

European Priorities 2013-14



Winning in Europe



**Northern Ireland
Executive**

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EUROPEAN PRIORITIES 2013-14

OVERVIEW

The Executive remains committed to building a shared and prosperous society. It is working to deliver a peaceful, fair and healthy society where individuals can enjoy a high quality of life and citizens know that government is working to support them.

A strong economy and dynamic private sector can sow the seeds of sustained prosperity, however, providing this remains a challenging task in the current sustained economic downturn; particularly when so many of our major trading partners are also struggling to emerge from recession and return to growth.

The primary focus of the Executive, as set out in our Programme for Government, is growing our economy and tackling disadvantage. A positive, sustained and systematic engagement with Europe will play a key role in achieving our aim.

A strong, modern economy requires a healthy, well-educated workforce, with our Universities and education system working in partnership with the private sector to develop and bring to market innovative products and cost effective services and solutions. An efficient and interconnected transport network is also essential to allow our companies easy access to external markets.

Our ability to tackle social disadvantage and support the vulnerable within our society is inextricably linked to our economic well-being and the recent initiative to make the region a centre of excellence in connected health technology demonstrates how government can facilitate better working between, public, private and educational sectors.

The role of the European Union in supporting such developments through research, training, networking and the exchange of international best practice can provide additional impetus for growth over and above that which we can provide for ourselves. Similarly, Europe's support in areas such as sustainable energy, transport, food production, and rural development helps to ensure that our environment and rich natural heritage is protected for future generations.

Key aims

We will use EU policies, networks and programmes to realise our goals and strengthen our European engagement. They will assist us in fully realising the opportunities which the European Union presents to influence and shape future policy and build our positive profile. We will also look proactively for opportunities to share our expertise with others and learn from working with other regions and Member States.

Key European policies and programmes

This year, 2013, marks the 40th anniversary of the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark joining the European Union. It has also been designated as the European Year of Citizens, seeking to encourage citizen participation in the European Union and create a dialogue between EU citizens and European representatives. It is also

a good time to reflect upon membership of the European Union, what it means, and the opportunities it continues to present.

The Executive is grateful to the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, for his commitment to our region, as demonstrated through the continuing work of the Commission Task Force. We will make the most of EU policies, funding programmes and networks; and the access the Task Force provides for us continues to be a valuable asset in deepening our European engagement and pursuing regional goals.

We have sought to align our priorities with the European Commission's *Legislative and Work Programme 2013* and the *Europe 2020 Strategy*, which provide a strategic framework to help shape and focus our approach. The need for the European Union to focus on economic recovery and job creation remains pressing and this focus continues to fit well with our own aims and objectives. Youth unemployment remains a particular concern here, but its importance is also clearly recognised right across the European Union.

2013 will also mark a clear transition within Europe as existing funding programmes conclude and negotiations on the EU's budget and new support programmes for 2014-20 are finalised. We will look to ensure that we:

- Play an active part in those policy discussions which will shape the next funding period;
- Prepare thoroughly for the new round of funding programmes and stand ready to exploit any early calls for proposals in 2014; and
- Are ready to react quickly and use the opportunities any final calls for proposals under the current range of programmes might provide.

Ireland holds the Presidency of the EU until June 2013. Some of the key priorities of the Irish Presidency, with synergies to our own objectives, are: economic growth and employment; tackling youth unemployment and measures aimed at SMEs, including improved access to credit and research funding.

Our European priorities

We will continue to focus our efforts on those European priorities which will maximise the benefits for all in our society. The priority policy areas identified in previous years have worked well and continue to provide the basis for effective, cross-departmental working in pursuit of our objectives. Our four overarching European thematic priorities for 2013-14 therefore remain:

- Competitiveness and Employment;
- Innovation and Technology;
- Climate Change and Energy; and
- Social Cohesion.

