



# ESF Ex-post Evaluation Synthesis 2007-2013

EU synthesis report – final version

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## **Glossary of key concepts**

<b>Access to Employment (A2E)</b>	Important policy area focused on enhancing Access to Employment and the sustainable inclusion in the labour market of job seekers and inactive people, preventing unemployment, in particular long-term and youth unemployment, encouraging active ageing and longer working lives, and increasing participation in the labour market. A2E is one of the Priorities of Article 3 "Scope of assistance" of the ESF Regulation No 1081/2006.
<b>Action</b>	The second level in the OP architecture; usually the Priority Axis (see below) consists of several actions.
<b>Adaptability</b>	A key policy area in the ESF, consisting of activities to increase the adaptation of workers and enterprises to the changing economic circumstances and labour market demands - one of the Priorities of Article 3 "Scope of assistance" of the ESF Regulation No 1081/2006.
<b>Allocated expenditure</b>	Expenditure allocated to the ESF activities during the programming stage of the Operational Programmes.
<b>Annex XXIII categories</b>	The socio-economic characteristics of ESF participants reported in the ESF monitoring systems, relating to the participants' gender, labour market status (employed (of which self-employed), unemployed (of which long-term unemployed), inactive of which in education and training), age (young people aged 15-24 and older people aged 55-64), disadvantaged status (migrants, minorities, disabled, other disadvantaged) and educational attainment status (by ISCED levels).
<b>Category of expenditure (CoE)</b>	Categorisation of the Structural Fund expenditure; cf ANNEX IV of COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006. ESF expenditure relates to Categories 62 to 74.
<b>Certified expenditure</b>	Expenditure incurred in the implementation of the ESF activities, which has been approved by the Managing Authority of the Operational Programme and the European Commission.
<b>Cluster</b>	A group of actions or interventions with common objectives and activities (the evaluation identified 9 clusters of ESF A2E activities).
<b>Convergence objective</b>	Speeding up the convergence of the least-developed Member States and regions: NUTS level 2 regions in the MS whose gross domestic product (GDP) per capita was less than 75 % of the average GDP of the EU-25 for the same reference period.
<b>Effectiveness</b>	The extent to which the set aims and objectives have been reached.
<b>EU Added Value (EUAV)</b>	Also known as <b>Community added value (CAV)</b> : Value resulting from EU intervention that is additional to the value that would have resulted from intervention initiated at regional or national levels. Four types of EUAV are defined by the Commission:  Volume: ESF funding adds to existing actions, either by supporting national action in general or specific areas of national policy.  Scope: ESF action broadens existing action by

supporting groups or policy areas that would not otherwise receive support.

Role: ESF action supports local/regional innovations that are taken up at national level or national innovative actions that are then 'mainstreamed'.

Process: ESF action influences Member State administrations and organisations involved in the programmes.

<b>Gender sensitivity</b>	The extent to which the planning, design, implementation and monitoring reflects gender issues.
<b>Human Capital</b>	A key policy area in the ESF, consisting of activities to develop the skills and knowledge of human resources across the different stages of the education and training system cycle (relating to the priorities of enhancing Human Capital and expanding and improving investment in Human Capital of the ESF Regulation). HC is one of the Priorities of Article 3 "Scope of assistance" of the ESF Regulation No 1081/2006.
<b>ISCED</b>	International Standard Classification of Education, an international standard classification used to classify the education levels:  <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1 Primary education</li><li>2 Lower secondary education</li><li>3 Upper secondary education</li><li>4 Post-secondary non-tertiary education</li><li>5 Short-cycle tertiary education</li><li>6 Bachelor or equivalent</li></ol>
<b>Intermediary Body (IB)</b>	Any public or private body or service which acts under the responsibility of a managing or which carries out duties on behalf of such an authority vis-à-vis beneficiaries implementing operations.
<b>Intervention</b>	The third level in the OP architecture, usually the Actions in the OP consist of several interventions.
<b>Managing Authority (MA)</b>	A national, regional or local public authority or a public or private body designated by the MS to manage the operational programme.
<b>Multi-Objective OP</b>	An OP in which both RCE and Convergence regions participate
<b>Operational Programme (OP)</b>	The means through which the ESF support was implemented in the MS, as agreed between the European Commission and the MS. Each OP consists of several Priority Axes, which in turn consist of several actions, which in turn consist of several interventions.
<b>Output</b>	The immediate reach of the ESF activity (e.g. number of participants reached, number of schools or enterprises supported).
<b>Participant</b>	The person who participated in the ESF funded activity.
<b>Priority Axis (PA)</b>	The first level in the OP architecture, usually the OP consists of several Priority Axes (concepts of priorities, areas and others are also used in the OPs), which in turn consist of several actions and each action of several

interventions.

<b>Promoting Partnerships (PP)</b>	Policy priority focused on partnerships, pacts and initiatives through networking of relevant stakeholders, such as the social partners and non-governmental organisations, at the transnational, national, regional and local levels in order to mobilise for reforms in the field of employment and labour market inclusiveness. PP is one of the Priorities of Article 3 "Scope of assistance" of the ESF Regulation No 1081/2006.
<b>Project promoter</b>	The organisation in charge of implementing specific ESF funded projects.
<b>Regional competitiveness and employment objective (RCE)</b>	Aimed at strengthening regions' competitiveness and attractiveness as well as employment by anticipating economic and social changes outside the least-developed regions: NUTS level 2 regions in the EU MS whose gross domestic product (GDP) per capita was above 90 % of the average GDP of the EU-25 for the same reference period.
<b>Result</b>	The change achieved through the activity upon leaving to long term achievements of ESF activities (e.g. number of qualifications acquired by participants, number of enterprises providing training).
<b>Social Inclusion</b>	Refers to a wide range of issues and activities, covering aspects such as fundamental rights, access to adequate income support and quality services. From the perspective of ESF SI interventions, the most common strand of activity in the Recommendation is that relating to inclusive labour markets. This focus is also echoed in the ESF Regulation, where the SI priority focuses on inclusion into the labour market as the best means of integrating individuals into society and of combatting social exclusion. SI is one of the Priorities of Article 3 "Scope of assistance" of the ESF Regulation No 1081/2006.
<b>Strengthening Institutional Capacity</b>	A key priority focussing on the efficiency of public administrations and public services at national, regional and local level by promoting mechanisms to improve good policy and programme design, monitoring and evaluation, and capacity building in the delivery of policies and programmes in the relevant fields. SIC is one of the Priorities of Article 3 "Scope of assistance" of the ESF Regulation No 1081/2006.
<b>Sustainability</b>	The extent to which the achieved results last.

## List of acronyms

<b>AIR</b>	Annual Implementation Report
<b>A2E</b>	Access and sustainable inclusion into employment
<b>ALMP</b>	Active Labour Market Policy
<b>CIE</b>	Counterfactual impact evaluation
<b>CON</b>	Convergence regions
<b>CSR</b>	Country Specific Recommendations
<b>EEN</b>	Expert Evaluation Network
<b>ERDF</b>	European Regional Development Fund
<b>ESF</b>	European Social Fund
<b>IB</b>	Intermediary body
<b>IVET</b>	Initial vocational education and training
<b>HC</b>	Human capital
<b>MA</b>	Managing Authority
<b>MS</b>	Member State
<b>NRP</b>	National Reform Programme
<b>OP</b>	Operational Programme
<b>PA</b>	Priority Axis
<b>PES</b>	Public Employment Service
<b>PP</b>	Promoting Partnerships
<b>RCE</b>	Regional Competitiveness and Employment region
<b>SCO</b>	Simplified costs option
<b>SI</b>	Social Inclusion
<b>SIC</b>	Strengthening Institutional Capacity
<b>SFC</b>	System for Fund Management



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## Executive Summary

### Headline findings

- A total of €115.6 billion was allocated to ESF 2007-2013, of which €76.7 billion is contributed by the EU budget (66.3%). National contributions amount to €35.1 billion, complemented by an additional €3.7 billion contributed by private funds, mobilised at the national level.
- More than 90% of the ESF 2007-2013 budget was allocated to the three main ESF priorities: Human Capital & Adaptability (46%), Access to Employment (34%), and Social Inclusion (14%).
- By the end of 2014, 79% of all allocated budgets had been spent across the various policy priorities, ranging from 42% in Croatia to 97% in Latvia. This will still increase substantially in the last year of implementation.
- ESF 2007-2013 registered a total of 98.7 million participations. Among these, a total of 51.3 million female participations were recorded, i.e. 51.4% of all participations throughout the programme period. A total of 30 million participations of unemployed were registered (30.4% of total participations).
- Young people were among the most important target groups across all ESF priorities, with a total of 30.1 million participations of young people registered in ESF 2007-2013, equalling 30.5% of all participations.
- At least 31.8 million positive results have been achieved by individuals (8.7 million obtained qualifications, 9.4 million secured employment while 13.7 million obtained other positive result).
- Relating results to participations, 44% of all participations can be linked to a positive individual result. These figures are expected to rise further towards the end of 2015.

### Aim and scope of the ex-post evaluation

This report concerns the ex post evaluation of the European Social Fund (ESF) in the 2007-2013 programming period. The scope of the assistance from the ESF is set out in Art. 3 of the ESF Regulation 1081/2006 and covers:

- Increasing the Adaptability of workers, enterprises, and entrepreneurs;
- Enhancing Access to Employment;
- Reinforcing the social inclusion of disadvantaged groups;
- Enhancing Human Capital;
- Promoting Partnerships;
- Strengthening Institutional Capacity.

This synthesis report covers, as required by Article 49(3) of the above mentioned Regulation, all Operational Programmes under each Objective and examines the extent to which resources were used, the effectiveness and efficiency of Fund programming and its socio-economic impact. It aims to draw conclusions for the policy on economic and social cohesion. It also identifies the factors contributing to the success or failure of the implementation of operational programmes, and describes good practices.

### Methodology

Given the complex nature and the magnitude of the ex-post evaluation, DG EMPL commissioned a preparatory study to support the Commission in designing the ex-post evaluation. This preparatory study assessed the availability of data and suggested how this could be best used for the ex-post evaluation. Based on the outcomes of this study, three thematic ex-post evaluations of ESF 2007-2013 were launched by the European Commission, DG EMPL. These covered the ESF Priorities (1) Adaptability and Human Capital (grouped together under the priority Human Capital, also by this synthesis evaluation); (2) the Integration of Disadvantaged Groups (Social Inclusion); and (3) Access and Sustainable Integration into Employment (Access to Employment). It is noted that the evaluation started before the Commission Evaluation Guidelines came into force.

For the ESF Ex-post Evaluation Synthesis 2007-2013, supplementary information was gathered in 2015 on the ESF Priorities Promoting Partnership and Strengthening

Institutional Capacity, which were not covered by the previous separate contracts. The ex-post evaluation synthesis also includes 28 country reports. The ex-post evaluation is based on an analysis of existing information available from the programme monitoring systems, programme evaluations from the EC and Member States, and additional fieldwork carried out in each of the thematic evaluations. Moreover, the synthesis study updated the monitoring data to include data up to 31 December 2014, for research, timing and practical reasons. This also allowed the inclusion of Croatia in the evaluation. It is to be noted, however, that expenditure of the 2007-2013 programming period was eligible until 31 December 2015 and hence programme implementation continued after the cut-off date. Implementation data (expenditure, participations and indicators) will consequently be higher, in some cases significantly, at the end of the programming period than the figures presented in this evaluation.

## **Key Findings**

### **ESF programming in a changing socio economic and policy context**

The evidence collected on the implementation of ESF 2007-2013 underlines the importance of ESF as a relevant instrument to support national and EU economic and social policy priorities. In line with Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006 on the European Social Fund, ESF priorities and programming are aligned with the European Employment Guidelines and contribute towards achieving the EU headline targets. The specific challenges identified for individual MS by the Country Specific Recommendations (CSR) towards achieving the EU headline targets are well reflected in the programming of ESF 2007-2013; all clusters of interventions identified by the various thematic ex-post evaluations can be linked to at least one of the CSR key challenges.

The flexibility in programming further facilitated by the European Economic Recovery Plan in 2008, enabled a swift response of ESF to the immediate challenges created by the crisis. In its response, ESF 2007-2013 increased its focus on fighting unemployment, while ensuring the continued relevance of ESF to deliver the EU2020 objectives of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Due to widespread austerity measures after the economic and financial crisis, the cuts in national contributions to ESF investments reduced the overall available investments for ESF from €118 billion to €115.6 billion. To limit the negative effects for MS with financial difficulties specifically, the Community's financial contribution was raised by €641.5 million, in comparison to the first version of ESF 2007-2013.

### **Scale of ESF investments**

A total of €115.60 billion was allocated to ESF 2007-2013 by the EU and MS, of which €76.75 billion refers to the EU contribution, which corresponds to roughly 7.9% of the total Multi-annual Financial Framework.<sup>1</sup> This is comparable to the share in the previous programming period 2000-2006. National contributions amounted to €35.12 billion, complemented by an additional €3.73 billion contributed by private funds, mobilised at the national level. The investments in Human Capital and Adaptability are the largest (46% of the budget), followed by investments in Access to Employment (34%). Social Inclusion interventions have been allocated 14% of the budget, leaving 2% for Strengthening Institutional Capacity, 1% for Promoting Partnerships, and 3% for Technical Assistance. There are considerable differences in priorities between MS; some chose to invest relatively little in Access to Employment interventions, while others invested less in Human Capital. Regional Competitiveness and Employment (RCE) regions invested overall more in employment related interventions, while Convergence (CON) regions concentrated more on investment in human capital.

The significance of ESF investments in relation to national funding varies substantially between MS, most particularly between older and newer MS. In AT, DK, FI, IE, LU, NL, SE, the contribution of ESF is relatively insignificant when compared to national investments in similar policy areas. However, ESF investments in BG, CZ, EE, EL, HR, LV,

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<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/budget/financialreport/2013/annex/1/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/budget/financialreport/2013/annex/1/index_en.html)

LT, MT, PL, PT, RO, SI, and SK are very significant in their national contexts. In other MS (BE, CY, DE, ES, FR, HU, IT, UK) ESF investment has a substantial significance.

## **Effectiveness**

By December 2014, a total of €91.65 billion had been spent, which corresponds to 79.3% of the total allocated budget. The implementation of ESF 2007-2013 generally took off in 2009 and we can observe that MS have different spending patterns over the programming period. While some MS have achieved implementation rates of over 90% (AT, LV, PT), in others they remained low (particularly RO, HR, and SK), there are no substantial differences between the implementation rates of CON and RCE regions overall. As projects can still be completed and declared until the end of 2015, a significant rise in the implementation rate is expected.

ESF supported large numbers of participants and entities to address a number of strategic development challenges across MS. In total, 98.66 million participations were recorded in the interventions funded by the ESF between 2007 and 2013 (61.77 million in CON regions and 36.89 million in RCE regions). Throughout the programming period, ESF has a balanced focus between inactive (36% of participations), employed (33%) and unemployed (30%) persons. While ESF 2007-2013 has reached a considerable number of young people (30.5%), the share of older people (55-64 years old) in ESF participations has been relatively low (6%).

In priorities Human Capital, Access to Employment and Social Inclusion ESF 2007-2013 contributed to a total of 30.24 million individual positive results (obtained qualifications, secured employment, etc.) that could be linked to approximately 68.97 million participations across the ESF priorities. As such, 44% of all participations in these priorities can be linked to a positive individual result. These figures are expected to rise further towards the end of 2015.

The thematic evaluations complement these figures with additional evidence and generally confirm the positive results across the ESF priorities. While the crisis proved challenging, particularly for reaching the targets set under Access to Employment and Social inclusion, the triangulation of various data sources shows that interventions under ESF 2007-2013 have generally been effective.

Altogether, the ESF made significant investments in employment, human capital, social policies and strengthening the institutional capacities of public administrations, leading to a significant volume of outputs and results.

## **Efficiency**

Efficiency of ESF can be mainly assessed by comparing the average cost per participation. The average cost per participation for all interventions across the EU28 is €897. The interventions in the field of Human Capital cost less (€681 per participation respectively), while interventions targeting more vulnerable groups tend to be more expensive. Access to Employment interventions cost on average €1,113 per participation and Social Inclusion actions €1,763 per participation. No cost per participation was calculated for interventions in the field of Promoting Partnership and Strengthening Institutional Capacity, as these interventions are generally targeted at institutions rather than individuals.

The available monitoring information does not allow systematic aggregation of results at the EU level. Therefore, an analysis of efficiency of ESF intervention is limited to comparing the cost per participation in different types of interventions across different MS. For a number of individual Priority Axes, costs per result could be calculated; these range between €401 and €8,340 and are in line with findings of in-depth interventions. Despite the large variation, these largely conform to the findings on the costs per participation.

Despite the considerable differences between cost per participation (or result where available) across MS, these are mainly attributed to broader macro-level conditions in MS, rather than (in)efficiencies in the implementation of interventions. Another important reason for substantial variations is the different ways in which ESF investments are used by MS. Some MS use ESF to complement national policies and, as a result, the cost per participation appears to be considerably lower. In other MS, ESF is used almost

exclusively to develop innovative approaches, which tends to be more expensive per participation. These differences do not necessarily indicate differences in efficiency, but in uses and reflect the large variety of approaches across the EU.

## **Sustainability**

Sustainability is understood as the extent to which specific positive effects can still be observed after some time has passed, measured at the individual or system level. Across the different programmes, there is no common approach to assessing the sustainability of ESF interventions for individuals. The data that is available, however, mainly for interventions in Access to Employment, show how ESF contributed to sustainable results for individuals. However, a systematic follow-up of individual results in other ESF priorities is rare and does not provide sufficient systematic evidence to draw robust conclusions.

Mixed results were found for the sustainability of results at the system level. One-off efforts to increase the quality of education are often limited in terms of sustainability as their success is highly dependent on concrete follow-up. However, interventions focusing on lifelong learning systems, or training of staff, achieved more sustainable results.

Most ESF interventions aim for sustainability through securing continued support from ESF in the new programming period. Several years after the financial crisis, there are continued restrictions on national budgets, which limit the potential to sustain ongoing projects without EU funding. Elements that are found to contribute to sustainability of interventions across the MS are (i) the conversion of new working relations into lasting networks, (ii) sharing of lessons learned, (iii) adoption of common approaches, (iv) mainstreaming of approaches.

## **Gender sensitivity**

A total of 51.3 million of female participations were registered in ESF 2007-2013, which corresponds to 51.4% of all participations throughout the programming period.

Most MS applied the principles of gender equality as a general horizontal principle in their ESF programming. However, this is not always positive, because such a horizontal approach sometimes displaces specific gender sensitivity actions. Most interventions across various priorities did not include specific actions directly addressing gender sensitivity.

A detailed analysis of the main ESF priorities shows that while most types of intervention have a relatively equal distribution of gender among participants (between 45%-55%), there are a number of MS and ESF priorities that show considerable differences. These differences are generally the result of a specific focus of underlying interventions and not necessarily of a lack of gender sensitivity. Most illustrative are male-dominated HC interventions targeting employees (due to higher employment rate of men in traditional industries), or female dominated interventions that target education or social services in Human Capital or Strengthening Institutional Capacity.

Despite the increased emphasis on gender mainstreaming in this programming period, evidence is lacking to allow an assessment of the articulation of gender equality in intervention design, objectives and target groups. Few interventions provide gender breakdowns for programme specific participation and result indicators (other than those requested by Annex XXIII), which prevents the assessment of gender specific results.

## **Young people**

Although there are few references to 'young people' in the Regulations governing ESF 2007-2013, the ESF has an important role in the implementation of policy initiatives in the area of youth. Young people are among the most important target groups across all ESF priorities, with a **total of 30.1 million participations of young people** registered in ESF 2007-2013, **30.5%** of all participations.

Within ESF programming, a great diversity of approaches under the various ESF priorities target young people. While most measures relate to Access to Employment directly, other types of measures for young people are often linked to education and training measures (Human Capital) to improve young people's position in the labour market in



the longer term. While these interventions do not always exclusively target young people, broader interventions can cater to young people's needs as well.

Despite the emphasis on young people in many OPs, relatively few MS defined OP-specific indicators focusing on outputs and results for young people supported via ESF investment, which prevents the assessment of the actual results of such interventions for young people specifically.

The increased policy attention at EU level to youth unemployment and the introduction of various specific youth employment policies between 2010-2013 has not directly translated into an increase of participation in the second half of the ESF programming period. In fact, despite some exceptions, various MS reduced the share of participations after the start of the crisis, giving more space for ESF participation of individuals between 25-54 years old.

## **EU Added Value**

Considerable added value was generated by ESF 2007-2013 in terms of the volume of investments provided. ESF 2007-2013 provided a significant contribution to national employment and social policies in a majority of MS, particularly in newer MS.

ESF 2007-2013 also provided added value by broadening the scope of existing national interventions. By making use of ESF interventions, MS were able to offer *more tailored* and intensive services to specific target groups such as people with disabilities, young people at risk of early school leaving, or persons with low qualifications.

ESF 2007-2013 contributed to changing the role of public services, particularly in the fields of Human Capital and Promoting Partnerships. In these fields, ESF has been used to test and implement new and innovative activities, and provides EU Added Value (EUAV) through the introduction of new ways of cooperation between various stakeholders.

The evaluations show that ESF interventions had added value in terms of process effects, mainly in the field of Promoting Partnerships and Strengthening Institutional Capacity. Interventions in these fields contributed to the adoption of systemic reforms and administrative capacity building in public services, such as PES or educational institutions, mainly in CON regions.

## **Socio-economic impacts**

The various evaluations conducted at MS and European level confirm the important role of ESF 2007-2013 in achieving the EU2020 objectives for smart and sustainable growth and social and economic cohesion within and between MS. While the current evidence base does not allow the establishment of a direct link to broader macro-level impacts of ESF specifically, the generally positive results of ESF indicate the relevance of ESF 2007-2013 in limiting the negative effects of the crisis at the macro and micro level in most MS. Moreover, a broader ex-post synthesis evaluation of Cohesion Policy found a contribution to economic development and growth.<sup>2</sup>

The ESF 2007-2013 contributed to meso-level impacts through its focus on capacity building, systems development and partnership promotion, which are particularly relevant in CON regions. The ESF created valuable impacts at the meso-level, for instance by increasing the scope of mainstream social services in various MS.

Given the ESF's primary focus on interventions for individuals, micro-level impacts created by the ESF 2007 have been central throughout this evaluation. First of all, a substantial share of the targeted populations have been reached with ESF 2007-2013. Among those that have been reached, by the end of 2014, 30.24 million individual positive results (such as: qualifications obtained, secured employment, other results) have been achieved that can be linked back to 68.97 million participations. These numbers are likely to increase in the final year of implementation, and show the

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<sup>2</sup> Ex post evaluation of Cohesion policy programmes 2007-2013 financed by the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund: WP1 synthesis report

contribution and relevance of ESF towards improving social and economic cohesion in the EU, both between and within MS.

## Key lessons learned

The evaluation shows a wide variety of lessons learned in terms of:

- **Policy choices:** It is recommended to continue aligning ESF with EU and national policies, and concentrating budgets on areas where the largest community added value can be obtained. The appropriate balance should be sought between new and existing activities while ensuring sufficient flexibility in programming to respond to external shocks and the implementation challenges.
- **Target groups:** The results of the evaluation point to the need to increase support for disadvantaged groups, and target ESF interventions on specific target groups. This requires an improved understanding of the needs of specific target groups while planning interventions, and requires the promotion of customisation of interventions to meet the needs of specific target groups (targeted intervention proved to be most effective). There is a continuing need to focus on young and older people, and to ensure a balance between men and women.
- **Appropriate programming:** The objectives for the different policy priorities should be defined in a more robust and clearly demarcated way, sufficiently supported by clear and measurable targets. This would be helped by a common target setting methodology between MS, applying evidence-based programming, which engages stakeholders / partners in programme planning. In addition, more attention is required for the sustainability of programming, gender sensitivity, and inter-programme coordination.
- **Programme implementation:** It is recommended that monitoring tools for measuring programme performance are improved to reduce delays in implementation, and additional use is made of technologies and e-learning in ESF delivery. Social partners should be more involved in the design and implementation of the programme in order to improve programme implementation. Programmes should detect good practices in successful programme and project implementation and share these with a wider audience.
- **Robustness of monitoring systems:** To improve the robustness of the overall programme, the Commission should aim for a higher standardisation of programme indicators across OPs and MS, and require consistent and reliable data reporting in SFC. The availability of longitudinal data on participations should also be improved to measure effects over time. Data and target setting should be set at individual intervention level. Result indicators could be improved in order to better reflect the expected change to be made by a specific intervention.
- **Robustness of evaluation systems:** It is recommended to reintroduce the concept of "final evaluation" at OP level, providing timely inputs to the ex post evaluation. Evaluations would further benefit by linking of the data on ESF participations with administrative data, and including the qualitative aspects of efficiency, in order to draw lessons for improving the efficiency of the programme in future. Evaluations could also broaden their scope beyond employment and education by focusing on improved measurement and capturing soft results from ESF interventions such as skills developed and empowerment (which play a role in the pathway to employment / education / social inclusion). There is a need to improve the robustness of the evaluations undertaken, and to further promote the use of counterfactual approaches in future programming periods. To allow cross-country and thematic analysis, evaluations could be further harmonised across OPs and MS. Finally, it is recommended to start exploring data and evaluation needs for the 2014-2020 ex post evaluation as early as possible. The Commission should continue working on the improvement of evaluation practice in the ESF in a dialogue with MS and the community of evaluation experts, facilitating peer learning and research.

