

**Social
Innovation+
Initiative**



European Competence Centre for Social Innovation
ESF+ Social Innovation+ Initiative

Alma Network Work Programme

This initiative is implemented
under the EaSI strand of the ESF+



Funded by
the European Union

CoP	ALMA Network
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The ALMA network will be organized and supported by the European Competence Centre for Social Innovation under the ESF+ Social Innovation+ Initiative. This initiative aims at facilitating transnational cooperation to boost the transfer and scaling up of innovative solutions aimed at reducing inequalities across the EU, especially in the policy areas of employment, skills and social inclusion.

Background on ALMA

ALMA (Aim-Learn-Master-Achieve) is an active inclusion initiative to empower the most vulnerable young people aged 18 to 29¹ who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs), by implementing a tailor-made approach to support them to find a job and integrate into society.

ALMA offers these young people counselling in their home country followed by a supervised, work-related learning experience in another EU Member State, with the aim of supporting their integration into the labour market and society in their home country. ALMA has been one of the European Commission initiatives for the European Year of Youth 2022 and will be a key instrument in implementing the Reinforced Youth Guarantee² adopted in 2020. It also contributes to the objectives of the European Year of Skills 2023.

ALMA operations consist of three phases:

Preparation: participants will receive intensive tailor-made training and coaching in their home country to prepare them for a stay abroad.

Mobility: participants will spend 2 to 6 months in another EU Member State, integrated into the work environment of a company.

Follow-up: Upon their return, continued support will guide them to use their newly acquired skills in their home country to gain employment or further education.

ALMA measures are financed by ESF+ under shared management. Its legal basis is the ESF+ Regulation 1057/2021 and the Structural Funds Regulation 1060/2021. Programmes under the ALMA Initiative can be planned within the national and regional ESF+ Operational Programmes, under the thematic concentration requirements for youth employment and social inclusion, or the dedicated social innovation priority axis (cofinance of 95%)³. Additionally, a central ALMA pilot call is implemented in 2023/24 at EU-level managed by ESFA, selected as the entrusted entity by the European Commission.

1 Member States are, however, free to include participants from the age of 15, in line with the youth employment thematic concentration (15-29 years) in the context of the ESF+.

2 European Youth Guarantee: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1079&langId=en>

3 Article 7(4) on social inclusion for specific objectives; Article 4(1) a) and I); Article 7(6) on youth employment; Article 10 on social innovation VO (EU) 1057/2021.

ALMA builds upon a social innovation initiative first implemented in Germany and transferred to several other Member States/regions through the Transnational Learning Network Mobility (TLN Mobility).

TLN Mobility was set up in 2013 and consisted of Managing Authorities and Implementing Bodies who wanted to implement mobility programmes for disadvantaged young people (NEETs) under their national/regional ESF OPs.

Since 2015 transnational mobility programmes following this approach have been successfully implemented in 8 EU Member states and regions: Catalonia, Czech Republic, Galicia, Germany, Poland, Slovenia, Sweden and Trento. The mobility programmes have proved remarkable success (integration rates up to 60%). The participants are much more likely to finish school, find a training place or get a job.

The ALMA network will continue the successful work of TLN Mobility in supporting the implementation of ALMA under the national and regional ESF+ Operational Programmes 2021–2027.

Objectives

The objective of the ALMA network is two-fold:

- support MS and regions implementing ALMA mobility programmes under their national and regional ESF+ Operational Programmes 2021–2027,
- to encourage more Member States and regions to participate in ALMA.

Network activities will focus on:

- Coordination and practical support for launching and implementing ALMA calls at different levels: from the planning to the drafting of calls to different phases of the implementation, depending on the needs of network partners. They will have the opportunity to address challenges, share good practices and discuss different approaches and solutions.
- Work on specific and cross-cutting themes to ensure high quality and further development/improvement of the ALMA programmes: measuring soft outcomes/ soft indicators, taking forward SCO, validation concept for mobility programmes.