Key Overall Objectives for 2013-14

1. Fully realise the opportunities which the European Union presents.
2. Influence and shape future policy.
3. Build our positive profile.

COMPETITIVENESS AND EMPLOYMENT

Our prosperity is dependent on the skills of our workforce and its ability to meet the needs of the local economy, to support a strong export orientated market and to secure the wealth creating opportunities of the future. To support our economy, we need to ensure all our businesses have access to high performing sustainable interconnected networks, that transport networks and infrastructure support economic growth and there are appropriate financial support mechanisms in place for our SMEs We need to develop a greater connectivity with the rest of Europe.

As the global economic downturn continues to have significant market impact, the impact of the recession in Northern Ireland is particularly acute, unemployment is rising, and low levels of skills and poor educational qualifications still remain in the workplace. Going forward we will have a clearer focus on employment, up-skilling and employability and the need to improve our productivity.

We will work towards the Europe 2020 Flagship Initiative 'An Agenda for new skills and jobs' to create conditions for the modernisation of our labour markets with a view to raising employment levels and empowering people through the acquisition of new skills. We will:

- Continue to build relationships within Europe, to share experiences and models of good practice both in policy development and implementation.
- Continue to utilise European funding in moving forward policy objectives and use our existing government funding in a complementary way.
- *Increase* our support for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and management and leadership skills.
- Move to rebalance the workforce.

Key aims

We will work to:

- Improve our contribution to EU policy and programme development and capture all the benefits from programme participation;
- Improve access to the single market by investing in our economic infrastructure;
- Promote emerging opportunities to stakeholders for the forthcoming programming period (2014-2020), to enhance and grow further our engagement with Europe in the years ahead; and
- Highlight exemplars of policy and practice.

Key EU policies

- European Commission White Paper 2011: *Roadmap to a single European Transport Area* –working towards a competitive and resource efficient transport system.
- *Single Market Act*.

- *EU Mobility Initiatives:*
 - *Agenda for New Skills and Jobs*
 - *Youth on the Move*
 - *European Platform against Poverty*
 - *Industrial Policy for the Globalisation Era*

Participation in EU Networks/Consortia

- Trans-European Networks (Transport, Telecommunications and Energy)
- Northern Ireland Leonardo, Grundtvig and Transversal Advisory Group
- European Quality Assurance reference framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) network
- Continued involvement in the promotion of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) initiative through a range of projects.
- Continued involvement in the promotion of European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) initiative

Targeted EU Funding Programmes

- Lifelong Learning Programme (Comenius, Leonardo, Erasmus, Grundtvig and Transversal)
- Horizon 2020
- Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) (Transport, Digital & Energy)
- Trans-European Networks (Transport, Telecommunications & Energy)
- PROGRESS
- Seventh Framework Programme (FP7)
- Youth in Action
- INTERREG
- ERASMUS+

Other EU Funding Programmes and Opportunities

- *Commission elective funding calls and preparatory action calls during 2013/14*
- *Investigate funding available under the new EU Youth Employment Initiative. (This is primarily targeted at regions with Youth Unemployment higher than 25%. Although Northern Ireland's rate is currently lower than this, some assistance may still be available).*

Key Objectives for 2013-14

- CE1. Promote and facilitate mobility.
- CE2. Increase the skills profile of the working population.
- CE3. Utilise European Social Fund.

- CE4. Explore the potential of the Programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs (COSME) to support NI business growth and competitiveness.
- CE5. Explore potential funding opportunities for Social Enterprises.
- CE6. Explore Trans-European Transport Network funding opportunities.
- CE7. Prepare for and influence EU decision-making processes in respect of future structural fund programmes, the State aid rules, the Trans-European Network regulations and the associated Connecting Europe Facility.
- CE8. Increase level of engagement with Europe.
- CE9. Increase partnership links between NI organisations and European organisations.

Longer Term Objectives

Improve and develop a high-performing, sustainable and efficiently interconnected trans-European transport network by the advancement and completion of a range of major works projects.