Many of the recommendations are already addressed in the new programming period, such as improving the alignment between ESF and EU and national policy targets, intervention logics, the performance orientation of the programme, programme indicators and evaluation planning.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Objectives of the European Social Fund

This report presents the results of the ex post evaluation of the European Social Fund (ESF) in the 2007-2013 programming period. The aim of the ESF in 2007-2013 is to support the MS in measures related to growth and employment based on the **Broad Economic Policy Guidelines**, the **European Employment Strategy**, and the **Employment Policy Guidelines**. As set out in Article 2(2) of the ESF Regulation 1081/2006 among the most prominent tasks of ESF is to take into account "... the relevant priorities and objectives of the Community in the fields of education and training, increasing the participation of economically inactive people in the labour market, combating social exclusion – especially that of disadvantaged groups such as people with disabilities – and promoting equality between women and men and non-discrimination." The scope of the assistance from the ESF is set out in Art. 3 of the ESF Regulation 1081/2006 and aims at:

- **Increasing the Adaptability of workers, enterprises, and entrepreneurs** with a view to improving the anticipation and positive management of economic change (corresponding to the priorities of: (1) lifelong learning and increased investment in human resources (2) design and dissemination of innovative and more productive forms of work organisation);
- **Enhancing Access to Employment** and the sustainable inclusion in the labour market of job seekers and inactive people, preventing unemployment, in particular long-term and youth unemployment, encouraging active ageing and longer working lives, and increasing participation in the labour market (corresponding to the priorities of: (3) the modernisation and strengthening of labour market institutions, (4) the implementation of active and preventive measures ensuring the early identification of needs with individual actions plans and personalised support (5) mainstreaming and specific actions to improve access to employment (6) increasing the participations of migrants in employment);
- **Reinforcing the Social Inclusion of disadvantaged people** with a view to their sustainable integration in employment and combating all forms of discrimination in the labour market (corresponding to the priorities of: (7) pathways to integration and re-entry into employment for disadvantaged people (8) acceptance of diversity and combating of discrimination);
- **Enhancing Human Capital**, corresponding to the priorities of: (9) the introduction and design of reforms in education and training systems and (10) networking activities between higher education institutes, research and technological centres and enterprises;
- **Promoting Partnerships**, pacts and initiatives through (11) networking of relevant stakeholders, such as the social partners and non-governmental organisations, at the transnational, national, regional and local levels in order to mobilise for reforms in the field of employment and labour market inclusiveness;

The ESF sets additional objectives for so-called Convergence (CON) regions. CON regions are defined as those regions having a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of less than 75% of the average GDP of the EU-25.<sup>3</sup> In these regions, ESF also supports:

- **Expanding and improving investment in Human Capital** by promoting: (12) the implementation of reforms in education and training, (13) increased participation in education and training throughout the life-cycle, and (14) development of human potential in research and innovation;
- **Strengthening Institutional Capacity** and the efficiency of public administrations and public services at national, regional and local level by promoting (15) mechanisms to improve good policy and programme design, monitoring and

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<sup>3</sup> Commission Decision C(2006)3475 of 4th August 2006 and Commission Decision C(2007) 1283 of 26 March 2007 amending Decision 2006/595/EC as concerns Bulgaria and Romania)

evaluation, and (16) capacity building in the delivery of policies and programmes in the relevant fields.

## **1.2 The purpose of the synthesis of ex post evaluation ESF 2007-2013**

Under the 2007-2013 Regulations<sup>4</sup>, MS are responsible for the ex-ante and on-going evaluations of their Operational Programmes (OPs), while the Commission is responsible for the ex post evaluation. Regulation Article 49(3) states that:

"The Commission shall carry out an ex post evaluation for each objective in close cooperation with the MS and managing authorities. The ex post evaluation shall cover all the operational programmes under each objective and examine the extent to which resources were used, the effectiveness and efficiency of Fund programming and the socio-economic impact. It shall be carried out for each of the objectives and shall aim to draw conclusions for the policy on economic and social cohesion. It shall identify the factors contributing to the success or failure of the implementation of operational programmes and identify good practice."<sup>5</sup>

Given the complexity of the ex-post evaluation and the need for adequate preparation, a preparatory study was launched in 2013 to assess the availability, type and usability of data that would be available at MS level. Building on these findings, three ESF 2007-2013 ex post evaluations were launched by DG EMPL in 2014. These covered the ESF Priorities in 27 MS up until the end of 2013 on: (1) Adaptability and Human Capital (analysed under one thematic ex post evaluation on Human Capital); (2) the Integration of Disadvantaged Groups (referred to as Social Inclusion); and (3) Access and Sustainable Integration into Employment (referred to as Access to Employment). In these three thematic evaluations, an EU level thematic evaluation was combined with in-depth assessment of a clustering of interventions under each Priority in a selected number of MS. Each MS was covered by at least one in-depth assessment on one of the main thematic priorities. The purpose of this report is to provide a synthesis of the results of these three thematic ex post evaluations and to provide supplementary evaluation synthesis of the ESF Priorities Promoting Partnership and Strengthening Institutional Capacity. The ex post evaluation synthesis also includes 28 country reports (including Croatia) summarising the outputs and results of the ESF investments across the ESF Priorities and presenting findings and conclusions as well as lessons learned and good practice at the end of 2014.

This synthesis draws lessons for economic and social cohesion policy at MS and EU level with reference to the European Employment Strategy as incorporated into the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs, within the framework of the Lisbon Strategy and the Europe 2020 Strategy, and the accompanying (country-specific) recommendations, national reform programmes, as well as the Education and Training 2020 strategy.

As well as serving the purpose of the ex post evaluation as defined in the General Regulation (Art. 49.3), the ex post synthesis evaluation will also have the function of supporting the communication of the Commission with the Council and the European Parliament of the main results of the 2007-2013 ESF as well as to broader audiences.

## **1.3 The scope of the ex post evaluation**

This report covers the interventions of the European Social Fund during the 2007-2013 programming period in all 28 MS.<sup>6</sup> It draws on the Operational Programme documents, Annual Implementation Reports up to 2014 and any available national and Commission

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<sup>4</sup>COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 1081/2006 of 5 July 2006 on the European Social Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1784/1999

<sup>5</sup> COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006, laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund and Cohesion Fund.

<sup>6</sup> As Croatia only joined the EU in 2013, at the end of the programming period observed by the ex post synthesis.

evaluations. The synthesis covers all 117 Operational Programmes in the 28 MS in both Convergence (CON) and Regional Competitiveness and Employment (RCE) Regions.

The ex-post evaluation synthesis relies mainly on existing evaluation material and information, but included updated monitoring data until December 2014. To fill the gap for the two ESF Priorities (Promoting Partnerships and Strengthening Institutional Capacity) not covered in the three thematic ex-post evaluations. Additional research was done on the basis of existing data and evaluations, supplemented by a limited number of interviews and national validation of findings.

The main sources of information for this synthesis report are:

- Operational Programmes and amendments/Implementing documents
- Annual Implementation Reports 2014 and previous AIRs
- System for Fund management in the European Community 2007-2013 (SFC2007)
- DG REGIO evaluation on effects of structural funds on GDP and macro-indicators<sup>7</sup>
- The Preparatory Study for the ESF 2007-2013 ex post evaluation (2013)
- ESF 2007-2013 ex post evaluation: Access and sustainable integration into Employment
- ESF 2007-2013 ex post evaluation: Investing in Human Capital
- ESF 2007-2013 ex post evaluation: Supporting the integration of disadvantaged groups into the labour market and society
- The reports of the ESF Expert Evaluation Network (2011-2013), including EU synthesis reports, country reports, and an inventory of all evaluations
- Evaluation of the response of the ESF to the economic and financial crisis (2012)
- Relevant ESF Evaluations (as collected in the ESF evaluation inventory)
- 'Ex post' evaluation of cohesion policy programmes 2007–2013 focusing on the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and Cohesion Fund (CF) — work package 12: delivery system)<sup>8</sup>

#### **1.4 Evaluation criteria**

This synthesis report brings together all information gathered during the 2007-2013 programming period on each of the five ESF Priorities as defined the ESF Regulation (Article 3). It also presents the lessons learned in terms of policy choices, target groups (with a special focus on specific target groups such as young people), programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of future programmes. Particular attention has been paid to:

- The extent to which resources were used;
- Effectiveness (quantified results, factors contributing to success and failure, identification of good practice);
- Efficiency measured in terms of cost-effectiveness;
- Sustainability;
- Gender sensitivity;
- Young people;
- Community Added Value;
- Socio-economic impact.

This synthesis evaluation report is structured along these key evaluation themes.

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<sup>7</sup> The impact of cohesion policy 2007-2013: model simulations with Quest III; [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/pdf/expost2013/wp14a\\_final\\_report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/pdf/expost2013/wp14a_final_report_en.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> The impact of cohesion policy 2007-2013: model simulations with RHOMOLO; [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/pdf/expost2013/wp14b\\_final\\_report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/pdf/expost2013/wp14b_final_report_en.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/pdf/expost2013/wp12\\_final\\_report.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/pdf/expost2013/wp12_final_report.pdf)

## 2 Background and context

### Key Findings

- The ESF 2007-2013 is highly relevant in addressing the main policy challenges associated with achieving the EU headline targets and contributing to the EU guidelines defined for labour market policies, social policies and education, while also contributing to the development of the institutional capacity needed to deliver policies and reforms.
- The specific challenges identified by the Country Specific Recommendations (CSR) in seeking to achieve the EU headline targets are well reflected in the programming of ESF 2007-2013; all clusters of interventions identified by the various thematic ex post evaluations can be linked to at least one of the CSR key challenges.
- The flexibility in programming further facilitated by the European Economic Recovery Plan in 2008, enabled a swift response of the ESF to the immediate challenges created by the crisis. In its response, the ESF 2007-2013 increased the focus on fighting unemployment, while ensuring the continued relevance of ESF to delivering the EU2020 objectives of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.
- Due to widespread austerity measures after the economic and financial crisis, the cuts in national contributions to ESF investments reduced the overall available investments for ESF from €117.96 billion to €115.60 billion. To limit the negative effects for MS with financial difficulties specifically, the Community's financial contribution was raised by €641.47 million, in comparison to the first version of ESF 2007-2013.

### 2.1 EU priorities in employment and social policy

The programming of the ESF takes place in the wider context of social policies in the EU. A central pillar is the European Employment Strategy (EES), dating back to 1997, when the EU MS undertook to establish a set of common objectives and targets for employment policy. The common objective to create more and better jobs in the EU materialised in the strategy adopted by the Lisbon Council in 2000, and was further streamlined with the adoption of the Lisbon Strategy's Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs in 2005. Subsequently, these were extended into 2008-2010 and formed the basis for programming ESF 2007-2013.

The Integrated Guidelines were to contribute to (1) attracting and retaining more people in employment, increasing labour supply and modernising social protection systems, (2) improving adaptability of workers and enterprises, and (3) increasing investment in Human Capital through better education and skills.<sup>9</sup> To encourage implementation of these guidelines in a coherent and integrated matter, yearly CSR are drawn up for each MS by the Council.

To ensure an effective response to newly emerging challenges, particularly as a result of the financial and economic crisis that started in 2008, the Council adopted in 2010 a new set of Guidelines for the employment policies of the MS.<sup>10</sup> These new guidelines form an integral part of the Europe 2020 Strategy which aims to create the conditions for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth towards 2020. Under these guidelines, specific headline targets have been defined to guide the action of MS towards removing bottlenecks for growth. The guidelines provide MS with guidance on the challenges and priorities identified at the European level, and help ensure that national and EU-level policies contribute fully to achieving the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy. The key elements of the employment guidelines can be summarised as follows.

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<sup>9</sup>2005/600/EC: Council Decision of 12 July 2005 on Guidelines for the employment policies of the MS, OJ L 205, 6.8.2005, p. 21-27.

<sup>10</sup> 2010/707/EU: Council Decision of 21 October 2010 on guidelines for the employment policies of the MS, OJ L 308, 24.11.2010, p. 46-51.



- **Guideline 7: Increasing labour market participation and reducing structural unemployment.** The EU headline target aims to bring the employment rate for women and men aged 20-64 to 75% by 2020, including through the greater participation of youth, older workers and low skilled workers and the better integration of legal migrants.
- **Guideline 8: Developing a skilled workforce** responding to labour market needs, promoting job quality and lifelong learning.
- **Guideline 9: Improving the performance of education and training systems at all levels and increasing participation in tertiary education.** The EU headline target aims to reduce the dropout rate to 10%, whilst increasing the share of the population aged 30-34 having completed tertiary or equivalent education to at least 40% in 2020.
- **Guideline 10: Promoting Social Inclusion and combating poverty.** The EU headline target aims to reduce by 25% the number of Europeans living below the national poverty lines, lifting over 20 million people out of poverty.

These guidelines are implemented through the 'European Semester', the European Union's yearly cycle of economic policy coordination. In the context of the Semester, since 2011 the Commission undertakes a detailed analysis of MS plans for budgetary, macroeconomic and structural reforms and provides them with CSR for the next 12-18 months. These recommendations also contribute to the objectives of the EU's long-term strategy for jobs and growth, the Europe 2020 strategy.

## 2.2 Linking ESF to EU strategic objectives

The ESF is the main financial tool through which the EU translates its strategic employment objectives into action. Article 2 of the ESF Regulation states that *"the ESF shall support actions in line with measures taken by MS on the basis of the guidelines adopted under the European Employment Strategy, as incorporated into the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs, and the accompanying recommendations"*. In operational terms, this means that MS should design their Operational Programmes (OP) in line with their priorities, the European Employment Strategy and the annual CSR. Secondly, the investments should be additional to national investments, and should not replace public or equivalent structural expenditure.<sup>11</sup>

The thematic evaluations conducted for the ex-post evaluation of ESF identified clusters of interventions. These provide insights in the types of interventions selected by ESF across the EU. The table below describes these clusters, for Access to Employment, Social Inclusion, and Human Capital, and provides some illustrations of the types of interventions. Each of these clusters are subsequently linked to the key challenges identified in the annual CSR, also included in the table below.

Table 1. Clusters of interventions, linked to key CSR challenges

Corresponding CSR challenge	Clusters of interventions	Examples of interventions
<b>Access to Employment</b>		
Improving PES services	1. Support to PES, other labour market institutions,	Supporting PES reforms, training for PES staff, introducing new ICT systems
Improving PES services	2. Personalised support for individuals,	coaching and careers advice, pathways approaches, guidance
Quality & LM relevance of education & training	3. Training	vocational training courses
Increase LM participation	4. Employment incentives	Wage subsidies
Support for entrepreneurship	5. Self-employment and entrepreneurship	Start-up support, support for female entrepreneurs
Enhancing participation of older workers	6. Active ageing and prolonging working life	Awareness-raising among employers

<sup>11</sup> Article 15 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999

Corresponding CSR challenge	Clusters of interventions	Examples of interventions
Enhancing equal opportunities / LM participation women	7. Women in employment and reducing gender-based segregation	Specific support for women, awareness-raising
Enhancing participation of migrants	8. Increasing migrant participation	Language courses, advice and support, social integration
Reduce regional disparities	9. Geographic and occupational mobility	Support for people willing to move to find work
Social inclusion		
Activation policies low skilled	1. Supporting and enabling actions	Language training for migrants; counselling and assistance, confidence building support; engagement with NEETs
Promote inclusion of vulnerable groups	2a. Advice, guidance and training	Personalised advice, guidance and counselling; training needs analysis; training and skills development; vocational rehabilitation; support for job search; etc.
Promote inclusion of vulnerable groups	2b. Actions which have employment as an output	Subsidised employment schemes; develop supported jobs in the 'second' labour market; public works
Promote inclusion of vulnerable groups	2c. Actions aimed at sustaining employment <sup>12</sup>	Support for disadvantaged groups at risk of redundancy; training or practical support; etc.
Promote inclusion of vulnerable groups	Cluster 3 Pathway approaches	Address barriers to employment, and advice, guidance, counselling and training measures
Reduce regional disparities	Cluster 4 Systemic measures influencing systems, institutional or cultural contexts	Expansion or upgrading of labour market institutions; development of infrastructure to support intermediate labour market; combating discrimination and awareness raising on equal opportunities
Human Capital		
Increase/ promote participation in LLL	1. LLL systems	Develop of new courses, quality assurance systems and mechanisms for educational institutions, qualification systems, recognition and validation of prior learning
Improve quality of HE	2. Quality of HE	Develop e-learning systems in HE, HE staff skills, improvement of HE study programmes, preparation of new HE management models
Improving ECEC access	3 .Early school education	Teacher training, awareness raising
Quality & LM relevance of education & training	4. Quality of school education	School staff training, develop programmes, pedagogical tools and procedures, develop student competences
Quality & LM relevance of education & training	5. Quality of VET	VET teacher training, promotion campaigns to participate in VET courses, financial incentives to participate in VET courses
Reducing early school leaving	6. Early school leaving	Provision of (vocational) education courses, advice, guidance, mentoring
Improve quality of HE	7. R&D	Financial support to study in the tertiary education, staff training and competence development, support to internationalisation and links with enterprises
Improve education outcomes youth	8. Young people	Apprenticeships, internships, access to other training and skills development activities, advice and guidance systems development
Support for employed	9. Employed	Support access to the training courses, qualifications, advice and career guidance, develop organisational HR strategies and management models
Increase/ promote participation in LLL	10. Adults	Financial support to training courses, qualifications, advice and career guidance, public works
Improve access and completion of HE	11. HE participation	Scholarships for HE participation, funding of HE places, support services for specific target groups (disabled)

Source: Authors, based on synthetic analysis of Thematic Evaluations

<sup>12</sup> NB – no Cluster 2c interventions featured in the in-depth reviews, but measures sustaining employment where part of some of the cluster 3 interventions reviewed.



Table 2 shows how all clusters of interventions found for the three main ESF priorities can be linked to the key CSR challenges. Subsequently, this evaluation investigates to what extent each of the CSR challenges was addressed and taken up by MS, as required by Articles 2 and 4 of the ESF Regulation. Table 2 shows a consistent link between the CSR received by MS and the types of interventions programmed in ESF 2007-2013. Firstly, MS that received CSR to enhance labour market participation have incorporated these in interventions. This is translated into various ESF interventions around *employability* (e.g. assessment; information, advice and guidance; personal development; basic/core/key employability skills; vocational skills; work experience/internships; skills in job search, job application and interview processes; post job entry support). Secondly, other relevant labour market interventions focus on the support, creation and retention of employment (e.g. self-employment and enterprise start-up; incentives for employers; temporary income support; transitional employment; supported employment). Thirdly, an issue that is often mentioned in CSR and is reflected in ESF programming as well, is the capacity building of relevant public services, particularly the PES, to be able to offer services better tailored to respondents. However, CZ and CY did not specifically include this element in their ESF programming, despite receiving recommendations to do so. Finally, disadvantaged groups are also among the participants in activities funded under most priority axes. This leads to the conclusion that the challenges in the field of the labour market and inclusion of vulnerable groups highlighted in CSR were generally well reflected in the ESF-funded interventions. No significant discrepancies can be identified.

Table 2. Linking priorities in CSR to ESF programming (over the period 2004-2013)<sup>13</sup>

	AT	BE	BG	CZ	CY	DE	DK	EE	EL	ES	FI	FR	HU	IE	IT	LT	LU	LV	MT	NL	PL	PT	RO	SE	SI	SK	UK	
Improving PES services	√	•√	•√	•	•	√		•√	√	•√	•√	•√	•√		•√	•√	√	•√	√	√	•√		•√		•√	•		
Support for entrepreneurship			√	•	√	•√	√	•√	√	•	•√	•√		√		•√	•√	•	•√	√	•√		√		√	√	√	
Increase LM participation	√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	√	•√	•√	√	•√	•√	√	•√	•√	•√	√	•√	•√	•√	•√			
Enhancing participation of older workers	•√	•√	√	•√	√	√	•√	√	√	√	•√	•√	•√	√	•√	•√	•√		•√	•√	•√		√	√	•√	•√		
Increase LM participation Youth	√	•√	•√	√	•√	•√	•√	•√	√	•√	•√	•√	•√	√	•√	•√	•√	•√	√	√	•√	√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	
Enhancing LM participation women	•√	√		•√	•√	•√	√	•√	•√	•√	√	√	•√	√	•√	•√	•√	√	•√	•√	•√		•√	•√	√	•√	•√	
Enhancing participation of migrants	•√	•√	•√		√	•√	•√			•√	√	•√		•√	•√					•√		•√	•√	•√	√			
Activation policies low skilled	•√	•√	•√	•√	√	•√	•√	•√	√	√	•√	•√	•√	•√	√	•	•√	√	√	√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•	•√	
Promote inclusion of vulnerable groups	•√	•√	•√	•√	√	•√		•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	√	•√	•√	•√	√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	
Reduce regional disparities		•√	√		√	•√		√		•	•	•√	•√		•√		√				√		√		√		√	
Increase/ promote participation in LLL	•√	•√	•√	√	•√	•√	√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	√	•√	•√	•√	√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	√	•√	•	•√
Improve quality of HE	•√		•√	•√	√			•√		√	√	√	•√	√	√	√		•√	•√		•√	√	√			•√		
Quality & LM relevance of education & training	√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√	•√
Improving ECEC access	•		•√	•	•√	•√	•		•√	•√		√	•√	•	•√	•		•	•	•	•√	•	√			•√	•	
Improve education outcomes youth	•√	•√	•√	•√	√		√		•√	√			√		•√	•√	√	•√	√		•	•√	•√	•		•√	•√	
Reducing early school leaving	•√	√	•√	√	√		•	√	•√	•√	√	•√	•√	•√	•√		•√	•√	•√	√	√	•√	•√	•√	•√	√	√	•√
Support for employed	•√	•√		•√		•√		√	•√	•√	√	√	•√	•	√	•	•√		•√	√	•√	•√	•√	•√		•√	•	•√

• = mentioned in CSR      √ = reflected in ESF programme

Source: ESF synthesis country report annexes

<sup>13</sup> To avoid duplications, MS under the Economic Adjustment Programme (PT, EL, CY, IE) did not receive CSR for all years. The table only includes those elements that were included in CSR. Please note that Croatia has not been included in the table on CSR / ESF 2007-2013 as Croatia has become a full member of the European Union on 1st July 2013. It took part in the 2013 European Semester, but did so on a voluntary and informal basis.

The importance allocated to EU policy priorities in the field of Human Capital are also generally well reflected in the ESF programming. Firstly, all MS that received recommendations to focus on reducing early school leaving included this priority in their ESF OPs, except DK. However, under the broader banner of improving educational outcomes, DK has also successfully addressed early school leaving. Various MS that did not receive such explicit recommendations included this priority in their OPs nonetheless (CZ, CY, EE, FI, NL, PL, and SI). Only two MS did not include ESL as a priority in ESF programming (DE and LT), which is in line with their performance on ESL. Secondly, all MS that received recommendations to concentrate on participation in and quality of higher tertiary education did so in their ESF programming. On average across the EU, higher education attainment rates increased, and the gender gap narrowed, but the improvements were unequal across MS. Thirdly, all 28 MS used the ESF for activities to enhance the provision of lifelong learning, though SK not directly. Finally, the table also shows that particularly the recommendations for providing childcare facilities are in a few cases not followed up by ESF programming. Various MS consider this a more structural feature of the national education system, which is not addressed by ESF, but by national funds. Despite existing recommendations, SE and PL also did not include the improvement of educational outcomes of young people as an explicit priority in their ESF programming.

### **Inter-programme coordination**

There are only a very few examples of inter-programme coordination between the ESF and the other ESI-funds. In some MS there was no formal link. The exception seems to be the field of developing entrepreneurship, where the ESF2007-2013 funded training for start-ups while the further development of the new enterprises is stimulated by subsidies from the ERDF. Examples are also found in the field of Human Capital, where ERDF contributed to education infrastructure (school buildings, etc.), while ESF support the students, teachers, and education systems.

## **2.3 Developing challenges across 2007-2013**

### **2.3.1 Labour market challenges**

Throughout the ESF 2007-2013 programming period, the employment rate in the EU marginally increased from 68.9% (2006) to 69.2% (2014), but this masks some major effects of the crisis. Table 3 shows the changes in the employment rate throughout the 2007-2013 period.

Table 3. shows that, until the crisis in 2008, the employment rate was on average 70.3% in the EU. The planning and programming of the ESF 2007-2013 took place in 2005-2006 in a context of sustained economic growth and overall improvements in the employment performance across the EU. However, soon after the start of the ESF implementation phase, the economic and financial crisis led to a significant deterioration of the economic and social situation which hit the most vulnerable groups in society in particular. The table shows that the employment rate fell significantly after 2008, remained relatively stagnant between 2010 and 2013, and increased again in 2014.

This suggests that the main effect of the crisis has been cyclical unemployment. However, some MS show decreasing employment rates up to 2014 (CY, EL, ES, IT, SI), indicating that recovery in these MS has not yet been fully realised at the national level. This does not exclude the possibility of improvements at the regional level for some of these MS (take for instance considerable differences between Northern and Southern Italy, or more developed and less developed regions in Spain). The crisis had a particularly strong effect in EE, LT, and LV, where the employment rate increased well before the crisis, than dropped to pre-2005 levels and increased again in the post-crisis years. The table below shows that the EU2020 headline target of 75% employment in the EU remains an ambitious target, even after the initial recovery from the crisis.

