

Västra Götalandsregionen

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Enabling synergies in cohesion policy 2021-2027

Region Västra Götaland has a long experience in coordinating the European Structural and Investments Funds to enable complementarities between regional, national and European level of investments. Ensuring synergies and enhance the impact of EU-funds and programmes on territorial development requires additional efforts, such as alignment between development strategies, an enabling regulatory framework and strategic guidance.

In Region Västra Götaland, a specific “coordination committee” has been set-up to enhance the impacts of EU funding by enabling synergies between the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF); the European Social Fund (ESF), European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

The committee is composed of Region Västra Götaland and Region Halland¹, the managing authorities², the Swedish Social Insurance Agency and the Swedish Public Employment Agency. It discusses common approaches to EU-funding, organizes information sessions to mobilise actors and coordinates calls to enable cross-financed projects in specific areas.

Five coordinated calls have been carried out during this programming period, such as in the agri-food chain sector, migration and digitalization with activities supporting innovation and entrepreneurship in ERDF-funded projects and skills and social inclusion in ESF-funded projects. Another example from the last programming period on synergies is the investment in “Asta Zero”, unique test facility for road and vehicle safety research, financed by funding from the region, national government and ERDF. Built on the regional smart specialisation strategy, it was achieved through a collaborative effort between the partners and with a long-term commitment from the industry.

Synergies, or rather coordination, between funds has been made possible due to the strong and clear mandate of the coordination committee and willingness of the actors involved to deliver strategic investments - where the region has taken an active role. However, creating synergies between programmes and enable coherent projects requires additional efforts.

¹ The NUTS 2 area eligible for EU-funding under cohesion policy

² The County Administrative Board (administering EAFRD), The Swedish ESF Council (managing authority for ESF), Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (managing authority for ERDF)

What is needed in the next programming period to enable synergies at the regional level are:

Alignment between development strategies

Västra Götaland's regional development strategy 2014-2020 is closely aligned with The Europe 2020 strategy, where same goals and indicators have been used but adapted to territorial specificities. Whilst each fund has a specific objective, common goals facilitates synergies by enabling the combining of funds at regional, national and European level. Alignment of strategies, together with an analysis of the fund's joint and individual contribution to the goals, strengthens and complements investments at the different levels, leading to more efficient use of funds. Europe needs a new strategy until 2030 that is based on the sustainable development goals (Agenda 2030).

An enabling regulatory framework

One of the main challenges for synergies in the ESIF in Västra Götaland is different rules and administrative procedures for the different funds. This limits the potential for coordination of and/or combining funds, like ESF and ERDF, without heavily increasing the administrative burden for the beneficiary. The European Commission proposal for simplified and harmonised rules in the next programming period is welcomed and has the potential to have a huge impact. However, uniform interpretation and implementation at national level needs to follow. One managing authority for the funds would help to ensure that.

Strategic guidance

There is a lack of strategic guidance and management on how to achieve synergies between EU-funds and programmes – and with national and regional funding. Without identified objectives at either European or national level, it is difficult to measure impact and results, and even more difficult to achieve consensus on what to do and who should do it. Today, synergies are mainly driven from a bottom-up perspective, where coordination is mainly achieved at partner level, enabled by joint, coordinated calls at regional level, as the example of Region Västra Götaland shows.