Use the European Social Fund Programme as a building block in our work to up-skill the working age population.

Use the European Social Fund Programme as a building block to help us meet our commitments to move working age benefit clients into employment by March 2015.

Rebalance the profile of our workforce.

Improve mobility of Northern Ireland citizens.

Northern Ireland to have a greater European perspective.

INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Encouraging greater investment in creativity, innovation and research and development (R&D) is key to developing our economy.

In 2011, regional business expenditure on R&D (expressed as a percentage of GDP) was the highest on record and the same as the UK average at 1.2%. However, we recognise that we have historically trailed behind on this measure and, in turn, the United Kingdom itself significantly lags behind the most innovative economies such as Finland and Sweden on overall R&D spend. Furthermore, in terms of our wider innovation performance, regional firms have not engaged well in innovation activity in comparison to other UK regions.

Innovation in the public sector, both in the use of technology and in deploying innovative organisational solutions, can lead to higher efficiency and higher quality of services. Developing and introducing innovative models to health and social care services, in particular, can help to answer the increasing demands for services within the limited public budget and at the same time become a driver for technological and economic development. It is particularly difficult, yet vitally important, to promote and support investment in innovation and technology in today's challenging economic climate.

We should continue to direct significant expenditure towards creativity, innovation and R&D, with much of this aimed at improving research capability, increasing our capacity and promoting the commercialisation of research. The majority of research activities in advanced innovation economies take place on a collaborative basis between businesses, higher education and public research institutes.

Key aims

We will work to:

- Promote greater private sector R&D investment;
- Encourage R&D, creativity and innovation;
- Promote science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and educational and creative industries that encourage young people to study STEM subjects;
- Promote translational research, knowledge transfer/exchange and STEM between firms and between the research base and firms;
- Nurture the development and exploitation of new technologies, ideas and ways of working in our companies, universities, the research base and elsewhere in the public sector;
- Make fuller use of information and communication technologies;
- Promote deployment and use of modern accessible online services;
- Leverage our significant public investment in the health sector, including in skilled employees to derive benefit and realise economic outcomes from the strong clinical trials infrastructure in Northern Ireland as a region; and
- Build a strong profile of health and agri-food R&D capability in Northern Ireland in the EU.

Key EU Policies

- *Horizon 2020 Framework (2014-20)*
- *Europe 2020 Flagship: Innovation Union*, which will improve access to finance for research and innovation and boost levels of investment throughout the European Union
- Competition Policy
- *A Digital Agenda for Europe - A Europe 2020 Flagship Initiative*: which will speed up the roll-out of high-speed internet and promote the value of a digital single market for households and firms
- *Common Agricultural Policy and the Rural Development Programme 2014-20*
- *European Institute of Innovation and Technology Strategic Innovation Agenda 2014-2020*
- *A Stronger European Industry for Growth and Economic Recovery - Industrial Policy flagship initiative*

Participation in EU Networks/Consortia

- Agriculture, food security and climate change (FACCE) Joint Programming Initiative (JPI)
- European Innovation Partnership (EIP) on agricultural productivity and sustainability. (ERANETs)
- Enterprise Europe Network, (EEN)
- European Regions Research and Innovation Network, (ERRIN)
- European Innovation Partnership (EIP) on active and healthy ageing
- European Innovation Partnership (EIP) on agricultural productivity and sustainability
- Seek Engagement with European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) – Knowledge & Innovation Communities (KIC) - ‘Innovation for healthy living and active ageing (improving the quality of life and well-being of citizens of all ages)’

Targeted EU Funding Programmes

- Horizon 2020
- INTERREG B and C
- Health For Growth (2014-2020)

Other EU Funding Programmes and Opportunities

- *Investigate funding available under the other elective funding opportunities as these emerge in conjunction with I&T Desk Officer.*

Key Objectives for 2013-14

- IT1. Maximise the drawdown of Horizon 2020 funds for NI by promoting increased participation in EU research, technology and innovation programmes by NI companies, universities, research base and elsewhere in the public sector.
- IT2. Further engage with the European Union in relation to Agri-Food Sector.
- IT3. Develop a more effective process to support effective collaborations involving health professionals and policy makers in EU bids and encourage the commercialisation and the widespread adoption of research findings related to technology and organisational models in the publicly-funded health sector.