Table 3. Changes in employment rate (people aged 20-64 years) 2006-2014

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Trend
<b>EU-28</b>	<b>68,9</b>	<b>69,8</b>	<b>70,3</b>	<b>69,0</b>	<b>68,6</b>	<b>68,6</b>	<b>68,4</b>	<b>68,4</b>	<b>69,2</b>	
AT	71,6	72,8	73,8	73,4	73,9	74,2	74,4	74,6	74,2	
BE	66,5	67,7	68,0	67,1	67,6	67,3	67,2	67,2	67,3	
BG	65,1	68,4	70,7	68,8	64,7	62,9	63,0	63,5	65,1	
CY	75,8	76,8	76,5	75,3	75,0	73,4	70,2	67,2	67,6	
CZ	71,2	72,0	72,4	70,9	70,4	70,9	71,5	72,5	73,5	
DE	71,1	72,9	74,0	74,2	74,9	76,5	76,9	77,3	77,7	
DK	79,4	79,0	79,7	77,5	75,8	75,7	75,4	75,6	75,9	
EE	75,9	76,9	77,1	70,0	66,8	70,6	72,2	73,3	74,3	
EL	65,6	65,8	66,3	65,6	63,8	59,6	55,0	52,9	53,3	
ES	69,0	69,7	68,5	64,0	62,8	62,0	59,6	58,6	59,9	
FI	73,9	74,8	75,8	73,5	73,0	73,8	74,0	73,3	73,1	
FR	69,4	69,9	70,5	69,5	69,3	69,2	69,4	69,5	69,9	
HR	60,6	63,9	64,9	64,2	62,1	59,8	58,1	57,2	59,2	
HU	62,6	62,3	61,5	60,1	59,9	60,4	61,6	63,0	66,7	
IE	73,4	73,8	72,2	66,9	64,6	63,8	63,7	65,5	67,0	
IT	62,4	62,7	62,9	61,6	61,0	61,0	60,9	59,7	59,9	
LT	71,3	72,7	72,0	67,0	64,3	66,9	68,5	69,9	71,8	
LU	69,1	69,6	68,8	70,4	70,7	70,1	71,4	71,1	72,1	
LV	73,2	75,2	75,4	66,6	64,3	66,3	68,1	69,7	70,7	
MT	57,9	58,6	59,2	59,0	60,1	61,6	63,1	64,8	66,4	
NL	76,3	77,8	78,9	78,8	76,8	76,4	76,6	75,9	75,4	
PL	60,1	62,7	65,0	64,9	64,3	64,5	64,7	64,9	66,5	
PT	72,6	72,5	73,1	71,1	70,3	68,8	66,3	65,4	67,6	
RO	64,8	64,4	64,4	63,5	64,8	63,8	64,8	64,7	65,7	
SE	78,8	80,1	80,4	78,3	78,1	79,4	79,4	79,8	80,0	
SK	66,0	67,2	68,8	66,4	64,6	65,0	65,1	65,0	65,9	
SI	71,5	72,4	73,0	71,9	70,3	68,4	68,3	67,2	67,7	
UK	75,2	75,2	75,2	73,9	73,5	73,5	74,1	74,8	76,2	

Source: Eurostat data, compiled by authors

The profound effect of the crisis on the labour market situation in the EU called for the development of targeted approaches, particularly for the more vulnerable members of the working age population such as the low skilled, unemployed, younger and older workers, disabled people, people with mental health issues, or minority groups such as migrants and the Roma. The employment rates for young people (15-24 year olds) throughout the years 2007-2013 confirm that the labour market position of young people in particular has been strongly affected by the crisis. At the same time, the vulnerable position of older workers with (increasingly) obsolete skills is another challenge European policymakers face in trying to maintain high employment rates.

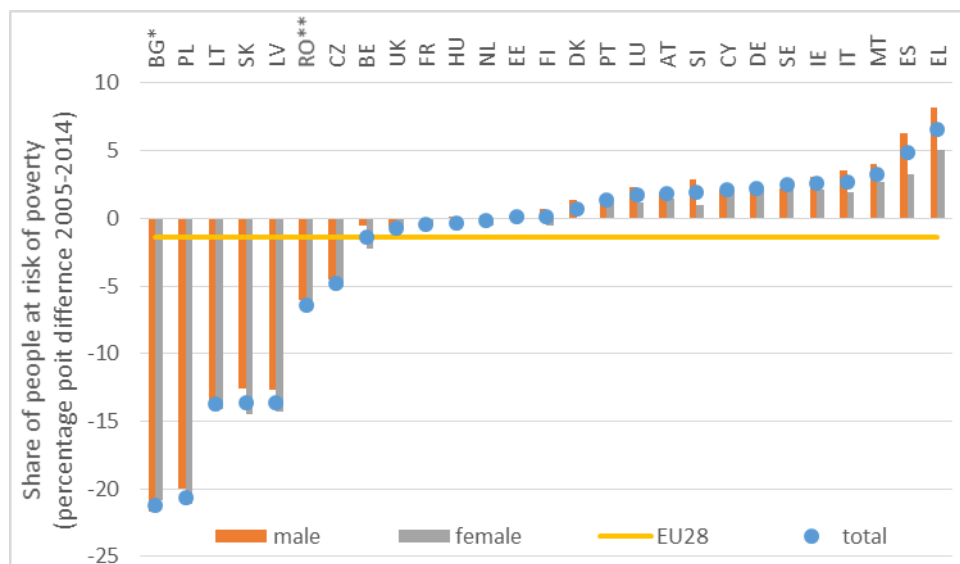
### 2.3.2 Challenges for poverty and social exclusion

With these considerable labour market challenges, the share of the population at risk of poverty and social exclusion also went up during the crisis. In 2008, more than 80 million people lived below the poverty line, which amounted to 16.5% of the EU population. The economic crisis further worsened the situation and the share of the population at risk of poverty and social exclusion went up during the crisis. According to the most recent data from Eurostat (2015<sup>14</sup>), in 2014, 122.3 million people, or 24.4% of the EU population, were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Young people, migrants and the low skilled, often relying on temporary and low-paid jobs, have experienced the greatest increases in unemployment and are therefore exposed to a worsening of their living conditions. The 'working poor' represented 8% of the working population in 2008, while the risk of

<sup>14</sup> Eurostat (2015); People at risk of poverty and social exclusion; [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People\\_at\\_risk\\_of\\_poverty\\_or\\_social\\_exclusion](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion)

poverty rose significantly for the unemployed, from 39% to 44% since 2005.<sup>15</sup>The crisis had a considerable negative impact on those earning the lowest amounts ('working poor'), whose situation has continued to deteriorate since 2005 and now face a greater risk of getting into debt.

Figure 1 Share of population (aged 18 and above) at risk of poverty or social exclusion by gender, period change between 2005 and 2014 (%)



Source: authors' analysis of Eurostat data.

To address this policy challenge, the EU2020 headline target builds on the multiple dimensions of poverty and social exclusion. To achieve progress towards this target, MS agreed on indicators on the basis of which to orient their policies to improve social protection systems and social services to promote inclusion throughout the life cycle (children, young unemployed people, working age population, and elderly), and across vulnerable groups such as single parents, households with dependants, people with a migrant background, certain ethnic minorities (such as Roma), or people with disabilities. A cross-cutting approach to the reduction of poverty is essential to address the needs of the heterogeneous target groups, and this calls for progress in employment policies; the design of tax-benefit systems; the provision of key social services such as quality child care, affordable housing, education and protection of children's rights, but also the reform of pension systems and progress in the field of healthcare and long-term care.

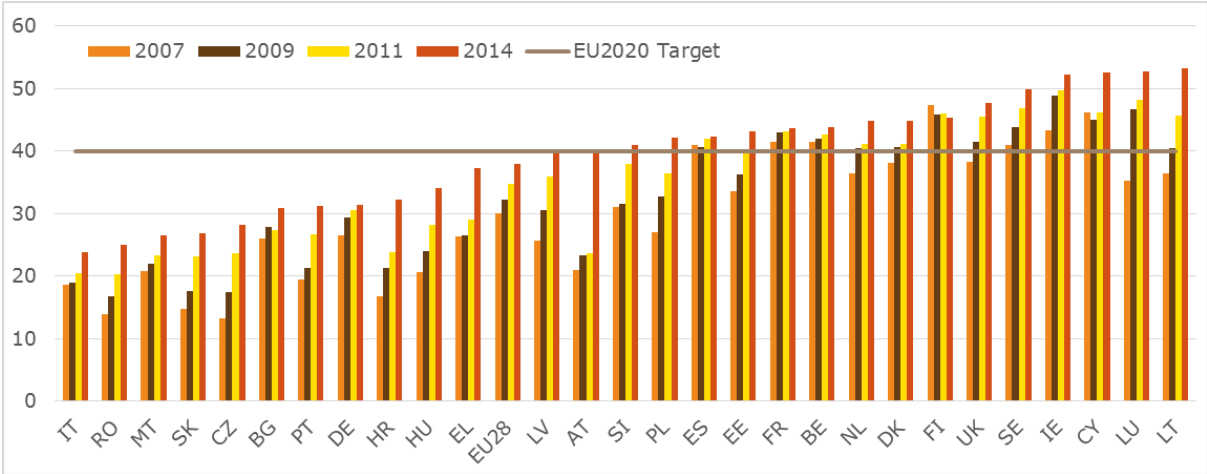
### 2.3.3 Challenges in the field of Human Capital

Due to already persistent skill mismatches in the EU, investments in education and training systems across the EU are essential to raise productivity, competitiveness, economic growth and employment.<sup>16</sup>For this purpose, the EU headline target proposes to increase the share of the population aged 30-34 completing tertiary or equivalent education to at least 40% in 2020. In the ESF 2007-2013 programming period, higher education attainment rates increased considerably for the EU as a whole, from 30.1% in 2007 to 37.9% by 2014, though considerable differences between MS persist. Figure 2. shows that progress was being achieved towards this target between 2011-2014, with just over half of the MS passing the 40% headline target.

<sup>15</sup> See EC Communication (2010/758), The European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion: A European framework for social and territorial cohesion

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/forecasting-skill-demand-and-supply/data-visualisations>

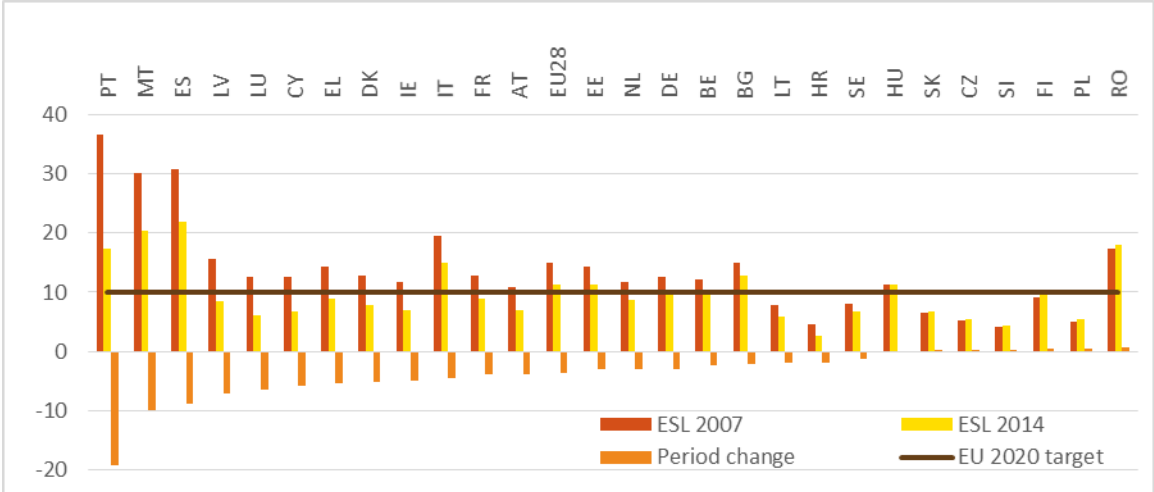
Figure 2. Higher education attainment (30-34 year olds) (%) 2007-2014, by MS



Source: authors’ analysis of Eurostat data.

The second EU2020 headline target under Human Capital is the reduction of early school leaving (ESL) rates in the EU to 10% by 2020, as presented in Figure 3. below.<sup>17</sup>

Figure 3. Early School Leaving period change 2007-2014, by MS



Source: authors’ analysis of Eurostat data.

High rates of ESL are an important impediment to improving education levels to achieve smart and inclusive growth. ESL represents missed opportunities for young people as well as a loss of social and economic potential. The percentage point decrease was highest in PT, with a 19.1% decrease in early school leaving between 2007 and 2014 (see Figure 3.). Decreases were also registered in CY, DK, EL, ES, LU, LV, MT, in all cases by over 5 percentage points over the 2007-2014 period. Among the already high performing MS, CZ, FI, HU, PL, ESL increased ESL rates, but by under 1 percentage point.

**2.4 Response of ESF 2007-2013 to the crisis**

In response to the financial and economic crisis and the challenges as described above, the European Commission formulated in 2008 the European Economic Recovery Plan, in which the ESF as the EU’s main financial instrument for investing in people is seen as a “key part of the recovery toolbox”.<sup>18</sup>In this plan, the European Commission proposes to

<sup>17</sup> Early school leavers are usually defined as those young people who leave education and training with only lower secondary education or less, and who are no longer in education and training. See Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving (2011/C 191/01).

<sup>18</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Council - A European Economic Recovery Plan COM/2008/0800 final.

simplify criteria for support and to step up advance payments. The simplification of criteria for supporting interventions (taken up by UK, DE, AT, BE, FR, MT, LV, IT, NL, SI, PT), the extended use of 2000-2006 funding (used by HU, CZ, SK, SI, BE, DE), and the possibility to advance the payment of 2007-2013 ESF allocation to earlier years (found in PT, UK, SI, HU, IE, MT, RO) provided the necessary assistance to help MS to cope with the crisis. This is particularly relevant in view of the austerity measures affecting the national budgets available for labour market policies. To further ensure the use of ESF (and other structural funds) during the crisis, MS receiving financial assistance were granted an additional 10 percentage points of European co-finance.<sup>19</sup>

As part of the Recovery Plan, the European Commission also announced the possibility of shifting existing programming of ESF expenditure towards more relevant and immediate crisis-driven needs. A study conducted in 2012 showed that 84 out of 117 OPs (72% of the total) were adapted in response to the crisis.<sup>20</sup> Figure 4 summarises the EU share of ESF budget adjustments, as recorded in Operational Programmes, by comparing the first version of the OP delivered to the EC in 2006 against the OP at the end of 2014.<sup>21</sup>

Figure 4. Comparison of budget allocations of OP approved at 31-12-2014 against first version OP (Community amount)

(x€1,000)	Human Capital	Access to Employment	Social Inclusion	Strengthening Institutional Capacity	Promoting Partnerships	Technical Assistance	Total
AT	-34.465	34.888	-	-	-	-424	-
BE	-21.023	25.206	13.481	-	-17.665	-	-
BG	-10.865	10.865	18.163	-20.907	-2.749	-229	-5.722
CY	-19.317	-	17.924	-	-	1.393	-
CZ	-193.385	51.047	84.103	-36.515	-	-6.664	-101.414
DE	-81.163	-102.920	313.596	-	-120.273	-9.240	-
DK	-26.200	26.200	-	-	-	-	-
EE	-4.474	4.474	-	-	-	-	-
ES	-956.656	1.013.917	-	-	-86.116	-10.180	-39.036
FI	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
FR	176.269	49.244	-125.133	-	-380	-	100.000
EL	-164.060	369.142	-77.569	-129.267	-	1.754	-
HR	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
HU	-286.289	281.905	-10.390	-2.113	-	-95	-16.983
IE	-78.421	77.747	-	-	-	674	-
IT	221.891	-51.894	-27.212	-54.344	-70.857	4.951	22.535
LT	-38.230	67.615	-	-15.002	-	-14.383	-
LU	2.190	-2.190	-	-	-	-	-
LV	-10.702	66.943	5.727	-29.519	-	-	32.450
MT	3.400	-	-	-3.575	-	175	-
NL	-40.000	20.000	20.000	-	-	-	-
PL	72.633	294.025	69.553	-131.653	-	-4.336	300.222
PT	1.267	152.355	192.378	-	-	-5.000	341.000

<sup>19</sup> Regulation (EU) no 1311/2011 of the European Parliament and the Council of 13 December 2011 amending Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 as regards certain provisions relating to financial management for certain MSs experiencing serious difficulties with respect to their financial stability

<sup>20</sup> Metis GmbH (2012), Evaluation of the reaction of the ESF to the economic and financial crisis, study commissioned by EC: DG EMPL.

<sup>21</sup> 2014 version of OP used to ensure comparability with other figures. Some minor shifts occurred in 2015, slightly further increasing the emphasis on employment related interventions, at the expense of human capital.

(x€1,000)	Human Capital	Access to Employment	Social Inclusion	Strengthening Institutional Capacity	Promoting Partnerships	Technical Assistance	Total
RO	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
SE	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
SI	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
SK	-72.078	87.465	-13.600	-24.262	-	6.902	-15.573
UK	-62.486	129.858	-	-	-	-43.372	24.000
EU28	-1.622.162	2.605.892	481.020	-447.158	-298.040	-78.073	641.479
CON	1.013.597	1.810.913	381.518	-438.519	-154.963	-38.740	546.611
RCE	-608.565	794.979	99.503	-8.639	-143.077	-39.334	94.867

Source: SFC2007: Operational Programmes version 2014

The table shows a **clear shift in allocated budgets across ESF priorities** between the first and 2014 versions of the OP. Across the EU, additional funds were allocated to the Access to Employment Priority, often at the expense of the Priorities Human Capital (exceptions are FR, IT and PL, which increased their budget for this Priority), and across the EU for Promoting Partnerships, Strengthening Institutional Capacity. This shift in focus is most visible in ES, but can also be observed in EL, HU, PL, PT, SK and the UK and, to a lesser extent, in other MS. Budgets were also shifted towards the Social Inclusion Priority by CZ, DE, NL, PL and PT.

The table shows the overall **increase in the EU contribution to ESF** of €641.47 million to €76.75 billion (as compared to the initial €76.11 billion EU budget allocated), as a result of the additional financial assistance to MS made available in response to the crisis.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, MS reduced their *national* contributions allocated to ESF in a broader austerity response to the crisis. The total combined allocation of ESF 2007-2013 investments (EU and National shares) at the start of the programme dropped from €117.99 billion to €115.60 billion in the 2014. As the structure of ESF requires national co-financing of investments, a reduction of national funds by definition also reduces the EU and total budgets allocated. Figure 5 below summarises the development of budgets in the different regions.

Figure 5. Comparison of budget allocations of OP approved at 31-12-2014 against first version OP, by type of region (EU amount and national amount separately)

(x€1,000)		Human Capital	Access to Employment	Social Inclusion	Strengthening Institutional Capacity	Promoting Partnerships	Technical Assistance	Total
EU + national	CON	-2.676.696	1.410.814	406.364	-599.215	-237.396	-110.031	-1.806.158
	RCE	-1.589.924	1.101.877	314.659	-45.571	-279.526	-83.771	-582.258
EU amount	CON	-1.013.597	1.810.913	381.518	-438.519	-154.963	-38.740	546.611
	RCE	-608.565	794.979	99.503	-8.639	-143.077	-39.334	94.867
National amount	CON	-1.663.099	-400.098	24.847	-160.696	-82.432	-71.291	-2.352.769
	RCE	-981.360	306.898	215.156	-36.932	-136.449	-44.437	-677.125

Source: SFC2007: Operational Programmes version 2014

<sup>22</sup> Regulation (EU) no 1311/2011 of the European Parliament and the Council of 13 December 2011 amending Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 as regards certain provisions relating to financial management for certain MSs experiencing serious difficulties with respect to their financial stability



Figure 5 underlines the importance of increased EU amounts to limit the negative short term effects of austerity. It also shows that reduced national investments were directed towards PA with lower co-financing rates, to reduce the impact on total budget of investments.<sup>23</sup> For Human Capital investments for instance, the national amounts were reduced more substantially than the EU amounts, which shows that these occur in PAs with co-financing below 50%; the EU amount would decrease in larger proportions if PAs were selected with co-financing up to 85%. For Access to Employment, the figure shows quite a different picture. While overall the national amounts invested in CON regions were reduced by €400 million, the EU amounts for this priority actually increased by €1.8 billion. As more investments were allocated to regions most affected by the crisis (where co-financing rates are often around 85%), the EU amount of the budget **increased substantially, despite reductions of national budgets**. In addition, the higher EU amounts are also explained by the fact that the co-financing rates in various CON regions were adjusted upwards during the programme period. As a result, allocated EU amounts went up, even though the allocated national amounts were adjusted downwards. Figure 5 also shows that MS themselves responded directly to the crisis, and shifted national amounts in RCE regions from other priorities towards Access to Employment. As RCE regions could not count on raised co-financing rates and additional EU funding, MS had to allocate additional amounts themselves in order to secure additional EU funding.

The flexibility to adjust allocated budgets to other Priorities also enabled MS to **adapt the types of interventions** to respond to more immediate needs, such as stepping up support for job-search and enterprise creation interventions in EL, or interventions to support employability in HU.<sup>24</sup> One of the main types of ESF-supported interventions increasingly selected in response to the crisis is training, often complemented by national short-term working arrangement schemes. This is an effective combination in times of crisis as it reduces the immediate need to lay off employees, while opening up training pathways for employees who otherwise might not have been targeted by in-company training measures. As such, these combined interventions are particularly relevant in crisis years, and show the potential of ESF support in adding a structural component to what would otherwise be short-term labour market responses. At the same time, there is evidence that part of the resources initially earmarked for more long-term and structural interventions, such as Strengthening Institutional Capacities, have been re-allocated to employment related interventions (EL, IT, LV, PL).

With financial readjustments within PAs and OPs, MS were able to adjust the planned **target values upwards** where needed in response to the greater needs created by crisis. In addition to increasing existing targets, in various instances, the scope of existing activities was broadened to include affected groups (particularly in ES, PT, FR, EL). This allowed MS to adapt the focus to **more relevant target groups** with greater immediate needs. The scope of existing target groups was broadened, or new target groups that were heavily impacted by the crisis were included in ESF programming. A commonly found shift was an additional focus on unemployed, but also in some cases towards young people (for instance in CY, DK, AT, LU, PT). Often a change of target groups was accompanied by reallocation of funds within or beyond priority axes.

While the above is illustrative of the ESF response to the crisis, it does not necessarily expose all changes to programming in response to the crisis. While substantial changes can be traced, due to shifts in allocated budgets across PAs and priorities, shifts *within* PAs do not require formal approval by the European Commission (under General regulation Article 33 / 37), do not show up at the EU level and are therefore not always possible to trace. MS with OPs that consist of a small number of relatively broad PAs are in particular able to shift financial allocations more easily *within* PA priorities to better combat the effects of the crisis, and respond in a similar way as described above.

The ESF 2007-2013 OPs show distinct and clear relevance in mitigating the crisis, including detailed operational actions to allow the available resources to be used more efficiently in view of immediate challenges related to the crisis. Due to the profound

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<sup>23</sup> Based on separate analysis of development of national budgets, not presented here.

<sup>24</sup> See ESF Thematic evaluation Access to Employment: Volume III, p. 27

effects of the crisis, various MS have used ESF increasingly to support mainstream activities, rather than as an innovative tool. However, as the remainder of this report will show, despite the context of crisis, ESF 2007-2013 still largely retained its focus on *long-term* skill development. This shows that activities related to upgrading skills and increasing Access to Employment are both coherent and rational for long-term labour market strategies, in combination with more immediate crisis-related measures.<sup>25</sup> As such, it can be concluded that the response of the ESF to the crisis and the flexible shared management of the OPs between the Commission and the Member States has been relevant and rational given the immediate needs for support generated by the crisis.

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<sup>25</sup> Panteia (2011), Study on Short-time working arrangements during the crisis and lessons to learn, study commissioned by EC: DG EMPL.

### 3 Scale of ESF investments

#### Key Findings

- A total of €115.60 billion was allocated to ESF 2007-2013 by the EU and MS, of which €76.75 billion refers to the EU contribution, which corresponds to roughly 7.9% of the total Multi-annual Financial Framework.<sup>26</sup> This is comparable to the share in the previous programming period 2000-2006.
- National contributions amount to €35.12 billion, complemented by an additional €3.73 billion contributed by private funds, mobilised at the national level.
- The investments in Human Capital and Adaptability are the largest (46% of the budget), followed by investments in Access to Employment (34%). Social Inclusion interventions have been allocated 14% of the budget, leaving 2% for Strengthening Institutional Capacity, 1% for Promoting Partnerships, and 3% for Technical Assistance.
- There are considerable differences in priorities between MS; some chose to invest relatively little in Access to Employment interventions, while others invested less in Human Capital. RCE regions invested overall more in employment related interventions, while CON regions concentrated more on investment in human capital infrastructure.
- The significance of ESF investments in relation to national funding varies substantially between MS, most particularly between older and newer MS. In AT, DK, FI, IE, LU, NL, SE, the contribution of ESF is relatively insignificant when compared to national investments in similar policy areas. However, ESF investments in BG, CZ, EE, EL, HR, LV, LT, MT, PL, PT, RO, SI, and SK are very significant in their national contexts. In other MS (BE, CY, DE, ES, FR, HU, IT, UK) ESF investment has a substantial significance.

#### 3.1 ESF allocation 2007-2013

The total budget allocated to ESF 2007-2013 programmes is €115.60 billion, comprising the total EU and national co-funding. The table 4 below summarises the EU budget allocations and the national share for each of the main priorities, based on the latest versions of the OPs. The table shows that from the total €115.60 billion allocated to the ESF by the EU and MS, €76.75 billion consists of EU budget, which corresponds to roughly 7.9% of the total Multi-annual Financial Framework.<sup>27</sup> This is comparable to the EU's share of the total ESF budget in the previous programming period 2000-2006, when the EU contributed €62 billion (8.5% of its multiannual budget) to a total ESF budget of €120 billion. The national contributions for the current ESF programme consist of €35.12 billion of public funds and an additional €3.73 billion from private sources. No private funds were mobilised in BG, CY, EL, FI, IT, LU, MT, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK. The ESF budget normally consists of grants. However, in a small number of MS (DE, DK, EE, IT, LT, LV, PL), a small share of the ESF budget (less than 1% at EU level) is invested in financial instruments (loans, holding funds, etc.) to enterprises, rather than grants.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/budget/financialreport/2013/annex/1/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/budget/financialreport/2013/annex/1/index_en.html)

<sup>27</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/budget/financialreport/2013/annex/1/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/budget/financialreport/2013/annex/1/index_en.html)

<sup>28</sup> European Commission (2015), Progress made in financing and implementing financial engineering instruments. [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/information/publications/reports/2015/summary-of-data-on-the-progress-made-in-financing-and-implementing-financial-engineering-instruments-2014](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/reports/2015/summary-of-data-on-the-progress-made-in-financing-and-implementing-financial-engineering-instruments-2014).