- Reach out to a wider audience with information sessions about the state of play regarding national/regional ALMA mobility programmes and activities of the ALMA network to promote ALMA and encourage more Member States and regions to implement ALMA.
- Providing support for the central ALMA pilot call directly implemented and managed in 2023/2024 by the ESF Agency in Lithuania (ESFA) as an additional strand for ALMA projects.

ALMA Network participants: key target groups

The main target group (Core group) of the ALMA network are Managing Authorities and Implementing Bodies at national and regional levels who are currently implementing or planning to implement ALMA measures under their national or regional ESF+ Operational Programmes 2021-2027.

A second group (Extended group) comprises MAs/IBs who might be still indetermined or want to implement ALMA later in the current ESF+ period as well as other relevant stakeholders involved in the ALMA initiative - to these the network will reach out with information sessions.

A third and separate group are the ALMA projects at EU level which the network will support in terms of transnational partner search activities and learning/training sessions.

Ensuring members' involvement

The work of the ALMA network depends very much on the active participation and commitment of members. There is a lot of experience from previous mobility programmes which network members can take advantage of and a range of models for implementing ALMA mobility measures that can be adapted to local needs.

The network will follow a bottom-up approach by identifying needs and shaping the work programme to match these. Members will be actively involved in the planning of meeting agendas and invited to bring in their own topics.

This means that the work programme is to be seen as kind of "living document" which will remain open for further development throughout the work process.

Proposed activities and outputs (results)

As stated above, the network will provide a coordination platform and support for preparing, launching and implementing ALMA calls at different levels. This can include:

- templates and technical guidance for the drafting of programmes,
- a transnational partner search database and transnational partner search activities for project operators once the calls have been launched, and
- peer learning between MAs/IBs during the implementation phase of ALMA programmes.

Additionally, the ALMA network can work on specific themes/work packages relevant for the successful implementation and further development/improvement of ALMA programmes. These could start in 2023 or 2024 depending on network member's needs (which will be reflected in the final work programme).

Suggested themes/work packages:

- Creation of an online EU map where all ALMA programmes in Europe are visible with some key information and links to relevant websites (in conjunction with the new SI+ website currently developed by ESFA)
- Financial issues/ Use of EU-level SCO:

Delegated act. Most of the network members will use SCO when setting up their programmes and have to account for/justify them to their national/regional authorities, so an exchange of experiences, challenges and good practices on how to apply the SCO/delegated act could be useful for network members.

- Measuring soft outcomes /soft indicators

Measuring 'distance travelled' by participants can demonstrate the impact of mobility measures. Several tried and tested tools as well as a *Study on the pathways to enhance the use of programme-specific indicators in the ESF and ESF+* published by EC in April 2022 and including soft indicators.

- Validation of mobility projects/programmes

The TLN Mobility already started to work on this idea.

A validation concept could look into the following 4 categories:

- Added value for participants/NEETs (*programme impact*) => also linked to / soft indicators
- Identify factors that explain the causal effects of the programme (*programme impact*)
- Impact on national implementation partners/project partners (*network impact*)
- Added value of ALMA network.

It could start with a Meta-evaluation looking at previous national/regional programmes and national/regional evaluation results or plans. This will be followed by qualitative interviews with evaluators and ALMA partners.

It's important to underline that the validation means collecting results and drawing conclusions, not comparing them or rating programmes. In this respect the ALMA network can be considered as a pool of good practices and results with various positive impacts and results.

The work programme 2023 foresees 5 network meetings/events (3 online and 2 on-site):

1st meeting 20 April 2023 (online)

- Establishing the network and setting the scene: purpose of the network, what it can provide (initial work programme), working procedures,
- State of play ALMA mobility programmes by partners and central ALMA call
- Identifying participants' needs and adjusting the work programme to match these.

2nd meeting 19-20 June 2023 Berlin (on-site)

- Linked to the kick-off event of the German JUVENTUS programme, network partners will have the opportunity to meet project operators to get first-hand experiences,
- Followed by an internal network meeting in the afternoon,
- Project visit on the 2nd day.