Longer Term Objectives

Northern Ireland emerging as an exemplar region for applied clinical research and innovation, through its success in obtaining EU funding and delivering project outcome

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY

Creating long term prosperity and social well being is underpinned by a healthy environment and the services it provides. Establishing the right conditions which will allow the economy to grow sustainably whilst protecting our environment and culture is essential to generate wealth and enhance quality of life.

Climate change remains one of the key issues facing Europe and, indeed, the world. This is as much an economic issue as it is an environmental one – the cost of taking early action to stabilise greenhouse gas emissions has been estimated at 1% - 2% of world GDP, but the cost of delaying action will be very much higher. However, addressing climate change is not just about mitigation (tackling the *causes* of climate change); it is increasingly about adaptation (dealing with the *consequences* of climate change).

We need to become more energy efficient in order to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, to reduce the cost of energy for individuals and to minimise the longer term risk of climate change.

Some 72% of energy consumed in our domestic and small business sector is in the form of heat and is mostly supplied from fossil fuels (93%). Over 70% of households still use oil for home heating and a study carried out for the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) into the impact of a Renewable Heat Incentive suggests the domestic sector is the largest heat-consuming sector (60% of all heat produced in NI).

A 21% improvement in the energy efficiency of our housing stock has been recorded between 1996 and 2009. However, despite this improvement, the level of fuel poverty actually increased from 34% of households in 2006 to 42% of households in 2011. This was primarily due to escalating fuel prices. We need to become more energy efficient in order to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, to reduce the cost of energy for individuals and to minimise the longer term risk of climate change.

Real progress has been made against our key energy objectives and specifically towards the Executive's targets for increasing the amount of electricity and heat from renewable sources. Currently around 13.7% of electricity is generated from renewable sources, against the 2012-13 target of 12%. Further increasing the amount of renewable electricity, alongside the implementation of the Renewable Heat Incentive and Renewable Heat Premium Payment schemes, will also contribute significantly to the achievement of our wider climate change goals.

Balancing the needs of the economy with the environment is a key challenge. In acknowledging the benefits of an improved transport infrastructure, we recognise that transport is a significant source of emissions. Meeting the future needs of the economy and facilitating higher levels of economic growth, particularly in export oriented sectors, will necessitate increased capacity on our transportation network and improved connectivity. While this requires continued investment to improve our

infrastructure, we can also dramatically increase capacity by using infrastructure in a smarter way, improving our competitiveness and reducing the environmental impact of transport.

We need to further develop an integrated and accessible transport infrastructure that promotes competitive economic growth and social inclusion across all areas, while reducing emissions and adverse impacts. We will seek to minimise the environmental impact of the transport sector by developing a range of sustainable transport initiatives. The promotion of more efficient and sustainable transport solutions and choices, in-line with *Europe 2020* and *the European Commission White Paper 2011: Roadmap to a single European Transport Area* will require investment in new technologies and smart transport infrastructure.

It is not just transport which can benefit from using infrastructure in a smarter way, but also other infrastructure such as that associated with water and sewerage provision, which have a high carbon footprint. The future regulation, planning and delivery of water and sewerage services will have a major role to play in contributing to sustainable economic growth. Energy efficiency and the use of renewable resources within the water industry can contribute to the protection and enhancement of the fresh water environment and the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Improved resource efficiency, the protection and enhancement of the fresh water and marine environment and the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions can all be achieved through energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy. Sustainability will continue to be a common theme of future water and sewerage investment plans. The introduction of carbon costs in the planning of all significant water and sewerage projects will require consideration of more sustainable and innovative solutions to be employed.