Table 4. ESF 2007-2013 budget Community / National (public + private) (in million €)

	Human Capital		Access to Employment		Social Inclusion		Institutional capacity		Promoting Partnerships		Technical assistance		Total	
	EU	Ntl.	EU	Ntl.	EU	Ntl.	EU	Ntl.	EU	Ntl.	EU	Ntl.	EU	Ntl.
AT	168	255	206	209	127	149	0	0	6	7	17	16	524	636
BE	346	366	339	485	321	340	0	0	35	32	33	32	1,073	1,256
BG	361	64	413	73	163	29	178	31	18	3	47	8	1,180	208
CY	62	11	0	0	53	9	0	0	0	0	5	1	120	21
CZ	2,161	381	688	121	483	85	159	28	39	2	144	25	3,673	643
DE	3,775	2,540	2,615	1,517	2,413	2,129	0	0	219	77	358	251	9,381	6,514
DK	153	153	92	92	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	255	255
EE	229	42	132	23	0	0	22	3	0	0	8	1	392	70
EL	1,674	291	1,818	305	432	96	356	63	0	0	84	15	4,364	770
ES	2,395	862	5,489	2,267	0	0	0	0	22	10	113	44	8,018	3,184
FI	361	462	196	258	0	0	0	0	37	49	25	32	619	802
FR	1,791	1,744	1,447	1,340	2,068	1,767	0	0	3	1	186	77	5,495	4,930
HR	48	8	45	8	40	7	8	1	0	0	12	2	152	27
HU	2,082	526	897	0	367	65	141	25	0	0	125	22	3,612	637
IE	148	148	224	224	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	375	375
IT	3,605	3,380	2,311	2,482	558	666	126	126	107	123	254	281	6,961	7,057
LT	334	59	440	83	0	0	154	27	0	0	99	12	1,028	181
LU	17	17	8	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	25	25
LV	245	32	249	66	48	4	23	1	0	0	18	0	583	103
MT	62	11	31	6	0	0	15	3	0	0	4	1	112	20
NL	375	464	219	329	203	304	0	0	0	0	33	33	830	1,130
PL	5,204	918	2,643	466	1,390	245	388	68	0	0	384	68	10,007	1,766
PT	5,496	1,827	597	249	602	238	0	0	0	0	158	31	6,853	2,345
RO	2,160	343	653	126	541	103	200	35	0	0	131	42	3,684	650
SE	199	199	465	465	0	0	0	0	0	0	28	28	692	692
SI	427	75	140	25	64	11	97	17	0	0	28	5	756	133
SK	522	92	673	119	174	31	57	10	0	0	58	10	1,484	262
UK	1,531	1,428	2,712	2,566	118	39	33	23	0	0	106	100	4,499	4,156
<b>EU 28</b>	<b>35,928</b>	<b>16,699</b>	<b>25,743</b>	<b>13,911</b>	<b>10,162</b>	<b>6,319</b>	<b>1,956</b>	<b>463</b>	<b>485</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>2473</b>	<b>1153</b>	<b>76,747</b>	<b>38,850</b>
<b>CON</b>	<b>26,805</b>	<b>7,298</b>	<b>16,179</b>	<b>4,235</b>	<b>5,918</b>	<b>1,623</b>	<b>1,893</b>	<b>452</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>1,686</b>	<b>445</b>	<b>52,733</b>	<b>14,118</b>
<b>RCE</b>	<b>9,122</b>	<b>9,401</b>	<b>9,564</b>	<b>9,676</b>	<b>4,244</b>	<b>4,696</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>787</b>	<b>708</b>	<b>24,013</b>	<b>24,732</b>

Source: SFC2007: Operational Programmes as of 31-12-2014

The table shows the allocated budget for each MS, and for the EU-28. A breakdown is provided by type of regional OP objective (CON and RCE regions). This shows the differences in national co-financing, in line with the requirements of the Regulation. The overview by OP objective also shows differences in Priorities selected between EU regions. Overall, CON regions allocate substantially more budget to Human Capital objectives than to Access to Employment, which is the most important category for RCE regions. This is also in line with the additional objective defined specifically for CON regions by article 3(2) ESF Regulation to invest in expanding and improving investments in Human Capital. RCE regions instead invest more in interventions in the field of Adaptability and Social Inclusion.

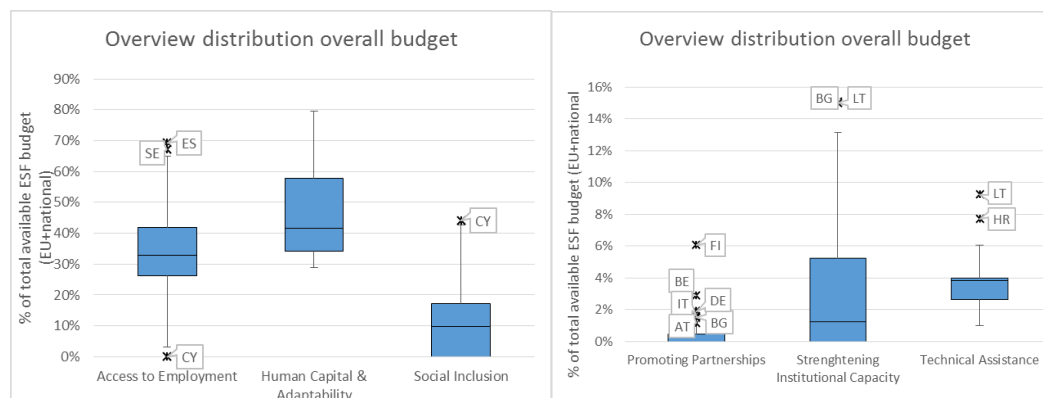
Table 5. Relative budget allocated to ESF priorities (based on total allocated budget, which includes EU + national budget)

Region	% Access to Employment	% Human Capital	% Social Inclusion	% Institutional capacity	% Promoting Partnership	% Technical assistance
<b>EU28</b>	<b>34.3</b>	<b>45.5</b>	<b>14.3</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>3.1</b>
AT	35.7	36.4	23.8	0.0	1.2	2.9
BE	35.4	30.6	28.4	0.0	2.9	2.8
BG	35.0	30.6	13.8	15.1	1.5	4.0
CY	0.0	51.9	44.1	0.0	0.0	4.0
CZ	18.8	58.9	13.2	4.3	1.0	3.9
DE	26.0	39.7	28.6	0.0	1.9	3.8
DK	36.3	59.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.8
EE	33.8	58.9	0.0	5.3	0.0	2.1
EL	41.4	38.3	10.3	8.1	0.0	1.9
ES	69.2	29.1	0.0	0.0	0.3	1.4
FI	32.0	58.0	0.0	0.0	6.1	4.0
FR	26.7	33.9	36.8	0.0	0.0	2.5
HR	29.5	31.3	26.2	5.2	0.0	7.7
HU	21.1	61.4	10.2	3.9	0.0	3.5
IE	59.7	39.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0
IT	34.2	49.8	8.7	1.8	1.6	3.8
LT	43.2	32.5	0.0	15.0	0.0	9.2
LU	29.7	66.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.0
LV	46.0	40.3	7.5	3.5	0.0	2.7
MT	28.0	54.9	0.0	13.1	0.0	4.0
NL	28.0	42.8	25.8	0.0	0.0	3.4
PL	26.4	52.0	13.9	3.9	0.0	3.8
PT	9.2	79.6	9.1	0.0	0.0	2.1
RO	18.0	57.7	14.9	5.4	0.0	4.0
SE	67.2	28.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.0
SI	18.5	56.5	8.4	12.8	0.0	3.7
SK	45.3	35.2	11.7	3.9	0.0	3.9
UK	61.0	34.2	1.8	0.6	0.0	2.4
<b>CON</b>	<b>30.5</b>	<b>51.0</b>	<b>11.3</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>3.2</b>
<b>RCE</b>	<b>39.5</b>	<b>38.0</b>	<b>18.3</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>3.1</b>

Source: SFC2007: AIR 2014

Table 5 shows that at the EU level, most budget was allocated to PAs on the ESF Priority Human Capital, followed by Access to Employment. However, considerable differences exist in choices made by MS, which reflects the different choices in programming to address national needs. ES, SE, and UK allocated more than 60% of their budget to Access to Employment, while CY did not allocate any ESF budget to this priority. PT, LU, and HU allocated substantial amounts to Human Capital, with over 60% of the budget, while SE, HR, and UK allocated a relatively low budget share in comparison to other MS. While NL allocates 42.8% of its ESF budget to Human Capital, a closer look shows that the Dutch interventions under this priority specifically target interventions to employees at risk of losing their jobs and not to broader Human Capital objectives. The variations are further displayed in figure 6 below, which shows that the medians for Access to Employment and Human Capital interventions are relatively similar, while the median share of Social Inclusion is considerably lower around 10%.

Figure 6. Relative budget allocated to ESF2007-2013 priorities



Source: SFC2007: AIR 2014

Figure 6 on the right also points to the considerable share of the total ESF investment in Lithuania and Bulgaria dedicated to Strengthening Institutional Capacity (15.0% and 15.1% respectively), while other MS invest substantially less. The small boxplot figure for technical assistance budgets suggests that MS invest relatively similar shares of their budgets to this; except LT and HR, all MS allocated 4% or less to technical assistance, in line with the requirements of Article 46 of the Regulation.<sup>29</sup>

### 3.2 Significance of ESF investments at MS level

As the previous paragraph already suggests, there are considerable variations in programming choices made for earmarking ESF investments, both across policy priorities and MS. To assess the actual significance of ESF for each MS, the size of ESF investments in each policy priority are compared to a national benchmark.

The significance of ESF investments in the field of Access to Employment can be assessed by comparing them with expenditure on national active labour market policies. With regard to ESF investments in the field of Social Inclusion, there is no similar comparable national indicator to estimate the significance of ESF investment. However, because Social Inclusion interventions also tend to focus on employability, the allocated SI budgets were also compared to the national budgets for active labour market policies. To assess the significance of ESF in the field of education and training policies, ESF investments are compared to the national expenditure on education and training. Finally, the share of national investments in Promoting Partnerships and Institutional Capacity compared to the total ESF budget are assessed against other MS to draw conclusions on the relative importance of these interventions. These comparisons are included in detail in Annex IV of the report. Based on this comparison, the evaluation is able to group MS in terms of the significance of ESF investments in their national contexts, in the various policy priorities, as per table 6 below.

Table 6. Significance of ESF investments in MS across ESF priorities

Significance of ESF investments in the field of:					
MS	Human Capital	Access to Employment	Social Inclusion	Institutional Capacity	Promoting Partnerships
AT	√	√	√	-	√√√
BE	√	√	√√	-	√√√
BG	√√	√√√	√√√	√√√	√√√
CY	√	√	√√√	-	-
CZ	√√√	√√	√√√	√√	√√
DE	√	√	√√	-	√√√
DK	√	√	√	-	-

<sup>29</sup> Please note that this evaluation assigned a thematic heading to ESF investments at PA level. In the case of LT and HR, PAs with predominant TA investments were assigned as such, even if these contain other types of interventions as well. As a result, for these two MS, the share of TA seems higher than allowed by the Regulation.

**Significance of ESF investments in the field of:**

<b>MS</b>	<b>Human Capital</b>	<b>Access to Employment</b>	<b>Social Inclusion</b>	<b>Institutional Capacity</b>	<b>Promoting Partnerships</b>
EE	√√	√√√	√	√√√	-
EL	*	√√√	√√√	√√√	-
ES	√	√√	√	-	√√
FI	√	√	√	-	√√√
FR	√	√	√√	-	√√
HR	*	√√	√√√	√√√	-
HU	√√	√√	√√	√√	-
IE	√	√	√	-	-
IT	√	√√	√	√√	√√√
LT	√√	√√√	√	√√√	-
LU	√	√	√	-	-
LV	√√	√√√	√√	√√	-
MT	√√	√√√	√	√√√	-
NL	√	√	√	-	-
PL	√√	√√	√√	√√	-
PT	√√√	√√	√√	-	-
RO	√√	√√√	√√√	√√√	-
SE	√	√	√	-	-
SI	√√	√√√	√√	√√√	-
SK	√√	√√√	√√√	√√	-
UK	√	√√	√	√√	-

**Legend:**

-: no presence of ESF investment in this field

√: low significance of ESF investment compared to benchmark

√√: some significance of ESF investment compared to benchmark

√√√: high significance of ESF investment compared to benchmark

\*: no benchmark data available

*Source: ESF thematic evaluations, supplemented with authors' calculations based on Eurostat data (see annex IV of this report)*

Based on the classification of significance of ESF investments in each ESF policy priority, MS can be classified into three groups.

- MS for which ESF investments have relatively low significance at the national level: AT, DK, FI, IE, LU, NL, SE;
- MS for which ESF investments have some significance at the national level: BE, CY, DE, ES, FR, HU, IT, UK;
- MS for which ESF investments have a high significance at the national level: BG, CZ, EE, EL, HR, LT, LV, MT, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK.

## 4 Effectiveness

### Key Findings

- By December 2014, a total of €91.65 billion was spent, which corresponds to 79.3% of the total allocated budget. The implementation of ESF 2007-2013 generally took off in 2009 and although MS have different spending patterns over the programming period. While some MS have comparatively low implementation rates (particularly RO, HR, and SK), there are no substantial differences between the implementation rates of CON and RCE regions. As projects can still be completed and declared until the end of 2015, a significant rise in the implementation rate is expected.
- ESF supported large numbers of participants and entities to address a number of strategic development challenges across MS. In total, 98.66 million participations were recorded in the interventions funded by the ESF between 2007 and 2013 (61.77 million in CON regions and 36.89 million in RCE regions). Throughout the programming period, ESF has a balanced focus between inactive (36% of participations), employed (33%) and unemployed (30%) people. While ESF 2007-2013 has reached a considerable number of young people, the share of older people (55-64 years old) in ESF participations has been relatively low.
- In Priorities Human Capital, Access to Employment and Social Inclusion, ESF 2007-2013 contributed to a total of 30.24 million individual positive results (obtained qualifications, secured employment, etc.) that could be linked to approximately 68.97 million participations across the ESF Priorities. As such, 44% of all participations in these Priorities can be linked to a positive individual result. These figures are expected to rise further towards the end of 2015.
- For a majority of the result indicators (54%), results are above target (more than 100%, sometimes well above 200% of initial targets), while for another 9% of the indicators, results are well within range of the targets by the end of 2014 (90%-100% achievement rate). These figures are expected to increase significantly towards the end of 2015.
- The thematic evaluations complement these figures with additional evidence and generally confirm the positive results across the ESF Priorities. While the crisis proved challenging, particularly for reaching the targets set under Access to Employment and Social inclusion, the triangulation of various data sources shows that interventions under ESF 2007-2013 have generally been effective.
- Altogether, the ESF made significant investments in employment, human capital, social inclusion and strengthening the institutional capacities of public administrations, leading to a significant volume of outputs and results.

### 4.1 Introduction

For assessing the effectiveness of ESF supported interventions in the programming period, the ex-post evaluation depends on the data collected by MA to annually monitor the progress of the programme, and on whether data is stored in a uniform manner allowing aggregation across OP and MS (using similar indicators). Based on EU-wide aggregations of this data, this chapter reports the following assessments:

- Analysis of financial implementation, comparing the actual spending reported with the allocated funds. However, as some projects are still ongoing, the current analysis to the end of 2014 underestimates the final financial implementation of interventions.
- Analysis of the different participant groups addressed by ESF supported interventions (based on Annex XXIII data).
- Analysis of the ESF outputs and results, comparing the targets for outputs and results with the achieved outputs and results.
- In-depth evaluations of selected interventions in the in-depth country evaluation implemented in each thematic evaluation of the ex post.

Various assumptions and critical steps have been taken to cope with various data limitations. Annex III further details the data limitations of the current ESF monitoring



system for this evaluation. Suggestions to improve the current limitation have been made in chapter 11 Key lessons learned.

## 4.2 Progress in the financial implementation of programmes

By December 2014, a total of €91.65 billion was spent out of €115.60 billion allocated to the entire ESF 2007-2013 programme, which corresponds to 79.3%. It should be taken into account that throughout 2015, many ESF supported projects were still being completed, declared to the European Commission and subsequently paid, which was possible until December 31<sup>st</sup> 2015. Table 7 below summarises the overall implementation rates of ESF funding by MS, both in absolute terms and in relative terms.

Table 7. Progress of Implementation ESF2007-2013 in absolute values (in Million €) (based on total budget Community + National amounts)

MS	Certified expenditure at 31-12-2014 (x€1,000,000)	Allocated investment ESF 2007-2013 (x€1,000,000)	%
<b>EU28</b>	<b>91,651</b>	<b>115,597</b>	79.3
AT	1,065	1,161	91.8
BE	1,867	2,329	80.2
BG	1,052	1,388	75.8
CY	110	141	77.7
CZ	3,167	4,316	73.4
DE	14,067	15,895	88.5
DK	398	510	78.1
EE	385	461	83.5
EL	4,066	5,134	79.2
ES	8,827	11,202	78.8
FI	1,196	1,420	84.2
FR	7,762	10,425	74.5
HR	76	179	42.5
HU	2,989	4,250	70.3
IE	607	751	80.8
IT	10,778	14,018	76.9
LT	1,001	1,210	82.7
LU	38	50	75.4
LV	667	686	97.3
MT	89	132	67.4
NL	1,610	1,960	82.2
PL	9,941	11,773	84.4
PT	8,297	9,198	90.2
RO	1,913	4,334	44.1
SE	1,140	1,383	82.4
SI	745	889	83.8
SK	1,133	1,746	64.9
UK	6,666	8,655	77.0
<b>CON</b>	<b>52,477</b>	<b>66,851</b>	<b>78.5</b>
<b>RCE</b>	<b>39,175</b>	<b>48,746</b>	<b>80.4</b>

Source: SFC2007: AIRs 2014

The table shows considerable differences in implementation rates across MS. Particularly low implementation rates have been realised so far by HR (42.5%, which has been an EU MS only since July 2013), RO (44.1%), SK (64.9%), and MT (67.4%). As a result, these MS run the risk of not being able to utilize all their budget before the end of 2015. The highest implementation rates were achieved in LV (97.3%), AT (91.8%), and PT (90.2%). The difference between CON regions and RCE regions is small, with 78.5% implemented in CON regions against 80.4% in RCE regions. These implementation rates are analysed in more detail per priority in table 8 below. This table also summarises the differences in implementation rates for different priorities between OPs with different regional objectives.

Table 8. Implementation rates for ESF2007-2013 priorities (in %)(based on total budget Community + National amounts)

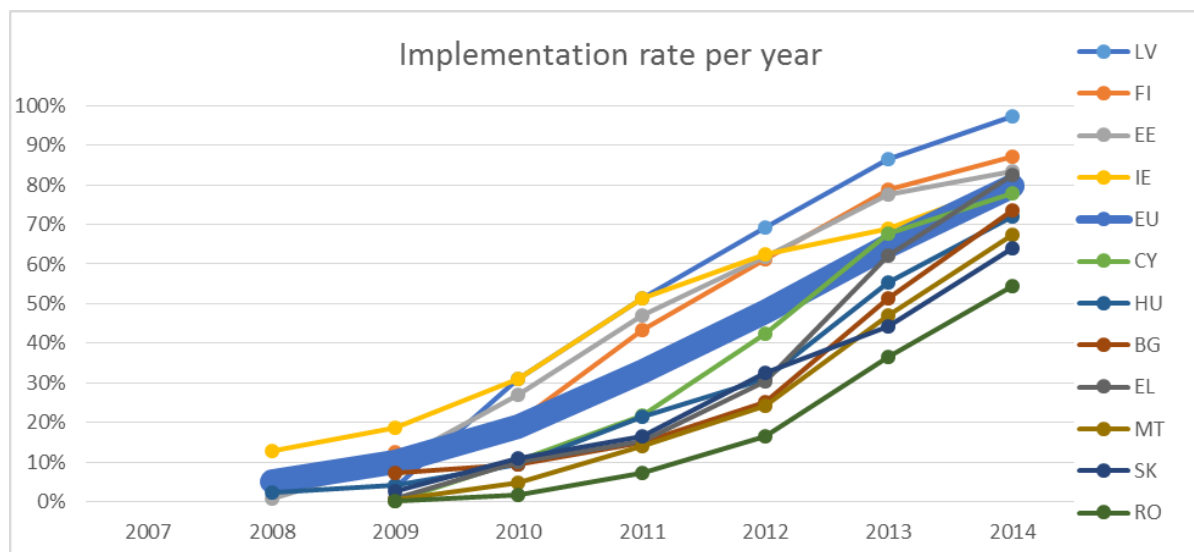
MS	Human Capital	Access to Employment	Social Inclusion	Institutional capacity	Promoting Partnerships	Technical assistance	Total
<b>EU28</b>	<b>78.1</b>	<b>81.1</b>	<b>83.7</b>	<b>69.0</b>	<b>64.2</b>	<b>67.9</b>	<b>79.3</b>
AT	92.2	96.2	87.5		97.1	65.2	91.8
BE	70.7	76.8	97.3		61.5	71.3	80.2
BG	76.6	79.1	84.9	65.6	52.5	56.3	75.8
CY	77.0		75.6			110.9	77.7
CZ	73.4	81.0	72.8	50.6	72.3	64.9	73.4
DE	85.4	85.4	98.2		75.9	74.7	88.5
DK	81.5	73.4				70.3	78.1
EE	77.9	93.2		86.7		76.0	83.5
EL	70.4	87.2	69.4	91.3		84.7	79.2
ES	80.7	78.3			62.5	68.5	78.8
FI	86.3	88.1			45.7	79.7	84.2
FR	70.0	71.2	81.8		71.1	61.1	74.5
HR	41.1	51.0	35.8	3.2		65.5	42.5
HU	66.8	84.0	66.8	73.5		56.2	70.3
IE	91.2	75.1				14.3	80.8
IT	79.7	76.4	77.0	51.9	54.5	65.4	76.9
LT	79.6	86.9		79.3		79.5	82.7
LU	71.5	83.7				78.8	75.4
LV	95.6	100.2	99.9	85.2		81.7	97.3
MT	71.8	69.7		44.7		63.8	67.4
NL	84.6	60.7	93.2			144.6	82.2
PL	75.7	104.7	83.4	69.1		82.0	84.4
PT	93.5	72.2	81.6			82.5	90.2
RO	43.5	49.9	40.3	67.8		8.9	44.1
SE	86.7	82.9				43.5	82.4
SI	83.0	92.5	84.9	78.0		69.5	83.8
SK	59.1	78.0	30.0	46.7		87.4	64.9
UK	75.3	80.2	73.4	23.9		37.1	77.0
CON	76.4	82.7	83.4	68.3	67.0	67.5	78.5
RCE	81.1	79.3	84.0	92.0	62.3	68.4	80.4

Source: SFC2007: AIRs 2014

While no substantial differences can be found between the implementation rates of PAs that focus on the most important priorities, the implementation rates for Promoting Partnerships and Strengthening Institutional Capacity are considerably lower (with 64.2% and 69.0% respectively). Interventions under these headings tend to focus on the longer term. Therefore, many projects in these ESF priorities run throughout the entire programming period and are being closed and submitted for payment only in 2015. In Italy specifically, the difficulties in implementing structural reforms in a context of reduced budgets were cited as the reason behind the problems in implementing SIC interventions. Also, the budgets allocated to technical assistance were not yet fully used by the end of 2014, with an average implementation rate across the EU of 67.9%. This may be explained by the ongoing or planned evaluations, which are part of Technical Assistance budgets. These can only be conducted at the very end of the programming period and are therefore not captured in the financial data at the end of 2014.

To better understand the differences in implementation of ESF programming across MS, an additional analysis has been done on the development of implementation rates over time. As it is difficult to capture the variation for all 28 MS over time in a single graph, figure 7 below presents such key data only for MS that are relative outliers. The fat line in the middle represents the annual EU28 average, which serves as reference point against the MS that show a slightly deviating pattern.

Figure 7. Implementation rates over time, ESF 2007-2013 – outliers



Source: SFC2007: AIRs 2014

Figure 7 shows clearly that the implementation for ESF 2007-2013 generally took off in 2009, as only IE, DE, PT, HU, EE filed eligible expenditures in 2008. In 2009, all other MS had reported eligible expenditures as well. A closer look at the various trend lines shows that basically three scenarios can be observed in the development of financial implementation.

- First of all, the average annual EU28 implementation rates captured by the fat central line shows an almost perfectly linear trend over time (every year a similar amount of budget is spent). Most MS follow this pattern (AT, CZ, DE, DK, ES, FR, IT, LT, LU, NL, PL, PT, SE, SI, UK). These MS are not presented in detail.
- Secondly, the programmes in various MS spent their budgets more exponentially (lower expenditure at the beginning, but steadily growing expenditure up to the final years): BG, HU, EL, MT, RO, SK.
- Thirdly, programmes in CY, EE, FI, IE, and LV spent their allocated budget according to an S curve (lower expenditure at the beginning, steadily growing in the middle phase, and slowing down at the end).

The variations between MS (table 7), different Priorities (table 8) and spending patterns over the years (figure 7) were also analysed in more detail by the thematic evaluations, which reported various factors that help to explain low absorption:

- A lack of effective coordination in the implementation between the Intermediate Bodies and project promoters;
- Longer than anticipated project preparatory/start-up phases, leading to delayed implementation and expenditure, and in some cases caused by the need to develop the appropriate partnership relationships, and operational processes, for example around referrals;
- Problems with co-financing of ESF interventions;
- A lack of the management capacity amongst project promoters, especially among those implementing the ESF for the first time;
- Difficulties in reaching the intended target groups (for example, older workers), including the lack of experience in reaching the target groups, inappropriate targeting and the target group's lack of interest in the offer;
- The activities aimed at system level changes were slower and more challenging to implement due to the complex and challenging nature of activities supported;
- In some cases, lower financial implementation rates were the result of reported project expenditures that turned out to be not reimbursable. This illustrates the importance of providers and intermediaries having a clear understanding of the requirements for financial claims under ESF, and of timely communications with Managing Authorities so any misunderstandings can be avoided or rectified rapidly.