3rd meeting September/October 2023 (on-site) place tbd

- Internal network meeting with updates ongoing activities (follow-ups) and start on work packages, topics to be defined according to the final work programme (and participants' needs)
- Linked to the European Year of Skills (extra session for a wider audience tbd)
- Linked to a separate transnational partner search/cooperation forum for ALMA call projects including learning sessions on various topics tbd (transnational cooperation, outreach to participants, involvement of partners and companies etc.) with ALMA network and project partners to be involved (information on their projects, table facilitators etc.)

4th meeting October/November 2023 (online)

- Presentation and use of new MS Teams platform
- Updates ongoing activities (mobility programmes, work packages and other follow-ups)
- Topics to be defined according to the final work programme (and participants' needs).

5th meeting January/February 2024 (online)

- Updates ongoing activities...topics to be defined (as above)
- Reflections on the work done in 2023
- Discussion work programme 2024, comments and suggestions
- Perhaps combined with information session for wider audience

Depending on the subject meetings can take the form of learning sessions/workshops, action learning sets⁴, peer learning or peer-to-peer-trainings, study visits etc.

Further activities include the promotion of ALMA/ Outreach activities (information sessions) and links to CoPs, ERASMUS+ and other EU initiatives to explore possible synergies.

4 Practical peer support from members for a specific problem/challenge one of the partners might have and help him to develop an action plan to solve that problem.

Dissemination of results

Reports of the network's meetings (summary, actions planned, next steps etc.) and ongoing activities to be shared with network partners in the internal ALMA section/workspace of the MS Teams platform.

Information on ALMA mobility programmes implemented by network partners and central ALMA call, general information incl. upcoming events and summary reports for a wider audience will be published on the ESFA website. Once SI+ website is in place, it will include a specific page ALMA. Information will also be published on the EC's ALMA website.

Teamwork organisation and logistics

ESFA and the ALMA network coordinator will function as a secretariat and provide organizational and technical support for networks activities.

A Steering group consisting of the ALMA network coordinator/ESFA, EC, a thematic expert and representatives of an ESF MAS/IBs (as practitioners tbd) will oversee the implementation of the workplan and monitor network activities.

The ALMA network thematic expert will be responsible for preparing and revising work programmes, and organising network activities (content, priorities, agendas, etc.) in close collaboration with the network coordinator and network partners.

According to specific themes/events/work packages a small task force can be established to act as preparatory group.

Work schedule

Time	Activities/ meetings	Output/Follow-up
March 2023	Set up of the ALMA network Preparation of work programme	ALMA work programme 2023
20 April 2023	1 st ALMA Network meeting (online). Presentation and discussion of work programme, current state ALMA call (project applications), overview current ALMA mobility programmes under nat./reg. ESF+ OPs, transnational partner search database.	Report (summary, actions planned, next steps) Small needs-analysis doc (internal use), and table mapping mobility programmes under ESF+ OPs Final ALMA work programme 2023 including comments/ suggestions of network partners
19-20 June 2023	2 nd ALMA network meeting Berlin (on-site) combined with the kick-off event of the German JUVENTUS programme and a project visit on the second day.	Report (summary, actions planned, next steps)
Summer 2023	Preparatory work for ALMA section/new Website incl. Partner Search Database (new templates), general information, support toolkit etc.	Website with ALMA section is online and working
Start of ALMA project	Preparation of PSF/ALMA project event	Detailed Screenplay for event
September/ October 2023	3 rd ALMA network meeting on-site (place TBD) linked to European Year of Skills and separate transnational cooperation/partner search event for ALMA call project operators (on-site) incl. learning/ training sessions (topics tbd)	Summary report ALMA projects have found transnational partners

October/ November 2023	4 th ALMA network meeting (online) presentation and use of new website, update ongoing activities (programmes, work packages and other follow-ups)	Report
December 2023	Taking stock and review of activities and work programme 2023, update ongoing activities (programmes, work packages and other follow-ups), Preparation work programme 2024	Work programme March - December 2024
January/ February 2024	5 th ALMA network meeting (online) Discussion of work programme 2024 comments, amendments, update ongoing activities (programmes, work packages and other follow-ups) Additional information session for wider audience?	Report Final work programme 2024

Social Innovation Initiative



Activating innovations for social change

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