Improved efficiency in the use of natural resources can bring economic opportunities, reducing costs, making us more competitive and, ultimately, delivering more jobs. Achieving resource efficiency in our region requires the building of a “green” economy in which economic growth can occur without a consequent increase in environmental degradation. There are obvious environmental benefits to taking such an approach – a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, waste arising (as a result of a move towards prevention) and measurable improvements in air and water quality, for example. However, resource efficiency is not just an environmental issue – it is clear that becoming more energy and resource efficient leads to increased business competitiveness, particularly for those doing business in the global marketplace.

Key Aims

We will work to:

- Contribute to addressing the issue of climate change by refining the available statistical evidence, playing our part in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and developing appropriate adaptation actions to manage the risks and avail of potential opportunities;

- Increase resource efficiency by improving our use of natural resources, including: reducing waste, increasing recycling rates and through energy efficiency;
- Develop energy infrastructure to support both EU and Strategic Energy Framework objectives;
- Further increase the amount of electricity and heat obtained from alternative and renewable sources;
- Develop smart transport infrastructure to reduce congestion and emissions and promote smarter, more sustainable transport choices;
- Strengthen the sustainability of the agri-food sector by supporting its efforts to further reduce the carbon intensity of its produce and increase resource efficiency;
- Continue to encourage all sectors to embrace R&D and pursue creative and innovative solutions; and
- Ensure that we avail of all opportunities to help influence future key EU policies and elective funding programmes related to climate change and energy.

Key EU policies

- *Resource Efficient Europe* - Europe 2020 Flagship Initiative supporting the shift towards a resource-efficient, low-carbon economy to achieve sustainable growth
- *Low-carbon Economy 2050 Roadmap*
- *The European Energy Efficiency Plan (until 2020)*
- *Blueprint to Safeguard Europe's Water Resources*
- European Commission White Paper 2011 - *Roadmap to a single European Transport Area*
- *Common Agricultural Policy and the Rural Development Programme 2014-20*
- *Common Fisheries Policy*
- *Innovating for Sustainable Growth: a Bio-economy for Europe, Strategy and Action plan*
- *EU Water Framework Directive*
- *EU Drinking Water Directive*
- *EU Floods Directive*
- *EU Waste Framework Directive*
- *7th Environmental Action Programme*

Participation in EU Networks/Consortia

- Environment Conference of the Regions of Europe (ENCORE)
- European Innovation Partnership (EIP) on Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability
- Trans-European Networks (Transport and Energy)
- European Regions of Research and Innovation Network (ERRIN)

Targeted EU Funding Programmes

- Framework Programme 7 (residual funds)
- INTERREG IVB (residual funds)
- Trans-European Networks (Transport)
- Connecting Europe Facility (Transport and Energy)
- Horizon 2020
- LIFE+ (including new LIFE 2014-20 programme)
- INTERREG V

Other EU Funding Programmes and Opportunities

- European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
- European Agricultural Guarantee Fund
- European Maritime and Fisheries Fund
- European Regional Development Fund

Key Objectives for 2013-14

- CC1. Promote the increased participation of relevant bodies (e.g. Departments, research establishments, NGOs, SMEs etc.) in the European competitive funding process.
- CC2. Develop our profile as a region of excellence for innovative research and development on climate change and energy.
- CC3. Identify opportunities to develop proposals aligned to EU policy that will support the development and delivery of better policies across climate change, resource efficiency, energy efficiency, increased use of renewable energy and sustainability.
- CC4. Prepare for and influence EU priorities for new legislation and funding programmes proposed for 2014-20.
- CC5. Work with the European Union to develop and deliver policies and/or projects relating to reducing congestion and emissions and provide sustainable transport solutions.
- CC6. Identify key infrastructure projects which align with EU energy policy and funding opportunities and support the delivery of the Strategic Energy Framework.
- CC7. Continue to build capacity to improve access to the European institutions and elective funding opportunities through engagement by officials and Ministers.