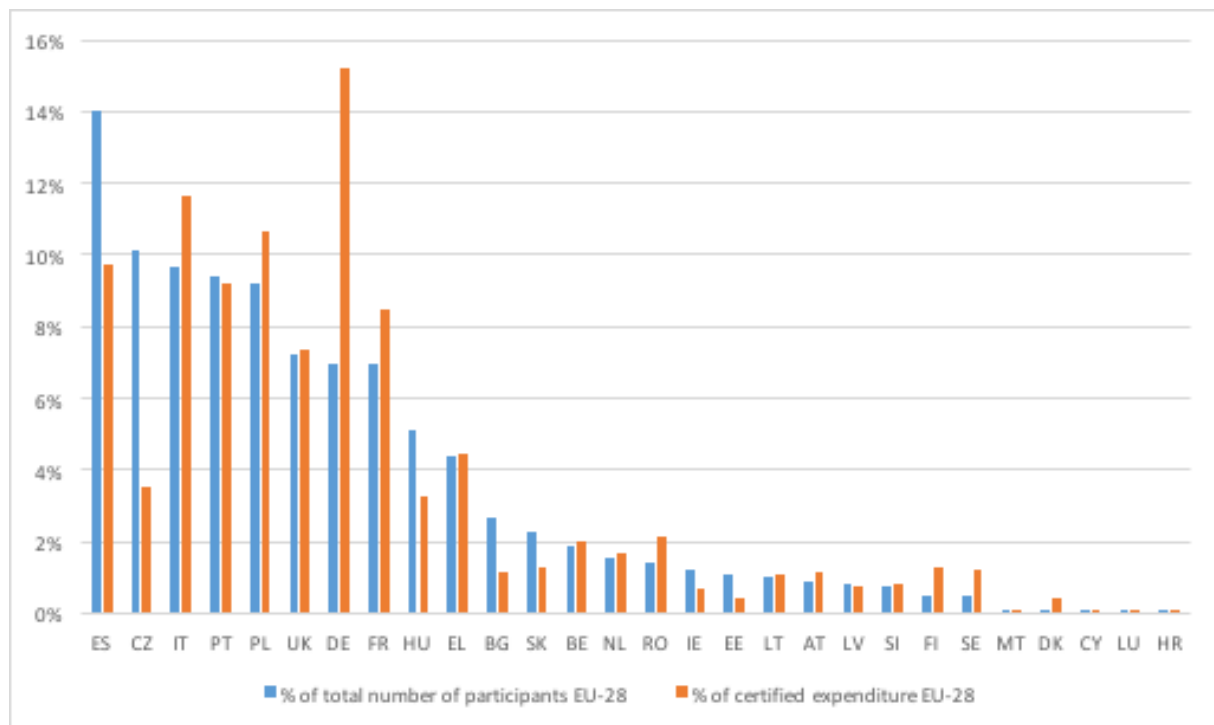
## 4.3 Output and results of ESF

### 4.3.1 Reaching out to target groups

Across the 28 MS, approximately 98.66 million participations have been registered in ESF supported interventions between 2007 and the end of 2014. This is a substantial number compared to the total EU population of 505 million in the EU-28 MS in 2013 (and 498 million in 2007), even when taking into account the fact that one individual may participate multiple times in ESF interventions. Section 10.3 further explores to what extent ESF 2007-2013 has reached individuals across different target groups.

The number of participations differ greatly between MS (see figure 8). In particular, ES, CZ, IT, PL, PT report a comparatively high number of participations, while a relatively low number of participations is reported for CY, DK, HR, LU, MT, SE (see figure 8 below, and Annex I of this report, which presents all Annex XXIII data on participations per MS). Comparing the MS share of total participations with the share of total budget spent, some MS report relatively a high number of ESF participations compared to their budget share, such as ES and the CZ, while other MS report a relatively small share of the total number of participations, such as DE and, to a lesser extent, Italy. The relatively large number of participations in CZ, ES and PT are explained by a limited number of PA that report on a large number of participations falling under the Priorities Human Capital or Access to Employment. In total 20 PA report more than 1 million participations, all together representing 44.5 million (45%) of all participations, with the CZ OP Competitiveness - OP Vzdělávání pro konkurenceschopnost - reporting 5.5 million participations for PA 7.3 (Human Capital); PA 2 of PT OP Potencial Humano 2007-2013 reporting 4.7 million participations (Human Capital), and PA1 of the UK OP of England and Gibraltar, reporting 4.4 million participations (Access to Employment).

Figure 8. Participations compared against total budget spent in ESF 2007-2013 – by MS



Source: own figure on the basis of SFC2007 (AIR2014)

The socio economic profile of participations varies across the EU-28 as well (see Annex 1 with more detailed information on socio economic background of participants per MS).

- **Gender:** Overall slightly more women participated in ESF supported interventions than men (52% versus 48% on EU level), demonstrating that ESF is gender sensitive in terms of total number of participations at EU28 level. Some MS report a relatively large share of women in total participations, with HR, LT, CY, EE, LV all scoring above the 60%, while other MS report a larger share of men (UK and NL).

- **(Un)employed and inactive:** The largest group of participants in ESF are the inactive (36% of participations), followed by the employed (33%) and the unemployed (30%). Looking in more detail at specific sub groups, around a quarter (26%) of participations are recorded for the inactive in education and training, while 9% are long term unemployed, and 2% self-employed. MS strongly differ in their focus. Some MS mainly target the employed (more than 50% of participants), such as in LU, SE, NL, FI, AT, DK, MT, PT, SI, CY, and LT, while BE, FR, SK, ES, HR, and LV focus ESF support more on the unemployed (more than 50% of the participants are unemployed). Other MS focus their ESF OPs more on the inactive, like CZ, BG, EL, HU (more than 50% of the participants are inactive). There are also MS that target the employed, unemployed, and inactive in a more balanced manner (e.g. IT, IE, EE, PL, DE, RO, and the UK). The largest share of self-employed participants is found in FI, DK, FR, EL, ES, and DE (more than 4% of ESF participants). In BE, FR, HR, LV and SK more than one-fifth of the participants are long term unemployed. In CZ, BG, IT, HU, EE, PL, and EL a large share of the participants are inactive but in education and training (more than 30% of the total number of participations).
- **Educational level:** In terms of the level of the education attainment, the analysis reveals that people with primary and secondary lower education (ISCED 1 and 2) make up the largest share of the supported population (45%), followed by people with upper secondary education (ISCED 3) and tertiary education (ISCED 5 and 6).<sup>30</sup> Only 6% of participants have a post-secondary, non-tertiary education (ISCED 4). Also here MS differ in their focus, with some countries focusing their OPs on those with ISCED level 1, 2 and 3 (such as in NL, DE, IE, IT, FR, DK, LU, ES, and EL, in which more than 70% of the participations belong to this group). Other MS focused on participants with a qualification level of ISCED 4 and higher (such as in CY, LT, EE, FI, HR, PL, SE, SI, RO, MT, HU).
- **Young and older people:** A considerable share (30%) of participations consist of young people between 15-24 years old, while only 6% of the participations are older people, 55-64 years old. Some MS targeted ESF interventions on young people to a greater extent (such as in DE, EE, NL, HU, PL, FR, DK, and the UK) ranging between 50% and 33% respectively of total participations. With regard to the group of older people aged 55-64, SE, LV, SI, FI, DK, LT, and SK report between 10% and 17% of total participations belonging to this group.
- **Disadvantaged groups:** Between 4% and 5% (at almost equal percentages) of participations are from migrant and minority groups or disabled people. Migrants are mainly targeted in CY, BE, AT, SE, DE, NL and ES (with more than 10% of participations belonging to this target group). Minorities are reported in considerable numbers in LV, UK, NL, SK, and HR (with more than 10 % of participations belonging to this group). Persons with a disability are targeted to a greater extent in the UK, CZ, AT than in other MS.<sup>31</sup>

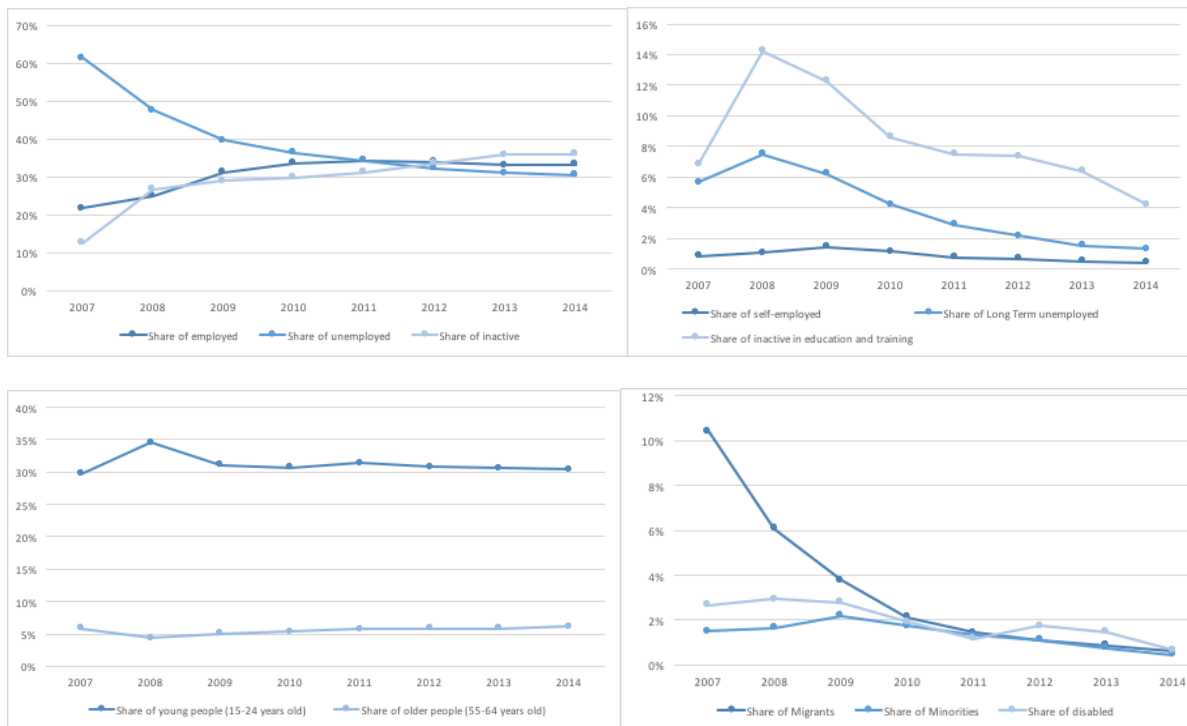
The ESF 2007-2013 was implemented in a changing socio economic context, with the economic crisis as a major event at the beginning of the programming period. As a result, a number of MS changed their ESF OPs to respond to the challenges created by the crisis (as described in chapter 2.4). MS shifted the focus of their OPs to more relevant target groups with higher immediate needs. This evaluation seeks to answer the question as to whether this changing focus can be observed in the relative share of certain target groups in the total population of ESF participations (see figure 9).

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<sup>30</sup> MS were not able to track the education level of all participants; as a result these categories do not sum to 100%.

<sup>31</sup> In many cases, MS were not able to track individuals according to these categories. No shared definitions exist across MS, and in various MS collecting this type of data for individuals is in fact prohibited by privacy regulations.

Figure 9. Relative share of total participations in ESF 2007-2013 over the years (cumulative values)



Source: own figure on the basis of SFC2007 (AIR2014)

Figure 9 shows that the numbers of employed, unemployed, and inactive across 2007-2013 are well balanced. At the start of the programming period, OPs seemed to focus more on the unemployed, but this emphasis decreased over the years, despite the increasing attention to this target group as a result of the financial and economic crisis. On the other hand, the relative share of the employed and inactive increased over the years.<sup>32</sup> A possible explanation could be that in the beginning of the programming period the PES could directly start with their ESF interventions related to the unemployed, while the projects focusing on the employed and the inactive took more time to be set up (activating employers and NGOs). With regard to specific subgroups of the (un)employed and inactive, the relative share of the inactive in education and training and the long-term unemployed decreased over the programming period, while the relative share of self-employed is more or less stable over the period (with a slight decrease in the last years). There is no generally valid explanation for this declining trend, but a few OP report a changing focus from the most disadvantaged groups to those who recently became employed or face the risks of unemployment as a result of the economic crisis.

Looking at the age groups across participations, one sees that the relative share of young people is rather stable over the years, as is the share of older people (although a larger share of young people take part in ESF activities). The stable share of young participations is interesting given that some MS broadened the scope of existing activities to include target groups particularly affected by the crisis (with an additional focus also on young people) from 2010 onwards. A more detailed analysis of this is presented in chapter 8. The relative share of migrants, minorities and disabled people decreased throughout 2007-2013, especially for migrants. As noted earlier, these target groups are generally underreported due to legal limitations in reporting on these background characteristics in some MS (due to privacy regulations). Finally, the change in the relative share of people with lower versus higher educational levels shows a more stable

<sup>32</sup> One should be careful with drawing conclusions on the relative share of certain target groups in the early years of the programme. Especially in 2007 and 2008, programmes are starting up, leading that some target groups are better addressed than others, as a consequence that some (large) projects are launched earlier on than others (such as for Public Employment Services addressing the unemployed, versus projects focussing on employers, addressing the employed). This misbalance is generally corrected over the years, as also observed.



position over the years (not reported in the figure 9 above) with the ESF OPs focusing more on those with a lower level of education. The largest share of participations have a primary or lower secondary education, followed by participants with an upper secondary education, tertiary education, and finally post-secondary non-tertiary education.

### Target groups reached by ESF priorities

Most participations are reported in PAs and interventions associated with Human Capital (60.33 million), followed by Access to Employment (28.87 million), and Social Inclusion (7.82 million). A lower number of participations are found in interventions related to Strengthening Institutional Capacity (1.44 million) and Promoting Partnerships (148,000).

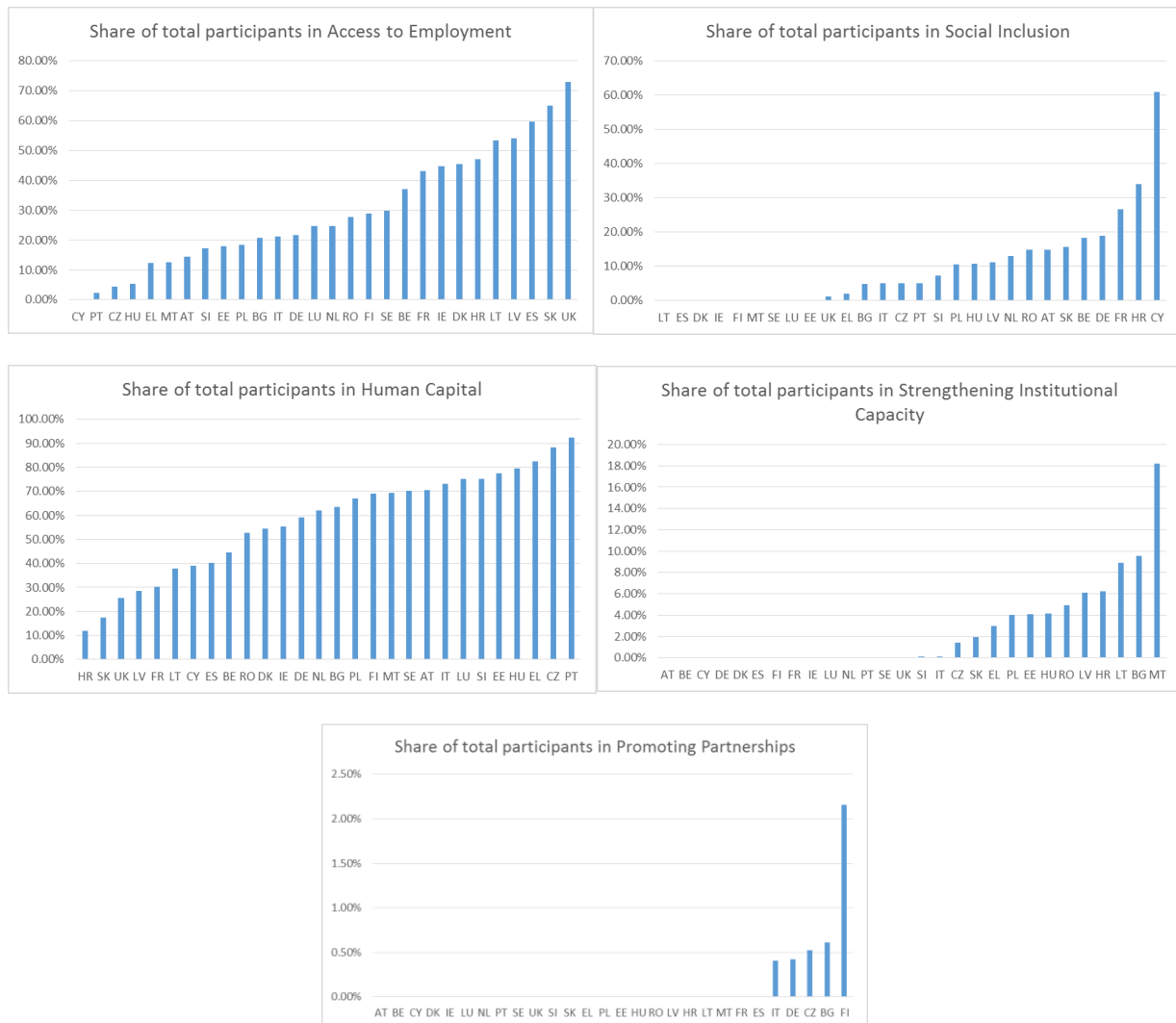
Table 9. Total number participations in ESF 2007-2013 by ESF priority (until end 2014)

Annex XXIII indicators (x1,000 participations)	Human Capital	Access to Employment	Social Inclusion	Institutional capacity	Promoting Partnerships	TA	Total
Total number of participations	60,328	28,866	7,822	1,437	148	58	98,659
Employed	25,582	4,589	1,353	1,392	71	54	33,041
of which self-employed	1,879	416	116	19	7	1	2,437
Unemployed	6,415	19,899	3,670	16	38	2	30,039
of which LTU	1,646	5,439	1,895	4	11	0	8,996
Inactive	28,330	4,379	2,799	29	39	2	35,578
of which in E&T	23,145	1,272	751	13	27	1	25,208
Young people (15-24 years)	19,404	8,398	2,153	58	49	1	30,064
Older people (55-64 years)	3,113	2,350	479	151	9	5	6,107
Migrants	1,806	2,424	900	0	20	1	5,152
Minorities	1,780	1,435	622	17	2	1	3,857
Disabled	2,228	1,973	1,050	9	4	1	5,266
Others	1,835	3,487	1,633	53	8	1	7,018
Primary or lower secondary education (ISCED 1-2)	23,960	11,204	3,600	34	42	1	38,840
Upper secondary education (ISCED 3)	14,987	8,952	1,844	181	43	6	26,014
Post-secondary non tertiary education (ISCED 4)	2,874	1,494	451	106	7	2	4,934
Tertiary education (ISCED 5-6)	10,893	3,812	683	812	50	47	16,298

Source: own figure on the basis of SFC2007 (AIR2014)

Looking more closely at the distribution of participations across the ESF Priorities by MS (see figure 10 below), participation in some Priorities is significantly higher than in other Priorities in some MS. MS that have a large share of participations in interventions in **Access to Employment** are the UK (73.1%), SK (65%), ES (59.7%), LV (54.2%), LT (53.3%), while **Social Inclusion** supports a large share of total participations in CY (61.0%). Some MS report a significant share of participations (over 70% of all participations) in the field of **Human Capital**: PT, CZ, EL, HU, EE, SI, LU, IT, AT, SE, MT, while many other MS also have substantial numbers of participation under these interventions. In BG, EE, EL, HR, HU, LT, LV, MT, PL, RO, CZ and SK, a relatively large share of the total number of participations is within **Strengthening Institutional Capacity** (above the EU average of 1%). Some MS (e.g. BG and RO) have a balanced distribution of participations across Priorities.

Figure 10. Relative share of total number participations in ESF 2007-2013 per ESF Priority and MS (by December 2014)



Source: own figure on the basis of SFC2007 (AIR2014)

The table and figures above also show clearly that ESF support for **Strengthening Institutional Capacity** and **Promoting Partnerships** is not solely focused on participants. To correctly capture the outputs of these ESF Priorities, the following categories have been identified from the more specific indicators:

- the number of individual participations taking place in ESF supported interventions (as already presented above, for BG, CZ, FI, DE, IT);
- the number of (transnational) partnerships/thematic networks/associations established;
- the number of partners/organisations/SMEs involved and/or supported, including the number of final individual recipients by gender;
- indicators that capture information on the activities to scale up and capitalise on the effects of the interventions training/information sessions, visits to a website or studies/evaluations carried out.

The table below summarises the programme output based on these specific clusters.



Table 10. Total aggregated achieved values of PP and SIC indicators

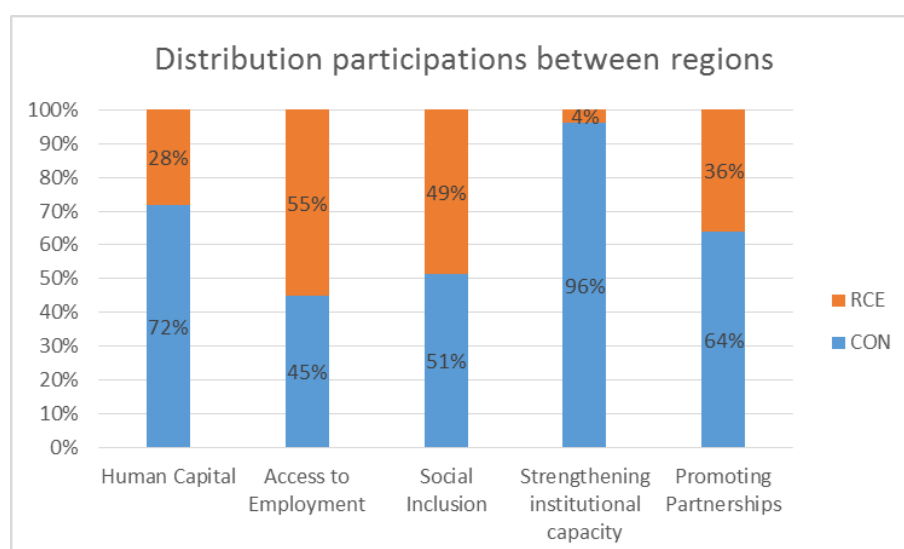
	Promoting Partnerships	Institutional Capacity
Number of persons (annex XXIII)	148,300	1,436,900
Partnerships/networks/associations	681	NA
Organisations	3,337	95,000
Products	106	22,900

Source: own figure based on thematic evaluations from the ESF ex post evaluation 2007-2013

### Differences between RCE and CON regions

Most of the participations in ESF are in the CON regions. These regions report almost twice the amount of participations than the RCE regions (61.77 million versus 36.89 million participations – see annex I for more details). A closer look at the distribution of participations across ESF priorities in the different regions shows that most of the participations in Human Capital interventions were in CON regions (72%), while the distribution of participations within the Priorities of Adaptability, Access to Employment and Social Inclusion is more balanced between the two types of regions. More participations are reported for Promoting Partnership in the CON regions (64%), while Strengthening Institutional Capacity is almost exclusively focused on the CON regions (with an exception for the RCE regions in HU, EL and the CZ, amounting to 4%).<sup>33</sup>

Figure 11. Share of total participations by Priority and type of region



Source: own figure on the basis of SFC2007 (AIR2014)

### 4.3.2 Results of ESF

This section discusses the results of ESF across the EU28 reported by the MA, and for each ESF Priority separately. It is based on aggregations into common categories of results and an analysis of the achievement rates of result indicators versus targets.

The large variety of result indicators used across the EU could only be aggregated by substantially simplifying the diverse realities of ESF programming into five broad result categories (employment gained, qualification gained, other positive result, product created, or entities improved). Many MS also defined result indicators to measure results in sub-groups and thus double-counted some results. Indicators counting the same results twice or more have been removed from the aggregation. In total 1,137 of the 3,489 result indicators were included in the aggregation presented in table 11 below.

<sup>33</sup> While the ESF Regulation limits interventions to Strengthening Institutional Capacity to Convergence Regions, specific exception were granted by the EC to include such interventions in HU, CZ, EL in Competitiveness regions as well.

Table 11. Total aggregated achievements of results indicators per MS

MS	Employment (incl. self-employment)	Qualification	Other positive result	Entities	Products
AT	351,580		59,533		
BE	452,203		968,831	611	35
BG	132,485	429,312	1,562,849	426	1,140
CY*	0		308	1,499	
CZ	60,386	2,248,360	1,489,752		
DE	608,423	602,385	1,218,496	105,850	102
DK	0		43,225	2,012	
EE	108,897	123,633	279,290	1,981	66
EL*	10,318	298,619	33,503	499	
ES	3,160,266	97,587	1,746,220	51,385	43,681
FI	52,099	798	32,500	3	20
FR	799,342	163,217	1,627,880		84
HR*	177	1,092		226	
HU	105,450	98,157	826,705		659
IE	103,733	283,326	70,529		329
IT*	367,458				
LT	125,202	257,288	207,981		
LU	539		28,076		177
LV	67,082	128,652	206,558		
MT	16,214	62,873			
NL	92,878	780,490	150,084		3,641
PL	1,101,989	442,468	2,209,171	90,493	
PT	128,472	1,273,828	520,854	18,404	56,232
RO	43,725	344,893		2,643	182
SE	36,278		70,777		
SI	45,381	281,392	70,488		735
SK*	179,844		3,755		
UK	1,273,583	784,074	246,373	41	2,184
<b>EU28</b>	<b>9,424,004</b>	<b>8,702,446</b>	<b>13,673,737</b>	<b>276,072</b>	<b>109,267</b>
<b>CON</b>	<b>3,498,147</b>	<b>6,079,411</b>	<b>9,261,858</b>	<b>150,728</b>	<b>68,743</b>
<b>RCE</b>	<b>5,925,857</b>	<b>2,623,034</b>	<b>4,411,879</b>	<b>125,344</b>	<b>40,524</b>

\*MS has reported less individual results in AIR than what would be expected based on total number of participations recorded in Annex XXIII (<10%). Additional data was requested from MA for validation, but was not received in time.

Common categories for results were allocated to 283 of 455 active PA (representing 79.6% of the total ESF budget)

Source: own figure on the basis of SFC2007 (AIR2014)

As indicated in the table with an asterisk, a number of MS reported insufficient data on results achieved; it is expected that the total number of results is under-estimated. Nevertheless, around 9.42 million are reported to be in employment directly or sometime after an ESF intervention, while around 8.70 million received a qualification / certificate. Around 13.67 million reported another positive result, other than employment or qualification, such as improving skills and competences, or successfully completing the ESF supported intervention (or reporting a combination of employment, qualification and other positive result, aggregating combined indicators). A total of 276,072 entities were successfully supported and 109,267 products / systems / tools were developed. Although not included as a separate category in the table above, over 300,000 individuals were supported by the ESF in starting their own business, particularly in FR, DE, ES and FI. Given its explicit contribution to job creation, these have been included in the aggregated total of employment.

Except for employment results, the highest number of results are achieved in CON regions. This is in line with the relatively large share of participations in CON regions versus RCE regions (61.77 million versus 36.89 million participations). Table 12 below further assesses the aggregated results by ESF Priority and for the different types of regions.

