

Independent Financial Advices for Consumers



1 What is ConFinAd?

ConFinAd (Consumer Financial Advice) is a 2-year training programme for non-profit financial advice in the EU. It has been exercised by BEUC, the European Consumer Association and the independent research institute iff since January 2012. It is funded by the European budget (Directorate General for Health & Consumers - DG SANCO). The purpose of this project is to develop, organise and conduct training courses on financial services advice from a consumer perspective in all 27 EU Member States by independent non-profit institutions. One training course per country is carried out in the national language taking the need for advice not linked to sales and the national specificities in financial services into consideration.

2 ConFinAd & its message

The ConFinAd project combines financial education with financial advice. It trains national experts on consumer law and financial services (ConFinAd trainers) who in turn bring their skills gained back to the advisors who work directly with consumers. This system of 'training the trainers' thereby unleashing a 'multiplier effect' is the essence of the ConFinAd project.

Key messages:

1. Non-profit financial advice (including the option of not buying the financial product)
2. What is consumer advice for a consumer perspective
3. The consumer needs approach



3 ConFinAd Outcome & Success

EU wide & National capacity building



Thanks to the ConFinAd project, horizontal communication has been created between organisations doing similar work in the field of independent financial advice. The communication has been established both at EU level between experts on financial services (ConFinAd trainers) thanks to the 'Train the Trainers' seminars as well as at national level and with a resource efficient project management.

Network of experts



A network of experts in the field of financial services and independent financial advice has been developed.

Distinguishable consumer needs approach



With ConFinAd, milestones have been set and key subjects provided to financial advisors resulting in a form of benchmarking for quality assurance. This facilitates the spread of unified standards for providing adequate advice and a distinctive approach oriented at the actual needs of consumers.

Consumer protection



A unique concept of consumer protection in financial services distinct from sales orientation in the advice of financial agents has been developed and discussed.

Train the Trainers



National experts (ConFinAd trainers) have been provided with relevant and specific expertise in training methodology to pass on knowledge and expertise and to learn how to organise training courses.

Priorities identified



Key areas of advice like consumer credit, mortgages, old age pension schemes and certain retail insurance have been identified as priorities.



4 ConFinAd in numbers

- ✓ **236** organisations have been reached
- ✓ **20** countries have been covered from March 2012 to May 2013
- ✓ **325** advisors have been trained

5 Why is ConFinAd important?

Statements from national experts:

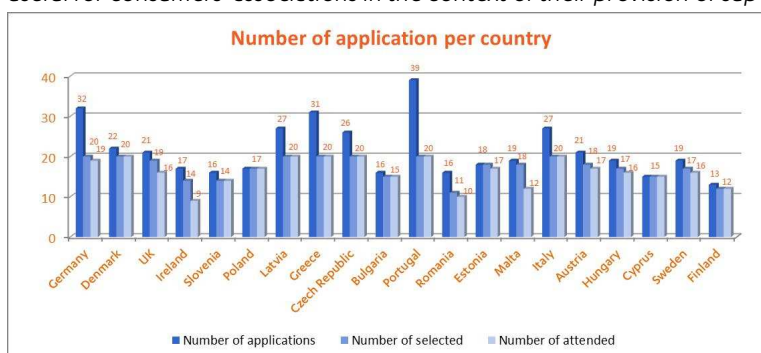
Greece: "More courses of this kind would be very useful for consumers' associations in the context of their provision of support and financial advice to consumers."

Romania: "the training activity should happen periodically, as the legislation changes and the Romanian consumers' expectations and level of knowledge are continuously growing"

Portugal: "This training programme is another major step in providing consumer advisors new knowledge and tools to apply in their day-to-day management of consumer requests and queries."

Sweden: "This project has given me many experiences and has been very fun and challenging, and I'm very pleased that I had the opportunity to meet you all"

Czech Republic: "Consumer financial advice is at the very beginning here and this course gave us a unique opportunity to listen to the complex bases of the non-profit consumer advisory and share our views and problems."



6 Conclusion & Recommendations

ConFinAd has started to establish a network of national financial services experts who have received a basic training. This network needs to be strengthened and taken to the next level by improving the established ties through a discussion of the experience made with these training and introducing 4-5 topics in more depth and detail.

The first steps towards a network of non-profit financial advice in the EU needs to be further centralised to persist. This project has centralised existing offers in the EU into an own decentralised network. Elaborated contents, educational forms and especially mutual cooperation have to be further developed in a second step.

Suggestions:

- ✓ 1.5 day in-depth course in Brussels for the national experts/trainers (analogous to 'Train the Trainers') to provide qualified input and training methodology on 4-5 key topics that resulted as priorities from the current ConFinAd project.
- ✓ The national experts train one of the 5 key topics that is of most importance in their country at national level providing an update on the other topics, if needed.
- ✓ Develop a core team including the project team plus 5 national trainers as a key expert network.
- ✓ For benchmarking and centralised input, a core team member should be present in each country to ensure the quality of the course, to support national experts, to act as observer and provide relevant feedback.
- ✓ Hold an official congress on independent financial advice for non-profit organisations in Brussels at the end of the project. This could be financed separately and organised by iff and BEUC preferably with the support of the Committee of the Regions, or the European Parliament.