Longer Term Objectives

Optimise EU funding to support delivery of a range of projects which are aligned to key EU and NI policy objectives in areas such as climate change, energy, transport, agriculture, renewables and innovation.

Through innovative research and demonstration projects, showcase the region as an exemplar and share our experience with other EU regions.

SOCIAL COHESION

The global economic downturn has brought greater focus to the European Union's priority of tackling the economic crisis and supporting member states in terms of sustainable jobs and growth. From the perspective of social cohesion, the key themes within this are sustainable growth, social protection, social investment and inclusion. The crisis has led to higher unemployment (particularly youth unemployment), the threat of increased poverty and a growing risk of social exclusion and unrest among the more vulnerable sections of society. It is vital to ensure that these issues are not allowed to become endemic.

The Northern Ireland Executive shares the European Union's ambition to create an inclusive, cohesive and sustainable society and we will work to use European funding and networks to add value and support innovative practice in this field. In 2012, the Executive introduced the Delivering Social Change Framework in order to co-ordinate key actions between Government Departments. It aims to deliver a sustained reduction in poverty and associated issues across all ages, improve children and young people's health, well-being and life opportunities and break the long-term cycle of multi-generational problems. These themes are closely aligned with the work of the Social Cohesion sub-group.

Clearly, strengthening our links with European institutions and other regions of Europe through the Delivering Social Change Framework and the Social Cohesion sub-group has multiple benefits. As a consequence of the recent past and, in particular, our divided society and high levels of unemployment, we have a great deal of experience in using innovative solutions to tackle social exclusion. We are therefore in a strong position to share transferable examples of our own best practice with the European institutions and other regions of Europe and learn from developments elsewhere which will help tackle key thematic areas in the social change agenda.

Key aims

We will work to:

- Contribute further to EU policy and programme development and capture all the benefits from programme participation;
- Promote emerging opportunities to stakeholders for the future funding period (2014-2020), to enhance and grow further our engagement with Europe in the years ahead;
- Highlight areas of best practice and policy related to social cohesion;
- Utilise the European Centre for Delivering Social Change to share areas of best practice in relation to delivering and managing social change with Europe;
- Leverage and promote dedicated ICT systems to benefit organisations in relation to European funding programmes linked to social cohesion; and
- Develop capacity in groups working on social cohesion related projects to help with EU engagement.

Key EU policies

- *Social Investment Package*
- *Youth on the Move*
- *Innovation Union*
- *Digital Agenda for Europe*
- *Resource Efficient Europe*
- *Agenda for New Skills and Jobs*
- *European Platform Against Poverty*
- *Horizon 2020*
- *European Charter on Shared Social Responsibilities*

Participation in EU Networks/Consortia

- Co-chairs of the Northern Ireland European Regional Forum

Targeted EU Funding Programmes

- Lifelong Learning Programme/Erasmus+
- Culture Programme/Creative Europe
- PROGRESS/Social Change and Innovation
- Framework 7 Programme (2007-13)/Horizon 2020 (2014-20)
- Rights and Citizenship Programme
- Europe for Citizens

Other EU Funding Programmes and Opportunities

- PEACE
- INTERREG
- European Regional Development Fund
- European Social Fund
- Twinning
- Social Entrepreneurship
- Health for Growth