Table 12. Total aggregated achieved values of results indicators by ESF Priority<sup>34</sup>

Region	ESF Priority	Employment	Qualification	Other positive result	Entities	Products
All regions	Human Capital	1,910,226	6,413,839	10,186,264	253,681	53,029
	Access to Employment	6,641,412	1,165,043	1,378,390	19,314	54,594
	Social Inclusion	870,608	606,118	1,985,681	952	
	Institutional Capacity	-	511,232	87,100	2,125	1,644
	Promoting Partnerships	1,758		36,303		
	Technical assistance	-	6,214			
	<b>Total</b>	<b>9,424,004</b>	<b>8,702,446</b>	<b>13,673,737</b>	<b>276,072</b>	<b>109,267</b>
CON	Human Capital	1,049,476	4,352,417	7,950,761	135,711	12,619
	Access to Employment	2,073,336	903,460	557,033	12,361	54,480
	Social Inclusion	373,782	306,088	640,980	531	
	Institutional Capacity	-	511,232	87,100	2,125	1,644
	Promoting Partnerships	1,553		25,984		
	Technical assistance	-	6,214			
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3,498,147</b>	<b>6,079,411</b>	<b>9,261,858</b>	<b>150,728</b>	<b>68,743</b>
RCE	Human Capital	860,750	2,061,422	2,235,503	117,970	40,410
	Access to Employment	4,568,076	261,583	821,356	6,953	114
	Social Inclusion	496,826	300,030	1,344,701	421	
	Institutional Capacity	-				
	Promoting Partnerships	205		10,319		
	Technical assistance					
	<b>Total</b>	<b>5,925,857</b>	<b>2,623,034</b>	<b>4,411,879</b>	<b>125,344</b>	<b>40,524</b>

Source: own figure on the basis of SFC2007 (AIR2014)

The largest volume of employment results are achieved by interventions under Access to Employment (with 6.64 million participants entering employment), followed by relatively small numbers under Human Capital (1.91 million in employment) and Social Inclusion (870,608 in employment). Human Capital interventions are associated with high numbers of participants who obtain a qualification (6.41 million), followed by Access to Employment (1.17 million). Large numbers of other positive results are mainly reported for Human Capital (10.19 million), Access to Employment (1.38 million) and Social Inclusion (1.99 million). Entities and products are mainly found as results in Human

<sup>34</sup>Please note that the values reported in this table do not necessarily match the results reported in the thematic evaluations. First of all, the thematic evaluations are based on AIR2013, while this table is based on AIR2014. Secondly, to reflect the thematic specificities of the ESF priorities, thematic evaluations in some instances used different definitions for grouping result indicators into common categories. Thirdly, the greater detail of thematic evaluations allowed to also include output indicators measuring results (which are excluded in the synthesis for reasons of comparability). The difference of results reported for A2E is mainly explained by this reason. A concrete example is the number of 144 output indicators that were included for products in the thematic evaluation for Access to Employment, that were not included in the EU synthesis report. For the synthesis only 5 result indicators were selected for the aggregation of products (of which one indicator in Portugal for POPH, namely the "number of projects sponsored by supported NGOs / non-profit institutions", report a large share of total achievement at EU level). The same counts for the difference between the number of results for entities for A2E, that is systematically higher in the thematic evaluation compared to the EU synthesis (mainly explained by the inclusion of output indicators in the thematic evaluation, and especially one specific output indicator in Latvia reporting a high achievement of 100,000 entities). Fourthly, differences between thematic evaluations and the EU synthesis are caused by different calculation methods used between the thematic and EU synthesis report, translating results measured by percentages to absolute values (the Human Capital evaluation used Annex XXIII data as reference, including all participations within a PA, while the EU synthesis identified the reference output indicator, leading to a substantial higher number of results for the thematic evaluation on Human Capital). Finally, there are cases where sub indicators are aggregated (like summing up total participants and sub groups) leading to double counting in the thematic evaluations, increasing the number of results. This situation was avoided as much as possible in the EU synthesis report, by only including the key result indicator.

Capital and Access to Employment. In the field of Strengthening Institutional Capacity, a total of 511,232 qualifications were awarded, and another 87,100 other positive results reached. However, the result indicators for Strengthening Institutional Capacity and Promoting Partnerships are not well represented in the five categories of result indicators presented above, mainly because these are not easy to cluster in the main categories. ESF support for Promoting Partnerships and Strengthening Institutional Capacity is monitored with a distinct set of programme specific output and result indicators which do not focus as much on individual results as the other ESF Priorities (as also seen for the output indicators). Moreover, a large number of result indicators in these Priorities are quite similar to the output indicators and not always very specific. For a better understanding of these results, section 4.4 presents a more qualitative assessment of the results of these Priorities in detail, based on the findings of the various evaluations conducted.

### Estimating success rate: linking participation data to results

To get a sense of the rate of success of ESF, participation data at PA level can be linked to results achieved by individuals at PA level.<sup>35</sup> This provides an idea of for how many participations a successful outcome has been recorded (in terms of employment, qualification gained, or other individual results). Such a comparison assumes a link between individual participations and results, while this is in reality more complex; a single individual may have participated in several measures, or have attained multiple results, or both. However, at the aggregate level, a comparison of such success rates can reveal meaningful patterns between regions or ESF priorities (see Annex III for a more detailed discussion on the assumptions behind this analysis).

Table 13. Total aggregated achieved values of results indicators and success rates by ESF priority / region

Region	ESF priority	Total number of participations - (only PA that report results)	% participations with results	% budget with results	Total number of results (individual results)	Success rate total results / participations)
All	Human Capital	38,463,495	64%	64%	17,781,404	46%
	Access to Employment	23,895,176	83%	80%	9,014,296	38%
	Social Inclusion	6,611,891	85%	84%	3,442,082	52%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>68,970,562</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>30,237,782</b>	<b>44%</b>
CON	Human Capital	27,939,188	65%	66%	12,736,033	46%
	Access to Employment	8,790,443	68%	68%	3,395,725	39%
	Social Inclusion	3,396,848	85%	84%	1,312,773	39%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>40,126,479</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>17,444,531</b>	<b>43%</b>
RCE	Human Capital	10,524,307	62%	61%	5,045,371	48%
	Access to Employment	15,104,733	95%	94%	5,618,571	37%
	Social Inclusion	3,215,043	84%	84%	2,129,309	66%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>28,844,083</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>12,793,251</b>	<b>44%</b>

Source: own figure on the basis of SFC2007 (AIR2014)

Table 13 compares the achievement of results and the total number of participations in PA assigned to the different Priorities. It excludes PA in which no meaningful link between individual results and participations can be made. PA for which a link can be made include 70% of all recorded participations, and corresponds to 73% of the ESF budget. The analysis shows that the success rate was highest for Social Inclusion (52%), followed by Human Capital (46%), and Access to Employment (38%). Various reasons can explain

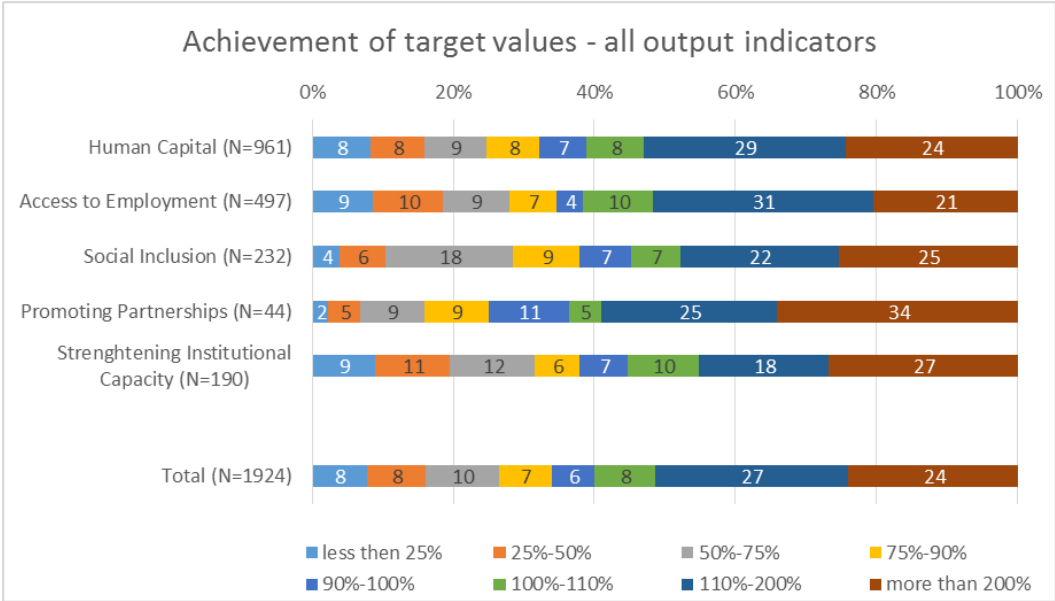
<sup>35</sup> Participation data, can only logically be linked to *results for individuals*. Other types of results, such as 'products delivered' and 'entities reached' are unrelated to participations and therefore excluded. Because interventions in the field of Strengthening Institutional Capacity and Promoting Partnerships do not capture individual outputs and results well, these are also excluded.

the lower success rates for interventions in the field of Access to Employment in comparison to the other priorities. However, the most influential factor is likely to be the negative effect on employment opportunities of the economic and financial crisis throughout the programming period. This affected particularly the results for interventions under Access to Employment as these results are more frequently expressed in terms of employment than other Priorities. All ESF Priorities together have a success rate of 44%. Only minor differences in success rates can be observed between RCE and CON regions; the only substantial difference can be found in Social Inclusion, where RCE regions reach a considerably higher success rate (66%) than CON regions (39%). However, this difference is not due to structural differences but can to a large extent be attributed to the Federal German OP in RCE regions, in which the increase in the number of childcare places are counted as individual results.

**Assessment of output and result target achievement**

In order to assess the effectiveness of the implementation of ESF across the EU28, the achieved outputs and results can also be compared against the target values set by MS in their OPs. For 1,489 (40%) of the total of 3,680 output indicators no targets were defined, while for 177 output indicators no results were reported. Figure 12 below provides an overview of the target achievement of the remaining output indicators per ESF priority.<sup>36</sup> For the majority of the output indicators (59%), higher results have been achieved than set in their targets (at or above 100%), while for another 6% of the indicators, targets are within range of being met by the end of 2014 (90%-100% achievement rate). 16% of the output indicators report a target achievement of below 50%. Slight differences are reported between Priorities, with Promoting Partnerships as the best performing ESF Priority (75% of indicators perform above the 90%), followed by Human Capital (68%), Access to Employment (66%), Strengthening Institutional capacity (62%) and Social Inclusion (61%).

Figure 12. Achievement rates of output indicators by ESF Priority

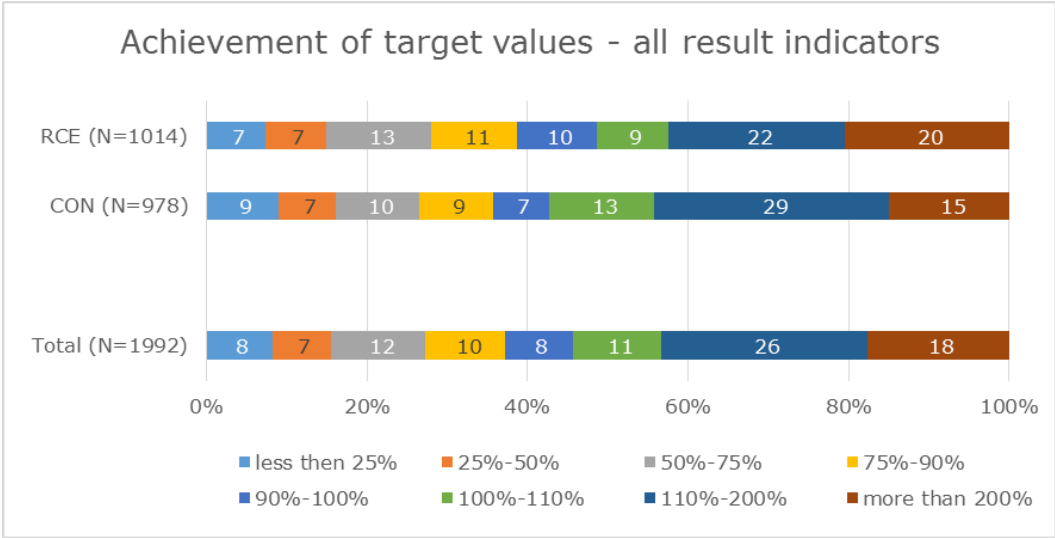


Source: authors’ calculations on the basis of SFC2007 (AIR2014)

For the ESF as a whole, a total of 3,489 result indicators were formulated. From this total, 35% (1,238 indicators) were not allocated a target. Another 7% of all result indicators (259 indicators) were not used for monitoring even though a target had initially been set. For the remaining 1,992 indicators the figure below summarises the achievement of targets.

<sup>36</sup> Note that the figure excludes output indicators allocated to TA, or that were not assigned to a single PA. As such, from the total of 2,014 output indicator with targets and results reported, 1,924 are presented.

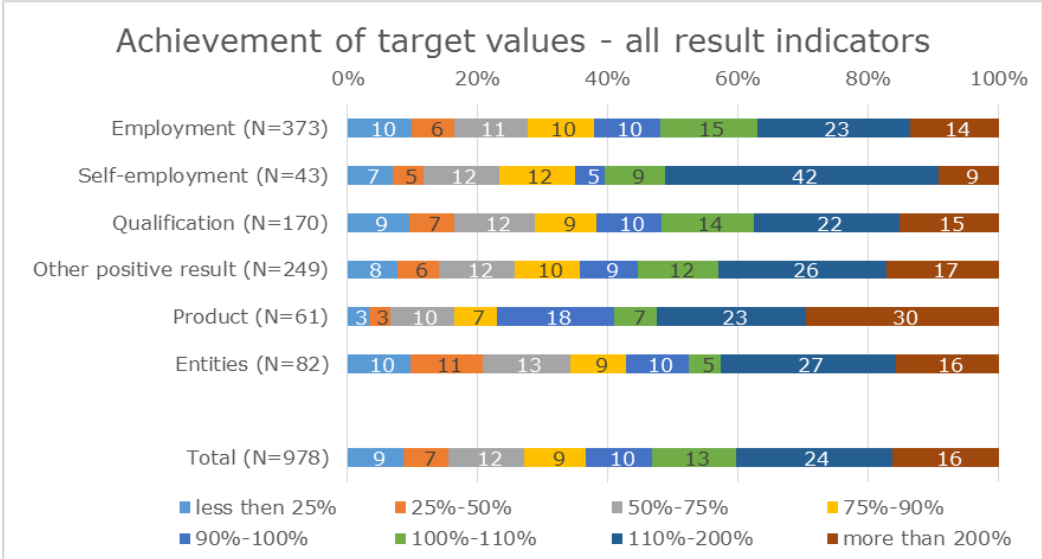
Figure 13. Achievement rates of result indicators by type of region



Source: authors’ calculations on the basis of SFC2007 (AIR2014)

For the majority of the result indicators (55%), higher results were achieved than set in their targets (at or above 100%), while for another 8% of the indicators, targets were within range of being met by the end of 2014 (90%-100% achievement rate). The figure shows that the achievement rates above 100% are slightly higher in CON regions (57% vs. 51%). However, the proportion of indicators where targets were almost met (90%-100%) is higher in RCE regions, which suggests that this difference may disappear in the last year of implementation. The evaluation also assessed the achievement rates specifically for those indicators that could be aggregated into common types of results. Figure 14 below summarises the achievement rates for the indicators included in the analysis.

Figure 14. Achievement rates of result indicators by type of indicator



Source: authors’ calculations on the basis of SFC2007 (AIR2014)

Figure 14 shows that particularly indicators measuring the delivery of a ‘product’ often achieved the target set (only 23% of the indicators in this category achieved less than 90%). The achievement rates for participants in terms of employment status or qualification are relatively similar; overall more than two thirds of the aggregated result indicators were close to or had already achieved the target set (more than 90% of targets met).

Overall, the majority (around two thirds) of output and result indicators (almost) achieved their target value by end 2014. Nevertheless, as already stated in Section 4.1,

353 result indicators (16%) report a target achievement above 200%, raising doubts as to whether the targets set in these cases were realistic. As indicated, it was not possible in the thematic evaluations to assess whether the initial targets were set in a comparable and appropriate way across the OPs. Anecdotal evidence shows that in some cases targets were not realistic, leading to a strong over- or underperformance. In other cases, targets had not been adjusted even if the programme and related budgets had been reallocated during the implementation.

#### **4.4 Findings on effectiveness from selected interventions studied in-depth**

The thematic evaluations, implemented in the context of the ex post evaluation process, analysed in-depth a number of interventions in all MS. For each cluster of interventions, an assessment was made on the level of achievement of outputs and results, financial implementation rates, number of participations, success rates in terms of employment, qualifications and other positive outcomes, and whether the implementation of activities were considered successful (see table 14 below).

Moreover, MS conducted a number of evaluations to gain a better insight into the performance of the ESF. Nevertheless, at the time of this evaluation, MAs had not always delivered a final evaluation at the end of the programming period, including overarching conclusions on the achievements and performance of ESF for each Priority, or for selected interventions. Moreover, most evaluations were process oriented, and effectiveness can best be assessed through theory-based evaluations with a limited number counterfactual evaluations to assess the net effects of ESF. This is not only the case for the ESF; the ex-post evaluation on delivery mechanisms of Cohesion Policy also concludes that more generally, evaluations conducted for Cohesion Policy programmes in 2007-2013 were often unable to convey reliable information on impacts, i.e. whether the programmes had made a difference.<sup>37</sup> Instead, most evaluations have primarily addressed programme implementation (focused on process).

##### **Good practice: "GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES OF IMPACT EVALUATIONS IDENTIFIED BY ESF EVALUATION NETWORK"**

In order to provide practical examples for Managing Authorities of when and how impact evaluations can usefully be carried out, the Commission asked the contractors of the ESF Expert Evaluation Network to identify five examples of good practice in impact evaluation, including both theory based and counterfactual evaluations, and to describe these in terms of good practice. The contractor selected a total number of four counterfactual evaluations and one theory based evaluation from a list of 20 potential impact evaluations. The selection was based on a number of criteria including the use of a clearly distinguishable theory based or counterfactual evaluation approach to assessing the impact of ESF, the use of robust control groups, evidence of results, methods and statistical packages used, target group and type of intervention assessed and geographical spread. The five evaluations selected were considered the most robust and the most interesting in terms of good practice. They also cover a variety of priorities and target groups thus showing the range of fields impact evaluations can address. The selected evaluations are:

Theory based evaluation:

Hungary: Evaluation of programmes targeting the integration of the Roma ("A Roma integrációt szolgáló programok értékelése")<sup>38</sup>

Counterfactual impact evaluations:

Germany: On-going and conclusive Evaluation of the Federal Programme Kommunal-Kombi ("Programmbegleitende und abschließende Evaluation des Bundesprogramms Kommunal-Kombi")<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ex post evaluation of Cohesion Policy programmes 2007-2013, focusing on the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF). Work Package 12: Delivery system.

<sup>38</sup> [http://www.nfu.hu/roma\\_integraciót\\_szolgáló\\_eu\\_s\\_fejlesztések\\_értékelése](http://www.nfu.hu/roma_integraciót_szolgáló_eu_s_fejlesztések_értékelése)

<sup>39</sup> [http://www.iaw.edu/iaw/De:Forschung:Arbeitsm%C3%A4rkte\\_und\\_Soziale\\_Sicherung:Laufende\\_Projekte:Kommunal-Kombi](http://www.iaw.edu/iaw/De:Forschung:Arbeitsm%C3%A4rkte_und_Soziale_Sicherung:Laufende_Projekte:Kommunal-Kombi)



Ireland: Activation in Ireland: An Evaluation of the National Employment Action Plan<sup>40</sup>  
 Portugal: Study for the evaluation and monitoring of basic and secondary education ("Estudo de avaliação e acompanhamento dos ensinos básico e secundário")<sup>41</sup>  
 United Kingdom: Early Impacts of the European Social Fund 2007-13 for England<sup>42</sup>

All the evaluations presented had reasonably propitious starting conditions in that they had access to large datasets stemming from administrative data. The use of administrative data means that large sample sizes for the treatment and control groups could be generated in a cost effective manner, which in turn allowed robust statistical analysis. In all the counterfactual evaluations reviewed, various units of analysis (e.g. individuals and regions) were used successfully to explore causal effects of an intervention on various levels. The creation and testing of the treatment and control groups was done very carefully. In these cases, evaluations provided a clear input to MA on what interventions work, and which do not.

#### 4.4.1 Human Capital

In total, 11 clusters of interventions were studied in-depth in the context of the thematic evaluation of Human Capital in a selection of MS.<sup>43</sup> Note that this thematic evaluation also includes ESF priority 'Increasing Adaptability'.

Table 14. Overview of the clusters of ESF Human Capital investments

Cluster <sup>44</sup>	Achievement of outputs and results	Financial implementation rate	Number participations	Successful implementation
Assessment:	+ below 50 % ++ 50-80 % +++ above 80 %	+ below 50 % ++ 50- 80% +++ above 80 %	+ below 1 million ++ 1-2 million +++ above 2 million	+ Less successful ++ More or less successful +++ Successful
Cluster 1 Lifelong learning systems	+	+	+++	+
Cluster 2 Quality of higher education	+++	++	++	+++
Cluster 4 Quality of school education	++	+++	+++	++
Cluster 5 Quality of vocational education	+	+++	++	+
Cluster 6 Reducing early school leaving	+++	++	++	+++
Cluster 7 Research and innovation	++	+++	+	++
Cluster 8 Transition to the labour market of young people	+++	++	+++	+++
Cluster 9 Support to upskilling of employed	++	+++	+++	++
Cluster 10 Upskilling of adults	+++	++	+	+++
Cluster 11 Participation in higher education	+++	+++	+	+++

Source: table constructed based on Volume 1 report, European Social Fund (ESF) 2007-2013 ex-post evaluation: investment in Human Capital

Table 14 shows that effectiveness varies in terms of actual versus planned outputs and results. Across the 87 selected interventions, the average rate of output achievement was 105% (excluding eight interventions where the actual achievement rate was over

<sup>40</sup> [http://www.esri.ie/publications/search\\_for\\_a\\_publication/search\\_results/view/index.xml?id=3144](http://www.esri.ie/publications/search_for_a_publication/search_results/view/index.xml?id=3144)

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.igfse.pt/upload/docs/2011/Relatório%20final%20EAAEBS.pdf>  
<http://www.igfse.pt/upload/docs/2011/Relatório%20final%20EAAEBS.pdf>  
<http://www.igfse.pt/upload/docs/2011/Relatório%20final%20EAAEBS.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/ih2011-2012/ihr3.pdf>

<sup>43</sup> The Thematic evaluation on HC studied in-depth interventions in BG, CZ, DK, FR, IE, IT, MT, LV, PT

<sup>44</sup> Cluster 3 is not considered in this analysis due to the lack of data on intervention activities focussing specifically on early education



300% and hence could be indicative of issues in the target setting methodology), while the average rate of result achievement was 99% (excluding two interventions where the actual achievement rate of results was over 300% and hence could be indicative of issues in the target setting methodology). There were, however, significant variations in the achievement of outputs and result targets by clusters. The proportion of interventions with exceeded and met output targets ranged from 38% in Cluster 4, Quality of school education to 80% in Cluster 2, Quality of higher education. The variation in the achievement and exceeding of result targets was slightly narrower, from 14% in Cluster 5, Quality and labour market relevance of VET to 67% in Cluster 9 Upskilling of employed.

The in-depth evaluations in a number of MS allow for a more detailed analysis of good practices and success rate per cluster of interventions. The highest share of employment results for participants was achieved in Cluster 5 (Quality and labour market relevance of VET) (47%), followed, at some distance, by Cluster 9 (Professional upskilling of employed people) (14%). The share of participants achieving qualifications was highest in Cluster 9 (Professional upskilling of employed people) (49%), followed by Cluster 10 (upskilling and requalification of adults) (22%). The share of participants achieving other positive outcomes was greatest in Clusters 2 (Quality of higher education) (70%) and 11 (Participation of HE students) (62%). The results on the share of positive outcomes are more challenging to interpret because of the breadth of positive results included under this definition (which can also include training/employment outcomes measured jointly as results).

Overall the implementation was considered most successful for interventions related to reducing early school leaving (Cluster 6), transitions to the labour market for young people (Cluster 8), connecting training for adults to labour market needs and quality and participation in higher education (Clusters 2 and 11).

#### **Effective intervention: FUND FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES (IRELAND)**

The Fund for Students with Disabilities seeks to support and encourage participation in higher education among persons with disabilities, a group historically under-represented therein. The model of fund disbursement across higher education institutions that the operation of the scheme employs has moved from one administered on a national basis by the National Access Office (within the Higher Education Authority), to a grant-based system autonomously administered by individual institutions during operation. The main results can be summarised as:

- Better flexibility and increased effectiveness compared to previous funding model.
- Interviewed stakeholders indicate that the project has generated greater strategic planning, institutional buy-in to disability-based practices and policies and institutional responsibility for attracting and supporting students with disabilities.
- The model has since been mainstreamed in Ireland.

ESF interventions in Cluster 1 (lifelong learning systems) and Cluster 5 (quality of vocational education and training), were less successful, particularly as it takes a long time to develop new programmes, education management procedures and accompanying staff training, before a system effect can be achieved. Such results generally cannot be included in the short term monitoring system or process evaluations.

In addition to success rates, evidence collected from evaluations show in general positive outcomes for Human Capital supported interventions. Some examples of positive outcomes are the number of people that are increasing their competences, qualifications gained, and job mobility (DE, IE, UK, and PT), but also impacts on macro-economic indicators such as reducing early school leaving (PT) or overcoming skills mismatches (such as for MT). Other evaluations report on improved teaching and learning methods (IT). Some specific evaluations address ESF contributions to the creation of centres of excellence and researcher mobility (EE), as well as ESF support that positively contributed to an increase of international publications by young researchers. Evaluations also showed that the ESF leads to changes at institution level, such as improving management of higher education institutions and accessibility to periodical and scientific publication databases (LT), as well as primary and secondary schools improving their quality procedures and updating skills of teachers (PL). Moreover, some evaluations reported systems changes, such as the introduction of dual VET systems (BG), by facilitating apprenticeship and internships, whereas other evaluations report on positive

experiences with employers that are participating in the development of study programmes (CZ) or employers that provide training (DE). Another clear result was that governance structures of VET systems were improved (including the cooperation between enterprises, PES, Chambers of Commerce, schools / other training providers), as well as the image of the VET system (LV and PT).

