

[National Assembly for Wales](#)

[Enterprise and Business Committee](#)

[Inquiry into EU funding opportunities 2014-2020](#)

Evidence from Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA)- EUO 08

National Assembly for Wales Inquiry into EU funding opportunities 2014-2020

Response from Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) January 2014

1. Background

- 1.1 Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) represents and campaigns for voluntary organisations, volunteers and communities.
- 1.2 According to WCVA's Third Sector Statistical Resource 2013, there are 33,000 voluntary organisations in Wales, including 9,221 registered charities. The sector has an income of £1.6bn, and it is estimated that 3% of that comes from EU funding sources.
- 1.3 WCVA welcomes the opportunity to respond to this Inquiry, to convey WCVA's own experiences of engaging with a range of EU funding streams (outside of EU Structural Funds), and to reflect some of the activities of colleagues within our sector. A short online survey was undertaken with third sector organisations known to have been involved in EU funding, in order to inform this response.

2. How long has your organisation been actively engaged in EU work?

- 2.1 WCVA has been actively engaged with EU funding since 2000, engaging predominantly with EU Structural Funds, but we have also delivered the following projects:

Project title	Year	EU fund	EU partners
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Support for community civic initiatives in Belarus	2002 and 2005	TACIS and KHF	Belarus
Community Currencies in Action (CCIA) - WCVA is lead partner	2012-2014	North West Europe (Interreg)	UK, France, Belgium, Netherlands
Microcredit provider	2013	JASMINE (Joint Action to Support Microfinance Institutions in Europe)	

2.2 In addition WCVA is lead partner in co-ordinating a bid to EuropeAid for funding under the call for proposals based on the European Year of Development in 2015 for *“Raising public awareness of development issues and promoting development education in the EU”*, working with partners from France, Sweden, Denmark, Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Armenia, and the Ukraine. WCVA has also worked with partners in England to deliver training to build the capacity of the NGO sector in Slovenia, Slovakia and Poland.

2.3 WCVA’s European Brokerage & Partnerships Co-ordinator is a member of the Programme Monitoring Committee for the Ireland-Wales Cross Border Co-operation Programme 2007-2013 and WEFO’s Territorial Co-operation Workstream for 2014-2020.

3. To what extent have you worked with the same partners inside and outside Wales? Have you established long term contacts with other parts of the EU?

3.1 WCVA has collaborated on a number of occasions with the Merseyside Network for Europe and relationships have been maintained between WCVA and Belarusian NGOs since 2002.

3.2 Third sector respondents to WCVA’s online survey have worked with EU partners predominantly through the Ireland-Wales Cross-border Co-operation programme and the Interreg North West Europe Programme; and most confirmed that long term relationships had been established. Organisations noted they have worked on several occasions with Bangor University and An Taisce in Ireland.

4. What support is available in Wales and elsewhere to raise awareness of EU funding opportunities and to facilitate successful participation in the EU funding programmes?

4.1 In Wales WCVA received support from the European Territorial Co-operation (ETC) Unit in WEFO to submit our first bid to Interreg; but the team, whilst helpful and enthusiastic, appears to have limited capacity to support organisations and the scope of their work is not widely understood or publicised. WCVA also accessed support from the UK Contact Point for Interreg and received helpful and timely advice and training during the application stage.

- 4.2 Post Interreg grant award, WCVA has received information and advice from the managing authority, but the consistency and continuity of advice has been hampered by a high staff turnover. The written guidance for the North West Europe Programme is limited and ambiguous, and is open to interpretation, with different advice on compliance and eligibility being given by the managing authority, UK Contact Point and WEFO.
- 4.3 Our observation is that information and advice appears to be fragmented, with unclear roles and responsibilities relating to different aspects of the process of identifying opportunities, applying for funding and post-award.

5. What challenges have you faced in applying for and securing EU funding?

5.1 The main challenges for WCVA and the third sector are:

- Advance payments are not eligible under Interreg, providing no start-up funding or cash flow for transnational projects;
- The six monthly payments cycle in arrears makes it very difficult to manage cash flow;
- In-kind volunteer time is not an eligible source of match funding, limiting the third sector's ability to source match funding for projects (it is eligible in our Welsh Structural Funds programmes);
- Flat rate apportionment rates for indirect costs do not cover costs for third sector organisations that operate a full cost recovery model;
- The layers of bureaucracy and audit are both complex and disproportionately time consuming.

6. What benefits/value has your organisation gained from engagement in EU initiatives?

6.1 The main benefits for third sector organisations are perceived to be:

- The opportunity to learn from different experiences and approaches and to trial new ways of doing things;
- Sharing expertise, concepts and skills for the mutual benefit of partners;
- Enabling people and communities in Wales to access new services;
- Exposure at EU level and ways of identifying future potential partners;
- Personal and professional development opportunities for staff and beneficiaries;
- Building organisational capacity and project management skills.

7. What opportunities do you see for the 2014-2020 EU funding Programmes and how do you plan to take these forward?

- 7.1 As the level of EU Structural Funds is expected to reduce in future programming periods in Wales, European Territorial Co-operation funding will increase in importance. WCVA recognises the significance of gaining a better understanding of the full range of funding options, and in helping to facilitate third sector engagement.
- 7.2 WCVA is currently investigating the following opportunities for territorial co-operation in the 2014-2020 period:

- Erasmus+ - online learning;
- Erasmus+ - young people and decision makers
- Horizon 2020 / Interreg - co-production methodologies

8. What more could be done in Wales by the Welsh Government and other public organisations to help applicants and potential applicants?

8.1 As an observation WCVA understands that in many cases, the same organisations tend to benefit repeatedly from EU funding streams as they have acquired the knowledge, expertise and networks to successfully capitalise on the opportunities presented by the programmes.

8.2 In order to generate wider participation in EU funding programmes, and to bring additional funding into Wales, WCVA believes that much more could be done to proactively raise awareness of EU funding programmes by:

- Using the WEFO website to provide broad information about the full range of EU funding streams;
- Proactively identifying and disseminating calls for proposals widely, using intermediary bodies such as WCVA to further cascade and target the opportunities to relevant stakeholders;
- Expanding the ETC Unit or the Horizon 2020 Unit in WEFO to make available practical support and general advice on a broad range of EU funding programmes, in order to assist potential applicants to identify relevant funding sources and partners, and sign post to the expert advice that is available for each programme eg UK Contact Points, managing authorities;
- An annual event to showcase Welsh good practice in a range of EU funding programmes to raise the profile and inspire potential applicants;
- Making available in Wales more structured training on the key EU funding streams (e.g. Interreg and Erasmus+) covering the application process, eligibility, compliance, claims process, risks etc;
- Facilitated one-to-one advice sessions, bringing the relevant UK Contact Points to provide expert advice to a Welsh audience;
- Facilitated networking opportunities to link Welsh organisations to share good practice, lessons learned, project management expertise etc;
- The WEFO website could host a 'members only' portal for successful applicants to store good practice and promote networking.

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