Key Objectives for 2013-14

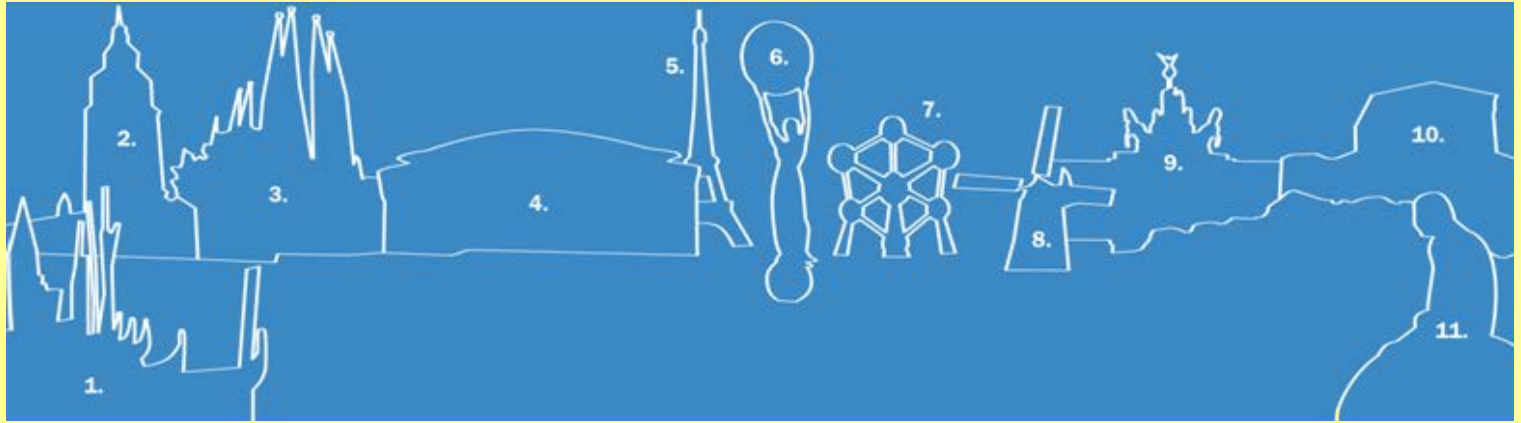
- SC1. Through the development of the European Centre for Delivering Social Change, promote and facilitate increased participation in competitive European funding streams and relevant EU policy among social cohesion stakeholders in government, the community and voluntary sector, academia, and the private sector.

- SC2. Prepare for the introduction of the new 2014-20 competitive funding programmes, targeting Erasmus+, Creative Europe, Social Change and Innovation, and Horizon 2020 Programmes.
- SC3. Provide advice, guidance and support to organisations and stakeholders involved in applying for European funding or influencing policy decisions throughout 2013-14, targeting Erasmus+, Creative Europe, Social Change and Innovation, and Horizon 2020 Programmes.
- SC4. Build capacity amongst organisations involved in social cohesion with limited or no experience of working with the European Union, targeting Erasmus+, Creative Europe, Social Change and Innovation, and Horizon 2020 Programmes.
- SC5. Increase engagement with the European institutions and key European networks by March 2014 in relation to delivering social change and the Erasmus+, Creative Europe, Social Change and Innovation, and Horizon 2020 Programmes.
- SC6. Enhance the region's profile as a region with expertise in innovative practices in the area of social cohesion relating to areas of delivering social change.
- SC7. Track and report information on relevant EU funding opportunities and policy developments on relevant funding programmes, including Erasmus+, Creative Europe, Social Change and Innovation, and Horizon 2020 Programmes.

Longer Term Objectives

Prepare the ground work with the third sector, statutory sector and private sector in preparation for the 2014–20 budgetary cycle.

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Cover Key:

1. Gondolas, Venice; 2. Town Hall, Krakow; 3. Sagrada Família, Barcelona; 4. Waterfront Hall, Belfast;
5. Eiffel Tower, Paris; 6. Circle of Thanksgiving, Belfast; 7. Atomium, Heysel, Brussels; 8. Windmill, Netherlands;
9. Brandenburg Gate, Berlin ; 10. The Parthenon, Athens; 11. The Little Mermaid, Copenhagen.

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