Besides this general positive assessment of ESF support in the field of Human Capital, some evaluations report concrete challenges, such as in AT where ESF faced problems in reaching out to disadvantaged people. For Hungary, it was reported that ESF support for cooperation between higher education and the business sector, and the utilization of the scientific results in businesses, did not lead to the expected results. Overall, there are still MS where limited evidence on the results of ESF in the field of Human Capital is available. A striking example in this respect is SK where, despite the high profile of Human Capital in the OP, data on results of ESF funded interventions were not available and no evaluations were carried out by the MA.

The thematic evaluation of Human Capital identified the following key success factors for effective support (see Volume I report, section 5.1):

- include an attractive learning offer (including a vocational training component and e-learning for young learners and training clearly linked to the labour market needs for adults);
- support integrated and holistic, but flexible, support measures (including career advice and counselling) and meet a real identified need of the target groups;
- ESF needs to take account of the broader political and socio-economic context of the ESF investment. The higher education activities were more successful when linked to the relevant national reforms; vocational apprenticeships tend to be less popular with employers during an economic crisis).

#### 4.4.2 Access to Employment

Eight clusters of interventions were studied in-depth in the context of the thematic evaluation of A2E.<sup>45</sup> Table 15 below provides an overview of the main assessments provided for each cluster of intervention.

Table 15. Overview of the cluster of ESF A2E investment

Cluster	Achievement of outputs	Financial implementation rate	Number of participations	Successful implementation
Assessment:	+ below 50% ++ 50-80% +++ above 80%	+ below 50% ++ 50- 80% +++ above 80%	+ below 1 million ++ 1-2 million +++ above 2 million	+ Less successful ++ More or less successful +++ Successful
Cluster 1 Support to PES and other labour market institutions	++	+++	++	+++
Cluster 2 Personalised support for individuals	+++	+++	+++	+++
Cluster 3 Training	+++	+++	+++	+++
Cluster 4 Employment incentives	+++	+++	+++	++
Cluster 5 Self-employment and entrepreneurship	+++	+++	+++	++
Cluster 7 Women	+++	+++	+	++
Cluster 8 Increase migrant participation	+++	+++	+	+++

Source: table constructed based on Volume 1 report, European Social Fund (ESF) 2007-2013 ex-post evaluation: Access to Employment

<sup>45</sup> The Thematic evaluation on Access to Employment studied in-depth interventions in BE, DE, EE, EL, ES, FR, HU, IT, PL, SK, SI, SE.

One of the main findings of the ex post evaluation of A2E was that at intervention level the results are poorly captured by the monitoring system. As a result, 60 out of the 89 selected interventions did not have sufficient result data to make judgements about effectiveness. This is mainly due to a failure to set target indicators and monitor actual results at this level. Four out of the 29 interventions with result data had results that were as expected. Significantly more had results that were above target (16). Nine interventions had results that were below target. To sum up, where data was available, all clusters had more results above target than below, suggesting that the majority of interventions for which data was available were effective.<sup>46</sup>

The in-depth evaluation of a number of MS allows for a more detailed analysis of good practices and success rate per cluster of interventions. This analysis shows that some clusters of intervention proved to be very successful, such as Cluster 1 (Support to PES and other labour market institutions) with special emphasis on flexibility, IT development, cooperation with social partners and multi-level governance; Cluster 2 (personalised support) where counselling, guidance, job clubs and individual centred approach proved to make interventions more effective. Moreover, Cluster 3 (Training) proved to be effective, especially when training took place in a work context (providing work experience places). Also, interventions under Cluster 8 (increasing migrant participation) were generally successful, mainly through providing personalised support (and using online language courses that were in high demand and increased the volume and scope of target groups). Furthermore, interventions targeting migrant groups that focused on addressing prejudices and social barriers as well as social integration increased the employment rate of migrants. Interventions under Cluster 4 (employment incentives) were only moderately successful, and received the criticism that they provided little added value and risked causing substitution and displacement effects. Wage incentives combined with other measures to get people back in employment were considered effective. Also Cluster 5 (self-employment and entrepreneurship) was not always considered successful, since it generated limited additional employment. In Cluster 7 (women), improvements were considered necessary in the intervention design and indicators to measure the expected results.

#### **Effective intervention: "PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE PROGRAMMES" (Spain)**

The Professional Experiences Programmes were apprenticeship programmes in companies (all activity sectors except public administration) targeting migrants, with the general aim of improving employability of migrants who did not have an educational background or labour market experience. The intervention's specific objective was achieving social integration of migrants through participation in the labour market. The main results can be summarised as:

- The intervention contributes to increasing migrant participation in employment and thereby strengthens their social integration in order to finally achieve the promotion of employability, social inclusion and equal opportunity between women and men.
- The measure is a good practice as it shows the potential of an approach combining access to employment and social inclusion. No less than 32,602 migrants carried out apprenticeship programmes and 10,525 people were integrated in the labour market after completing the intervention.

Overall, the evaluations conducted by MS and analysed in the thematic evaluation on Access to Employment show positive results for A2E across EU 28, supporting the conclusion that ESF is effective. Generally, these evaluations measured the gross effects, and only a few counterfactual evaluations were implemented measuring the net effects, but all showing positive effects.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ex-post evaluation Access and sustainable inclusion into employment Volume III, p. 323-324

<sup>47</sup> Such as in Belgium showing quite significant effects, meaning that participants, on average, did improve their employment situation. Also in Estonia a counterfactual evaluation of the programme 'Increasing the Supply of Qualified Labour 2007-2013' showed positive results, calculating that the probability of being employed six months after the intervention is about 56% higher for participants than for the control group.

The effectiveness of the ESF active labour market policies was highly dependent on the dynamics of the labour market. The economic crisis affected different MS, leading to a sharp increase in the number of unemployed. These external aspects influenced the accomplishment of results of the ESF. Some evaluations showed that ESF interventions do not always focus on the most vulnerable target groups. Instead, various interventions seem designed to attract easier to reach groups, and focus more on absorption of the budget than on making an impact on populations that would benefit most. This also explains that in interventions in PL tend to disproportionately target participants in urban areas.

The thematic evaluation of Access to Employment identified the following key success factors for effective support (see Volume I report, section 5.1):

- Inclusion of tailored approaches focussing the intervention on the specific needs of the target group;
- Identification of personal situations and needs at the outset and then create individually adjusted actions;
- Use of the experience and knowledge of institutions working closely with the target group as their cumulated knowledge about the target groups helps better target the actions;
- Inclusion of interventions using work based learning.
- Wage incentives are most effective when combined with other measures;
- Online platforms are also a contributing factor to success, as they helped PES to explore new ways to assist job seekers.

**4.4.3 Social Inclusion**

The in-depth evaluation of Social Inclusion explored four clusters of interventions in more detail in a selection of MS.<sup>48</sup>

*Table 16. Overview of the cluster of ESF Social Inclusion investment*

Cluster	Achievement of outputs	Financial implementation rate	Number of participations	Successful implementation
Assessment:	+ below 50 % ++ 50-80 % +++ above 80 %	+ below 50 % ++ 50- 80% +++ above 80 %	+ below 1 million ++ 1-2 million +++ above 2 million	+ Less successful ++ More or less successful +++ Successful
Cluster 1 Supporting and enabling actions	+++	+++	+	++
Cluster 2a Advice, guidance, training	+++	+++	+	++
Cluster 2b Direct employment	+++	+++	+	+++
Cluster 3 pathway approaches	+++	+++	+	+++
Cluster 4 System interventions	+++	+++	+	+++

Source: table constructed based on Volume 1 report, European Social Fund (ESF) 2007-2013 ex-post evaluation: Social Inclusion

The thematic evaluation on Social Inclusion shows an average output performance of 107% of targets in all clusters. However, this was largely the result of some interventions significantly exceeding their output targets. When looking instead at the share of interventions which met or exceeded their output targets, the picture is different, as this provides an average 76% of interventions in all clusters reached their output targets. The average result achievement is lower, with Cluster 1 reporting the lowest figure (20%) and Cluster 3 the highest (80%), and Clusters 2a, 2b and 3 in between (scoring respectively 56, 63, and 60%). Particularly the high performance of Cluster 3 types of interventions is explained by the suitability of the holistic/pathways approach for vulnerable target groups, which take account of the complexity of the challenges faced and address them as part of a continuum of provision moving participants towards

<sup>48</sup> The Thematic evaluation on Social Inclusion studied in-depth interventions in AT, CY, FI, LT, LU, NL, RO, UK

training or employment. The low performance of Cluster 1 could partly be attributed to the lower than expected financial implementation rates for this cluster. If targets are set realistically, performance should, in principle, not be related to the fact that achieving employment results tends to be more challenging for Cluster 1 participants, which included some of the disadvantaged groups at the greatest distance from the labour market. Nevertheless, the nature of the Cluster 1 target groups was seen as influential: several project promoters remarked that the crisis had made it more challenging to integrate the most disadvantaged groups into the labour market. As a result, when looking at ESF results only in terms of employment achieved, the achievements for Cluster 1 participants are disappointing. However, the results achieved should also be seen in terms of improved position on the labour market, which is also a valuable result of ESF interventions.

The in-depth evaluations in a number of MS allows for a more detailed analysis of good practices and success rate per cluster of interventions. Across the 58 interventions studied in-depth, results data showed that an average of 42% of participants achieved employment outcomes immediately after their participation in the intervention, while 8% obtained a qualification, and 26% achieved another positive outcome. Over 70% of participations in these interventions achieved positive results. The highest share of employment results for participants was achieved in Cluster 2b, followed, by Cluster 2a (53% and 31% respectively). This could be explained by the fact that participants in these clusters, while still facing disadvantage, are likely to be closer to the labour market than those in Clusters 1 or 3 (preparatory or holistic) actions. Furthermore, Cluster 2b activities were specifically intended to achieve direct employment outcomes, e.g. through support for subsidised work. The share of participants achieving qualifications was highest in Cluster 2a (50%), as would be expected given the cluster's focus on guidance, counselling and training actions. Training was also a component in many of the Cluster 1 and 3 interventions, with 23% and 7% of participants respectively achieving qualifications. The share of participants achieving other positive outcomes was greatest in Clusters 2a (48%) and 3 (47%). The results on the share of positive outcomes are more challenging to interpret because of the breadth of positive results included under this definition (which can also include training/employment outcomes measured jointly as results).

**Effective intervention: "TOWARDS EMPLOYMENT – DEVELOPMENT OF INTERMEDIATION SERVICES FOR EMPLOYING INDIVIDUALS WITH IMPAIRED HEARING " (Lithuania)**

Job coaches were supported and trained by the project, and made the greatest contribution to the success of operation. They were instrumental in providing motivational support to job seekers as well as post-employment assistance by helping them integrate in the workplace. On other hand, they engaged in finding employers and speaking with them, organising employers' meetings with people with disabilities as well as helping to adapt workplaces and providing continued support. The main results can be summarised as:

- Consolidating organizations and networks working in the field as well as supporting and utilizing their operational structures, accumulated knowledge, motivation and experience were important in achieving high job placement results.
- As a result of the project, around 450 deaf job seekers found employment as at end of 2012. Rate of persons gaining employment reached 70%, exceeding the planned target of 50%, despite generally worsened economic environment. The costs of employment of one person with hearing disability can be estimated at about LTL 6,900 (€ 1,052) and is lower than for other employment measures despite the wider scope of activities being carried out.
- Combining the experience and efforts of the Public Employment Services and the Lithuanian Association of the Deaf was critical in achieving such high job placement results.

Evaluations of Social Inclusion in MS also show positive results. ESF provided the opportunity to support target groups that otherwise were not supported by regular policies and interventions (or at least not to that extent) in MS. Moreover, ESF made it possible for disadvantaged groups to be reached through new innovative measures, addressed their issues from another perspective than simply the labour market one and involved actors going beyond PES (as reported for AT). Nevertheless, many evaluations of ESF interventions in the field of Social Inclusion still assessed the results from an



employment perspective. However, the evaluations also show the difficult nature of the target groups under Social Inclusion, as shown by an evaluation in Hungary which indicated that the tools and resources of ESF could not solve all issues of the socially excluded. One of the reasons is that the target group includes people with multiple disadvantages that need combined interventions. Another issue that poses challenges for effective implementation is the difference between regions within MS; due to less resources and expertise, organisations based in the least developed regions also face more difficulties to submit successful proposals for ESF projects.

The thematic evaluation of Social Inclusion identified the following key success factors for effective support (see Volume I report, section 5.1):

- continue the support for tailored and individualised approaches since these were identified in the thematic evaluation as most effective;
- align interventions with the needs identified by local and national institutions and other stakeholders (and ensure that stakeholders are involved in identifying the need and implementing ESF);
- ensure a follow up support after ESF and ensure mainstreaming of successful interventions in regular policies;
- ensure synergies with other activities (such as supporting services that are not achievable through mainstream actions; support disadvantaged individuals who are not yet, or no longer, eligible for unemployment benefit; support multiple or multi-faceted interventions).

#### **4.4.4 Strengthening Institutional Capacity**

Combining all evidence to assess the impact of ESF support that was available, the thematic evaluation on Strengthening Institutional Capacity found that the ESF was successful in helping to reduce the administrative burden for citizens and businesses<sup>49</sup>, in making services more accessible, and in contributing to the production of better quality policies and legislation. For example, the ESF supported interventions helped in reducing the administrative burden for citizens and businesses by introducing new procedures and regulations in PL (see good practice described below). It provided support for shortening the processing time for documents, servicing clients, obtaining the necessary paperwork for starting a business and judicial procedures (BG, CZ, PL), and reduction of administrative costs (EL, RO, PL).

##### **Effective and sustainable intervention: "BETTER REGULATIONS " (Poland)**

In Poland, changes in public administration institutions, which were introduced as part of the ESF programme, will have a permanent nature. This is guaranteed by the introduction of new procedures and regulations. This is also in line with the "Better Regulations 2015", adopted by the Council of Ministers on 22 January 2013 and concerning areas such as: legislative actions of simplification (solutions in removing barriers to entrepreneurship development), impact assessment (an analytical tool that allows the design of regulations which correspond to real socio-economic problems) and a public consultation (online consultation facilitating stakeholder participation in the legislative process).

Moreover, services were made more accessible through the introduction of on-line service delivery at various administrative levels (BG, CZ, PL). Interventions in the field of Strengthening Institutional Capacity also contributed to the production of better quality policies and legislation through the introduction of monitoring and evaluation procedures in administrative bodies (BG, RO), the increase in impact studies conducted before introducing new legislation (BG, CZ), the development of quality management in public institutions (LV), and laws that were amended to better serve the community (HU). Management systems and practices were changed to incorporate modern human resource management and planning techniques (EE, PL, LV), performance ratings used for staff assessment (HU) and new staff that were attracted to join government institutions (HU). Cooperation with other actors was also furthered through the

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<sup>49</sup> The processing time was shortened for documents, servicing clients, obtaining the necessary paperwork for starting a business and judicial procedures (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Poland); administrative costs were also reduced (Greece, Romania, Poland).

preparation of rules for public private partnerships in public administrations (BG) and the inclusion of NGOs in activities (LV). Interventions also directly contributed to various reforms in public institutions (RO). The support to institutional capacity also contributed to achievements in specific policy areas. It contributed for instance to equal opportunities, as evidenced by the increased number of public bodies of the central government promoting the integration of gender policies (EL). Additionally, it contributed to the implementation of environmental policies through the development of territorial plans in municipalities (LT) and environmental management systems in companies (UK). Finally, its interventions also contributed to the social dialogue through the increased number of employees that are covered by collective agreements (LV). Furthermore, the thematic report identifies that these interventions may be affected by the "capacity traps" where low capacity of beneficiaries may lead to their ineligibility or subsequent non-implementation of projects.

Success factors of ESF support to Strengthening Institutional Capacity are:

- ensuring political backing and support for SIC interventions;
- strengthening mutual learning between actors;
- actively promoting and supporting networking;
- the exchange of experience and good practices between stakeholders.

#### **4.4.5 Promoting Partnerships**

A large variety of types of partnerships was developed across the EU, varying in their strategic and specific objectives, the actors involved and their relationships (vertical vs. horizontal), geographical scope, and the typology of delivery mechanisms. Due to this variety, the results of interventions are difficult to aggregate at an EU level. Moreover, only a limited number of evaluations are available in the field of Promoting Partnerships. These evaluations mostly refer to the number of partnerships/networks created (BE and CZ) or maintained (AT with the number of Territorial Employment Pacts).

A closer look at the results achieved by the wide variety of approaches by the thematic evaluation shows that interventions in this priority have brought about concrete achievements, including: the creation of networks; the development of skills and competences of participants; the improvement of organisations' capacities; the organisation of joint occupational training actions, workshops, apprenticeships, seminars, forums and other events; the development and testing of innovative strategies (for social inclusion or ALMP); putting into practice new joint services, methodologies, tools and products; and the transfer and adaptation of know-how among organisations, regions and countries. Other less measurable achievements include the creation of new opportunities for partners to share their own views, experiences and ideas; this ultimately leads to improved knowledge and understanding of common challenges. It also leads to the creation of an "institutional ecosystem", whereby involved beneficiaries gain a wider perspective on the problems they face, the difficulties that certain solutions might present for other partners, and the solutions that other organisations/partners might offer for their own problems. This provides a valuable asset for institutions in terms of social capital, which actually generates greater potential for partnership development.

#### **Effective interventions on transnational cooperation: "TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION" (Germany)**

In Lower Saxony OP, the main target group of PP interventions were SMEs with most measures aimed at improving human capital and increasing the adaptability of workers, enterprises and entrepreneurs. An exemplary project supported training on the subject of renewable energy and energy efficiency, with all participants passing the exam and receiving a certificate. Due to a high demand for training, additional courses were held. The involvement of international partners contributed greatly to the project's success.

Another example is a project funded through the Saxony OP on work placements for vocational students. Placements were organised through setting up international partnerships. The aim of the placement was to improve the linguistic and intercultural competences of participants and thereby increase the employability of students in the labour market. The evaluation of this project showed that almost all participants, as well as the teachers, noted an increase in their linguistic and intercultural skills. The vast majority could increase their linguistic proficiency.

Despite these positive achievements, some challenges were also identified which hampered the impact of ESF supported interventions. These included the small scale of the support, the lack of involvement of different partners, the slow start up of interventions supported in the field of PP, and lack of mainstreaming of project result in regular policies. The thematic evaluation of Promoting Partnerships identified the following key success factors for effective support:

- importance of connecting and harmonising PP more effectively with national strategies;
- improving competences of MA / IB in managing PP;
- improving MS capacity to develop concepts on partnerships;
- taking into account more effectively the different needs at different development stages of the organisations;
- ensuring sufficient co-funding given the vulnerability of funding for this policy domain.



## 5 Efficiency

### Key Findings

- The average cost per participation for all interventions across the EU28 is €897. The interventions in the field of Human Capital cost less (€681 per participation respectively), while interventions targeting more vulnerable groups tend to be more expensive. Access to Employment interventions cost on average €1,113 per participation and Social Inclusion actions €1,763 per participation. No cost per participation was calculated for interventions in the field of Promoting Partnership and Strengthening Institutional Capacity, as these interventions are generally targeted at institutions rather than participations.
- The available monitoring information does not allow the systematic aggregation of all results at the EU level. Therefore, an analysis of the efficiency of ESF interventions is limited to comparing the cost per participation in different types of interventions across different MS. For a number of individual Priority Axes, costs per result could be calculated; these range between €401 and €8,340. Despite the large variation, these largely conform with the findings on the costs per participation.
- Despite the considerable differences between costs per participation (or result where available) across MS, these are mainly attributed to broader macro-level conditions in MS, rather than (in)efficiencies in the implementation of interventions. Another important reason for substantial variation is the different ways in which ESF investments are used by MS. Some MS use ESF to complement national policies, and as a result the cost per participation seems considerably lower. In other MS, ESF is used almost exclusively to develop innovative approaches, which tend to be more expensive per participation. These differences do not necessarily indicate differences in efficiency, but instead result from the large variety of approaches across the EU.

### 5.1 Costs per participation

In order to assess the efficiency of ESF, information needs to be analysed on the costs, outputs and results achieved by ESF across all MS and ESF Priorities. However, the diverse nature of most PAs, and the lack of standardised result indicators across the EU prevents a direct link being made between budgets and results. While the common categories of result indicators defined by this evaluation (see chapter 4) can help to understand whether targets were achieved, they simplify too much to inform an assessment of efficiency.<sup>50</sup> Instead, the efficiency of ESF investments is assessed by comparing the size of investments spent across programmes against a single participation unit. These can be aggregated at the EU level, as comparable data on participations have been collected for every Priority Axis (Annex XXIII). This allows an in-depth assessment of the variation in the costs of different interventions per participation. Based on the link between financial data and number of participations per Priority Axis, a basic assessment can be conducted on the average cost per participation. Results of such an efficiency assessment should, however, be treated with caution as sometimes the ESF financially contributes to an intervention that is being implemented under national policies which leads to an underestimation of the actual costs of the intervention, while in other cases ESF money is used for interventions that are not directly focused on individual participants (actually increasing the costs per participation).

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<sup>50</sup>We can, for instance, consider the comparison of qualification results 'successfully completed half a day training course' against 'completing ISCED level 5 qualification'. The latter is likely to have higher unit costs than the former, but this does not tell us anything about the efficiency of the measures. It only tells us that the underlying result indicators are different, even if they are part of the same type of results.

Across the EU and all different Priority Axes, the average cost of an intervention for one participation is €897.<sup>51</sup> However, this average figure masks substantial differences between MS, Priorities, and types of interventions.

Table 17. Cost per participation across ESF priorities (in €) – EU 28

	Human Capital	Access to Employment	Social Inclusion	Overall
AT	640	3,197	1,882	1,195
BE	612	930	1,908	967
BG	194	708	1,244	372
CY	3,610		1,924	2,581
CZ	212	1,495	817	301
DE	1,329	2,379	3,419	1,955
DK	4,703	3,065		3,957
EE	256	761		351
EL	387	3,455	4,184	859
ES	470	734		628
FI	2,022	2,722		2,228
FR	1,195	669	1,712	1,106
HR	11,243	3,331	2,885	4,186
HU	435	2,786	530	578
IE	417	644		519
IT	796	1,805	1,958	1,070
LT	800	822		813
LU	952	1,524		1,093
LV	1,140	716	568	827
MT	673	1,840		852
NL	736	866	2,333	977
PL	761	1,942	1,414	1,060
PT	796	2,729	1,442	876
RO	1,454	989	1,234	1,285
SE	1,085	5,716		2,463
SI	729	1,159	1,162	835
SK	941	428	177	479
UK	1,221	813	1,248	923
<b>EU28</b>	<b>681</b>	<b>1,113</b>	<b>1,763</b>	<b>897</b>
CON	604	1,308	1,566	820
RCE	875	955	1,972	1,023

Source: SFC2007: AIRs 2014, which include participation data up until December 2014

Considerable differences can be observed in the costs per ESF participation across different MS. Explanations for these differences are first of all various macro-economic factors such as price level, the type of interventions chosen and, crucially, the way monitoring information was recorded (see above for Human Capital). MS that focus more on vulnerable groups, with a greater distance to the labour market, also tend to spend more per participation. HR has the highest costs per participation (€4,186), mainly due to its high cost per participation in Human Capital, but this figure is expected to be substantially lower when all participations have been taken into account.<sup>52</sup> Other MS with high costs per participation are DK, SE, FI and DE where the ESF approach focuses primarily on innovation and piloting of new initiatives. In these MS, *nationally* funded ALMP measures often focus on the types of interventions that are funded by ESF in other MS. This shows the limits of comparing costs per participation between different MS.

<sup>51</sup>Excluding interventions in the field of Promoting Partnerships / Strengthening Institutional Capacity. As noted in the thematic evaluations, interventions differ to a large extent and often target institutions rather than actual participants. Including these would lead to very high figure. In Greece for instance, a number of interventions recorded low participation (less than a hundred participants) against high investments (EUR 200 million) in the field of institutional capacity building.

<sup>52</sup>Please note that the evaluation is based on the monitoring data as delivered to the European Commission up to February 2016. Because Croatia officially started its ESF programme only after entering the EU in July 2013, it has a considerably higher number of participations than other MS in the last year of implementation (2015), which could not be included in the evaluation.

While this small selection of MS uses ESF to develop innovative projects in the field of Access to Employment, other RCE regions use ESF to complement their considerably larger national investments in the field of ALMP. As a result, in these MS the costs per participation of ESF-funded interventions appear relatively low (particularly in UK, NL, IE, and FR). This is likely to contribute to the difference in costs per participation for Access to Employment interventions between RCE and CON regions.

The differences between types of interventions are further explored in detail in the next paragraph, but the differences between types of Priorities already reveal the underlying diversity of approaches. The unit costs for interventions in the field of Human Capital are only half the costs of Access to Employment interventions, while these remain at around a third of the unit costs for interventions in the field of Social Inclusion. Various reasons can be cited for these differences, as will be made clear in the more detailed analysis in the next section. However, many participations in Human Capital consist of relatively short-term interventions as opposed to the more substantial labour market or social inclusion interventions in the other Priorities. Secondly, the manner of counting the participations in Human Capital interventions does not reflect the nature and intensity of the ESF support received, and often, particularly in CON regions, individuals that benefited indirectly were included as participations.

## 5.2 Costs of different types of interventions

In addition to relevant differences in costs between MS, the costs of different types of interventions across ESF Priorities are also compared. First, from an EU perspective, the interventions in the field of **Human Capital** cost on average less than the interventions in other ESF Priorities, and this is particularly the case in CON regions. This is because these regions defined a wider scope of Human Capital interventions in line with the ESF Regulation, which allows the use of ESF to fund Human Capital system interventions. In addition, in various CON regions participations were counted without noting differences in the nature and intensity of the ESF support received.<sup>53</sup> Often, it concerned students who indirectly benefitted from the subsidies to improve education structures. Due to the high number of 'participations', the average costs appear to be substantially lower. Table 18 below summarises the efficiency findings calculated by the thematic evaluation on the main clusters of Human Capital interventions.

Table 18. Efficiency data by clusters – Human Capital

Human Capital	Cost per participation (€)	Cost per result (€)*
1. LLL systems	208	1,032
2. Quality of HE	133	198
3. Early school education	N.a	N.a
4. Quality of school education	215	401
5. Quality of VET	1,913	3,561
6. Early school leaving	587	1,811
7. R&D	2,384	1,527
8. Young people	1,211	2,476
9. Employed	483	3,548
10. Adults	1,315	8,340
11. HE participation	1,240	1,341

\* The interventions with no result indicators have been removed from the calculations of the total expenditure of the cluster

Source: ESF 2007-2013 ex post evaluation, Thematic evaluation on Human Capital

The thematic evaluation points to a clear link between the average costs of results achieved and the intensity of the Human Capital support received. The highest costs per results are observed in the cluster around 'Upskilling of adults' and interventions in the field of 'Quality of vocational education and training'. The fact that the costs per result

<sup>53</sup> The Czech Republic has 7.9 million recorded participants in HC interventions (out of a total population of 10.5 million); Portugal has 5.8 million participants in HC interventions (out of a total of 10.3 million); Greece has 3.5 million HC participants (out of a total of 10.8 million). However, the available monitoring data does not distinguish between different types of Human Capital interventions, and these can therefore not be excluded.

achieved are higher for these clusters of interventions reflects the nature of the activities. These consist of longer training and upskilling activities as well as system level activities such the development of study programmes, new qualification standards or operation procedures. Costs per participation in interventions in the field of lifelong learning systems and the employed are considerably lower than for Access to Employment and Social Inclusion, which is related to fact that the large majority of the participants in such interventions are employed and are often targeted with relatively short-term training courses.

The interventions that focus on groups with more specific needs are also considerably more expensive. Interventions in the field of **Access to Employment** for instance reached mostly unemployed participants<sup>54</sup>, and the interventions were almost twice as expensive per participation than HC. The costs of **Social Inclusion** interventions, which tend to target the groups with the greatest distance to the labour market, tend to be considerably higher per individual participation.

Table 19. Efficiency data by interventions – Access to Employment & Social Inclusion

Access to employment	Cost per participation (€)	Cost per result (€)
1. Support to PES, other labour market institutions	N.a	N.a.
2. Personalised support for individuals,	€1,865	Not provided
3. Training	€2,341	Not provided
4. Employment incentives	€4,999	Not provided
5. Self-employment and entrepreneurship	€12,770	Not provided
6. Active ageing and prolonging working life	€5,078	Not provided
7. Women in employment and reducing gender-based segregation	€4,065	Not provided
8. Increasing migrant participation	€1,865	Not provided
9. Geographic and occupational mobility	N.a	N.a.
Social Inclusion	Cost per participation (€)	Cost per result (€)
1. Supporting and enabling actions	1,318	3,092
2a. Advice, guidance and training	1,004	1,381
2b. Actions which have employment as an output	996	983
2c. Actions aimed at sustaining employment <sup>55</sup>	N.a	N.a
Cluster 3 Pathway approaches	1,715	4,934
Cluster 4 Systemic measures influencing systems, institutional or cultural contexts	1,521	5,771

Source: ESF 2007-2013 ex post evaluation, Thematic evaluation on Access to Employment & Social Inclusion

Although insightful, the various figures presented above are of limited value for comparisons, as these consist of very different types of interventions across very different national contexts, with different macro-economic realities. With some limitations, however, this can be done by comparing the costs per participation against the costs per participation of national ALMP. This shows that ESF investments in labour market policies are relatively cost-efficient. As the table above shows, the average cost per participation in Access to Employment in the EU is €1,113, which is low compared to the EU28 average of over €5,600 per national ALMP participation in 2007-2013.<sup>56</sup> Also, for individual MS, the cost of ESF investments in Access to Employment per participation is consistently lower than the costs for national ALMP per participation. However, the thematic evaluation on Access to Employment underlines that ESF investments are often used to support accompanying (additional) measures such as personalised support and guidance, on top of mainstream ALMP activities supported by the MS. This explains the differences in costs to some extent. Still, ESF interventions are relatively cost-efficient in

<sup>54</sup> 69% of participants recorded in Access to Employment interventions were not in employment.

<sup>55</sup> NB – no Cluster 2c interventions featured in the in-depth reviews, but measures sustaining employment where part of some of the cluster 3 interventions reviewed.

<sup>56</sup> Author's own calculation based on 2007-2013 Eurostat data on the costs and participants of active labour market policies (type 2-7).

relation to ALMP; while ESF interventions face considerably cheaper unit costs, ESF interventions reach relatively similar success rates.

As can be noted from table 17 above, the interventions under the heading of **Promoting Partnerships** and **Strengthening Institutional Capacity** were not included in the analysis. The interventions under these headings are more often directed at institutions than at individual participants. As a result, an analysis of the cost per participation would be misleading. Instead, the thematic evaluation of **Promoting Partnerships** attempted to reconstruct the cost per result, measured in terms of partnership/network successfully set up or maintained. The evaluation shows that the costs per result are relatively homogeneous among the countries that have opted for investments in this ESF Priority, which lies in the range of €300,000 in AT and BE, €600,000 in ES and €487,000 in CZ. Moreover, the thematic evaluation notes the potential of Promoting Partnership investments to contribute to efficiency in other fields.

In the field of **Strengthening Institutional Capacity**, no participant data or comparable results can be used, and no usable benchmarks can be used either to approximate the efficiency of interventions.<sup>57</sup> The paradox of evaluating efficiency for this Priority is that the interventions generally seek to improve the efficiency of institutions where this is most needed. The substantial shares paid to project management to deal with complex (regulatory) procedures of Fund management are illustrative of this. When taking these difficult circumstances fully into account, the interventions under this Priority can be judged to be relatively efficient.

### 5.3 Reducing administrative burden

The ex-post evaluation of the delivery mechanisms of Cohesion Policy Programmes concluded that while overall programmes performed well regarding implementation, selecting and carrying out projects, many beneficiaries, especially in programmes with smaller budgets, perceived the administrative burden to be higher than necessary.<sup>58</sup> While stakeholders are generally aware and understanding of the need for clear monitoring provisions and administration in multi-level systems of shared management, the administrative burden of participation in Cohesion Policy programmes is judged disproportionate in comparison with national programmes.

In order to reduce the costs of the management of interventions, the European Commission has worked to reduce the administrative burden related to the management of the funds. For this purpose, use of simplified cost options (SCO) were significantly expanded in 2009.<sup>59</sup> Such SCO allow MS to calculate costs according to a predefined method, such as flat-rate financing, standard scales of unit costs (based on outputs, results or some other costs) and lump sum grants. This marks a difference from the predominant approach in which MS are required to draw down actual eligible costs and provide documentary evidence. SCO should help reduce bureaucracy, but also reduce the risk of committing errors.

In a survey on the implementation of SCO, MA widely agreed that such options can contribute to a reduction in the administrative burden and reduce the amount of paperwork. The introduction of SCO should also make it easier to check compliance, cut red tape and reduce the risk of errors and later financial corrections. Despite these advantages, the uptake of this provision has been relatively modest since introduction; MA indicated that 7% of the total expenditure to be declared for ESF co-financing for the 2007-2013 programming period will make use of at least one type of SCO.<sup>60</sup> MA cite an initial extra workload in implementing the SCO, mainly due to substantial changes to the control and audit framework of ESF. In addition, MA fear the legal uncertainty of these new options and risk for systemic error in the early phases of implementation. Therefore,

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<sup>57</sup> See for a detailed discussion on the limits for this priority the evaluation on Strengthening Institutional Capacity.

<sup>58</sup> Ex post evaluation of Cohesion Policy programmes 2007-2013, focusing on the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF). Work Package 12: Delivery system.

<sup>59</sup> Regulation (EC) No 396/2009

<sup>60</sup> European Commission (2015), Simplified Cost Options in the European Social Fund. Ares(2015)5423710

the main advantages of this approach will probably only materialise in the 2014-2020 programming period when MS have the possibility to include these options from the beginning.

## 6 Sustainability

### Key Findings

- Across the different OPs, there is no common approach to assessing the sustainability of ESF interventions for individuals. The data that is available however, mainly for interventions in Access to Employment, shows how ESF contributed to sustainable results for individuals. However, a systematic follow-up of individual results in other ESF Priorities is rare and does not provide sufficient systematic evidence to draw any conclusions.
- Mixed results were found for the sustainability of results at the system level. One-off efforts to increase the quality of education are often limited in terms of sustainability, as their success is highly dependent on concrete follow-up. However, interventions focusing on lifelong learning systems, or training of staff, achieved more sustainable results.
- Most ESF interventions aim for sustainability through securing continued support from ESF in the new programming period. Several years after the financial crisis, there are continued restrictions on national budgets, which limit the potential to sustain ongoing projects without EU funding.
- Elements that are found to contribute to sustainability of interventions across the MS are (i) the conversion of new working relations into lasting networks, (ii) sharing of lessons learned, (iii) adoption of common approaches, (iv) mainstreaming of approaches.

This chapter assesses the sustainability of the results of the various ESF interventions, first for individuals (6.1) and at the system-level (6.2). Subsequently, common elements for sustainability are identified in section 6.3.

### 6.1 Sustainability of individual results

The sustainability of results for individuals is defined as the extent to which particular positive effects can still be observed after some time has passed. In order to get evidence to test this, positive results should be measured not only directly after participation in an intervention, but also after a certain period of time. Various monitoring systems capture such information on sustainability of interventions through a sample.

In the field of **Access to Employment**, the most common way to measure sustainability is to monitor whether a participant is in employment 6 or 12 months after leaving the intervention. Based on the available indicators on employment between 3 and 24 months, the thematic evaluation shows that on average positive results are sustained over time for 21% of participants, compared to positive one-time employment results for 38% of participants (see chapter 4). More specific programme evaluations also show positive employment results a given period of time after the intervention, sometimes higher than directly after the intervention, as it can take some time for participants to find a job after the intervention. In this regard, training programmes for the unemployed in particular often show effects in the medium – and long – run. Indicators that measure sustainability are mostly limited to these individual findings. Only in very limited cases (four PAs) was monitoring data available to inform the sustainability of results for enterprises supported; those four show sustainable results.

The thematic evaluations of the ESF's contribution to **Human Capital** show some evidence of the sustainability of the results achieved by participants, such as continuing positive employment outcomes, lasting improvements in skills and competences and continued use of education and training materials developed. This evidence is mostly based on stakeholder interviews and OP monitoring data since a systematic follow-up of ESF participants to measure the sustainability of their Human Capital development results was rarely undertaken or captured in indicators.

In the thematic evaluation of ESF contributions to **Social Inclusion**, only a few of the interventions reviewed in-depth measured the sustainability of results for participants (e.g. after six or twelve months following an ESF intervention). Where such information was available, results varied considerably from over 70% to below 20% sustained after six months, depending on the context of the groups targeted and the socio-economic settings in which they were located.

The remaining ESF Priorities, **Promoting Partnerships** and **Strengthening Institutional Capacity** address very different groups and therefore do not measure the sustainability of results for individuals. In fact, interventions in these fields are mainly focused on changing systems and structures. Nevertheless, the thematic evaluations provide some evidence that effects are achieved on an individual level, such as the skills and competences acquired, as well as the individual networks developed. Such achievements can be used in academic, training or professional contexts depending on participant's profile independently of further ESF funding. Individual results are also reported for Strengthening Institutional Capacity, for instance by contributing to improved competence of government officials.

## 6.2 Sustainability of system results

Interventions under ESF are also targeted at the systems level. The sustainability of an intervention's results can be assessed by its ability to influence the policies and practices in its environment. This concerns particularly interventions in the ESF Priorities Promoting Partnerships and Strengthening Institutional Capacity, but also in other Priorities. Sustainability of results can be expressed in improved capacities, such as organisational and managerial capacities or technical capacities (in terms of equipment and resources). This section assesses to what extent sustainable results were achieved across Priorities.

ESF interventions in the field of **Access to Employment** aimed at systems were often the starting point for the development of new and existing services which would then be integrated into the everyday running of the PES services. ESF funded training of PES personnel is common in the newer MSs but can also be found for instance in ES or IT. While most interventions of this type train individuals, the results can be observed at the system level through broader system learning. While the sustainability of results depends greatly on low staff turnover, the thematic ex post evaluation on Access to Employment did not find evidence that staff turnover threatened the sustainability of results. In IT, permanent contracts are being issued to PES staff to make it more likely that they stay within the organisation. In some cases, e.g. in IT (Calabria) and ES (Cataluña), the systems developed in one region were later used as blueprints for mainstreaming in other regions.

The thematic evaluation on **Human Capital** found differences in sustainability of results across interventions. The in-depth evaluation of various clusters of interventions show that interventions clustered around lifelong learning systems, and on research and innovation, overall contributed to sustainable system impacts across the EU. On the other hand, interventions that focus on increasing quality in education in some cases contributed to less sustainable results. These interventions tend to be more often designed with a fixed end date, without taking sustainability issues explicitly into account. As a result, the thematic evaluation found less sustainability in the design, follow-up and implementation of this cluster of activities.

While most interventions in the field of **Social Inclusion** tend to focus directly on (disadvantaged) individuals, a small number of interventions also seek to deliver systemic changes (e.g. building a system for the assessment of work ability of disabled individuals; mapping and supporting intermediate labour markets; building a web portal for careers guidance and establishing support services for deaf job seekers). Sustainability of results of such interventions can be expressed in a variety of ways including the continuation and further enhancement of structures and new bodies established; the ongoing and continuously updated mapping of intermediate labour markets; and eventually the improved labour market outcomes of individuals benefiting from the establishment of such institutions. The latter was only measured in one intervention.

The thematic ex post evaluation of **Promoting Partnerships** reports mostly sustainable results. It finds evidence for sustainable effects of ESF interventions on MS culture, institutional framework and social capital, and finds a contribution of ESF to the embedding of new partnerships into policy implementation structures. In RO, SI and BG, interventions were identified to grow the capacity to participate in partnerships, in order



to enable to new potential partners to join partnerships, such as the social partners and NGOs.

While the sustainability of systemic results for the various interventions in the thematic fields above are relatively positive, the thematic evaluation on **Strengthening Institutional Capacity** also underlines the difficulties that these interventions can face. In contexts with less stable institutional and political environments, and with a lack of national financial resources to invest, the continuity of products and results created from the 2007–2013 Structural Funds in the field of public management depend to a large extent on planned investments for the 2014–2020 programming period. While it is not unlikely that these are continued in the new ESF programming period, there is little attention being paid to sustaining system results without ESF support.

However, this does not mean that all Strengthening Institutional Capacity interventions have difficulties attaining sustainable results; this depends to a large extent on the type of intervention and its context. In the field of Strengthening Institutional Capacity in particular, changes in public administration institutions often lead to sustainable results through the introduction of new procedures and regulations. Interventions that set in motion other activities that will continue beyond the lifespan of the original activity or that developed tools providing a platform for other new activities also tend to be more sustainable, for instance:

- Interventions that upgrade or have added value to other interventions, such as training programs based on needs assessments, made through functional analysis. (BG)
- Interventions introducing e-governance and other tools (BG, MT)
- Interventions in the field of quality management (LV)
- A common learning portal for local authorities (UK)
- Training or manpower interventions (EE, IT, MT)

### **6.3 Sustainability of interventions**

While the sustainability of results at individual and system levels are distinct, common elements can be observed that contribute not only to sustainable results, but also to the sustainability of interventions.

The sustainability of interventions often depends on the continuation of ESF funding into the new programme period. For interventions in the field of Access to Employment and Social Inclusion, a substantial majority of successful interventions is planned to be sustained into the new programming period. In fact, several Social Inclusion interventions were already receiving 'top-up' ESF funding to extend delivery into 2015, in order to ensure continuity between the two programme periods. For Human Capital interventions, roughly 70% of the interventions and related actions are likely to be continued either with the ESF support in the 2014-2020 programming period or through national resources. For interventions in the field of Promoting Partnerships, the sustainability of interventions is particularly important, as an intervention's sustainability is often directly coupled to the sustainability of its results. Various approaches can be found to ensure such sustainability; in RO for instance, all projects and beneficiaries are committed by contract to continue their services for at least three years after the ending of the financial agreement.

Particularly successful interventions may not need to depend on ESF funding, and can be taken on as mainstream approaches by (local) governments. For example, the Meikštų Dvaras intervention (LT) became a sustainable intervention through inclusion in the National Programme on Drug Control and Prevention of Drug Addiction 2010–2016, which guaranteed its continuation until 2016. Elsewhere providers described receiving funds from local and central government (e.g. in AT and in FI) to both continue their activities and help embed them within local and national support infrastructures. Six out of seven Social Inclusion interventions in AT were mainstreamed and taken up by national and regional funding.

Sustainable interventions are also more likely to have more sustainable effects. This holds true across the various ESF Priorities, and therefore this section synthesises the

findings on the sustainability of interventions across the Priorities. Across ESF Priorities, the following main elements for sustainability of interventions can be distilled:

- Convert new working relations into lasting networks;
- Ensure the sharing of lessons learned among peers with similar interests;
- Adopt common (elements of) approaches;
- Pursue wider mainstreaming of approaches.

Some MS, such as RO, SK or BG, have implemented concrete actions that contribute to the capacity of policymakers and other public officers to participate in partnerships in order to enable cooperation with new potential partners such as social partners and NGOs. As such, the ESF offered the opportunity for organisations to work together for the first time, and **establish working relationships and integrate into networks**, which are reported to continue after their ESF funding. This was present where a new organisation and method of delivery was important for the development of partnerships between students/pupils, teachers, tutors and employers (e.g. the Bulgarian intervention on pupil and student practices or the Maltese Youth Employment Programme which has also fostered new ways of working).

Various interventions studied in more detail prove to be crucial in the development of new ways of **sharing information and lessons learned** within institutions and beyond, between different types of stakeholders.

Through these insights gained in the internal working processes of partners, the various stakeholders were better able to develop a **common strategy towards their common goal**. For instance, various interventions were found where ESF investments contributed to the common development of administrative capacity by encouraging schools (under Human Capital), social services (under Access to employment and Social Inclusion), and public authorities (under Promoting Partnerships and Strengthening Institutional Capacity) to work together to improve their planning and management methods in a common way, and increasing the monitoring and reporting discipline.

**Mainstreaming of results obtained** or developed with the help of ESF investments is another way to ensure the sustainability of ESF supported interventions. In many MS across ESF Priorities, interventions were found that specifically aim to 'mainstream' the project's result to a wider population than those targeted directly. A good example of such mainstreaming is a Spanish improvement plan of the PES. This intervention is described in more detail in the box below; upon reaching success, it has been adopted in the regional government's IT system, making it a compulsory step in the labour orientation process targeting unemployed people delivered by the regional employment service offices. Currently, it is being considered for implementation at the national level.

**Good practice of sustainability: "IMPROVEMENT PLAN OF EMPLOYMENT SERVICE OF CATALONIA AND INTEGRATION OF NEW PLATFORMS"** (Spain)

The intervention consisted in providing the employment service offices of Catalonia with a new model of orientation and professional training, increasing in this way the regional employability rate by the provision of a more direct support service adapted to unemployed people's needs. The new model was aimed to diagnostic unemployed people's competences through the use of a tool able to position them in the labour market: the "Q" questionnaire. This questionnaire was a specific tool on employment factors, measuring and describing competences factors in relation to the structural, personal and transversal ones. It classified unemployed people in groups, according to their position in the labour market, their level of integration and the activity sector in which they wanted to work. It analysed training, professional experience, level of access to employment, knowledge, their disposal to learn and transversal competences. For each group, basic professional itineraries and other services (orientation itineraries, training actions, professional experiences, etc.) were planned.

- After its successful implementation in the region, it was adopted in the regional government's IT system, making it a compulsory step in the labour orientation process targeting unemployed people delivered by the regional employment service offices.
- The new model implemented through the intervention was adopted in the regional government's IT system. Currently, it is being considered for implementation at the national level.
- The new model was applied to 1,689,474 users.

## 7 Gender sensitivity

### Key Findings

- A total of 51.3 million female participations were registered in ESF 2007-2013, which corresponds to 51.4% of all participations throughout the programming period.
- Most MS applied the principles of gender equality as a general horizontal principle in their ESF programming. However, this is not always positive, because such a horizontal approach sometimes displaces specific actions on gender sensitivity. Most interventions across various Priorities did not include specific actions directly addressing gender sensitivity.
- A detailed analysis of the main ESF Priorities shows that while most types of intervention have a relatively equal distribution of gender among participants (between 45%-55%), there are a number of MS and ESF Priorities that show considerable differences. These differences are generally the result of the specific focus of the interventions and not necessarily of a lack of gender sensitivity. Most illustrative are male-dominated HC interventions targeting employees (due to higher employment rate of men in traditional industries), or female dominated interventions that target education or social services in Human Capital or Strengthening Institutional Capacity.
- Despite the increased emphasis on gender mainstreaming considerations in this programming period, evidence is lacking to allow an assessment of the articulation of gender equality in intervention design, objectives and target groups. Few interventions provide a gender breakdown for participation and result indicators (other than those requested by Annex XXIII), which prevents the assessment of at gender specific results.

### 7.1 Context

ESF interventions are set against a context in which overall employment rates in the EU-27 continue to be lower among women than among men (58.9% and 69.5% respectively in 2013). However, during the early years of the crisis in particular, the sector-specific effect of the crisis meant that over the years 2005-2013, female employment rates actually increased by 2.7% whereas male employment rates declined by 1.3%. Male and female long-term unemployment (LTU) rates were the same at 5.1% in the EU27 in 2013. These figures reflect a more significant increase in LTU among men in the period between 2005 and 2013. This result, however, does not necessarily reflect real progress on gender equality as it can be attributed to a deterioration of the situation of men in the labour market due to the impact of the crisis on traditionally male dominated sectors such as manufacturing, construction and the financial sector.

In addition to this continued imbalance in the employment rate, the gender pay gap is a persistent problem. In this respect, women in the EU27 are still more likely to be at risk of poverty or social exclusion (24.8% of women in 2013 compared to 22.5% of men).

Gender inequalities in terms of access to compulsory education are generally considered low.<sup>61</sup> Still, significant gender equality issues can be observed, for instance in education and training: large shares of staff working in the education sector continue to be women, the continuing use of gender stereotyped curricula and learning materials and gender segregation in study subjects (e.g. women under-represented in science, technology, engineering and maths subjects). In terms of educational outcomes, women tend to outperform men (women tend to have higher HE education attainment rates, participate to a greater extent in LLL and are less likely to leave education early without qualifications).<sup>62</sup> Gender sensitive approaches should therefore also pay attention to issues faced by men with regard to human capital development.

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<sup>61</sup> GHK (2012) Study on sex discrimination in access to education, undertaken on behalf of DG Justice.

<sup>62</sup> See Thematic Evaluation Report on Human Capital Volume II, section 2

Article 6 of the ESF Regulation stipulates that MS describe how gender equality and equal opportunities are promoted in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of operational programmes. The Regulation specifically called for the use of a gender mainstreaming approach to be combined with specific action to increase the sustainable participation and progress of women in employment.<sup>63</sup> This chapter assesses the extent to which MS promote a balanced participation of women and men in the management and implementation of operational programmes, and to which MS meet these reporting requirements.

**7.2 Attention to gender sensitivity in ESF programming**

The way in which the gender equality objective was pursued in ESF OPs varied considerably across MS. For most MS, 'gender equality' is interpreted as a guiding general principle inspiring both specifically funded 'gender equality actions' and 'gender equality mainstreaming' (the so-called 'dual approach'). In this regard, particularly AT, DK, PL, RO, SE, and UK have embraced a gender mainstreaming approach.<sup>64</sup> In PL for instance, the gender mainstreaming was implemented through the establishment of a group with representatives of intermediary bodies. IT also adopted a gender mainstreaming approach, while also including several interventions that were largely or totally dedicated to women. Greece also had a number of interventions specifically targeting women, e.g. female entrepreneurship, and programmes promoting work-life balance. Hungary marks some success in preparing equal opportunity plans, employing equal opportunity assistants, and creating family-friendly attitudes.

However, there is evidence that this 'dual approach' (attention to gender mainstreaming and to specific actions) contributed to decreasing support for gender-specific actions compared to the previous ESF programme period, while MS increasingly rely on gender mainstreaming across all priorities.<sup>65</sup> While ideally all priorities contain such a gender mainstreaming element, approaching gender sensitivity as a horizontal priority comes at the risk of reduced visibility of gender sensitivity in the planning of interventions. A detailed analysis in the thematic evaluations of interventions confirms this, and in fact shows little evidence that a gender sensitive approach is systematically applied to planning, implementing and delivering of interventions and activities. While gender mainstreaming elements may have been part of preparing interventions, this is often not apparent in the materials reviewed. This shows that gender considerations in the ESF programming were often sporadic and patchy.<sup>66</sup> In ES, specific gender interventions were cut back after the onset of the crisis as funding was transferred to actions aimed at other target groups.

**7.3 Participations**

The ESF Regulations require MS to report detailed information on the background characteristics of participants in ESF intervention, including on gender. A detailed analysis of the main ESF Priorities shows that while most types of intervention have a relatively equal distribution of gender among participations (between 45%-55%), there are a number of MS and Priorities that show considerable differences. Most of these differences are not due to specific gender-sensitivity considerations but are reflections of the specific target groups of certain types of interventions.

*Table 20. Number and share of female participations*

MS	Access to Employment	Human Capital	Social Inclusion	Institutional capacity	Promoting Partnerships	All priorities
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<sup>63</sup> The ESF Regulation in preamble 16 states that a "[...] gender mainstreaming approach should be combined with specific action to increase the sustainable participation and progress of women in employment [...]".  
<sup>64</sup> GHK/FGB (2011), Evaluation of the European Social Fund's Support to Gender Equality: Synthesis Report.  
<sup>65</sup> GHK/FGB (2011), Evaluation of the European Social Fund's Support to Gender Equality: Synthesis Report.  
<sup>66</sup> The evaluation of the ESF support to gender equality also found a critical concern in the lack of gender sensitiveness of project along with the logic of project-selection criteria and the screening ability of project-selection assessors, a lack of status of the gender-equality objectives, see GHK and Fondazione G. Brodolini (2012).

	X	%	X	%	X	%	X	%	X	%	X	%
	1,000	total	1,000	total	1,000	total	1,000	total	1,000	total	1,000	total
AT	65	<b>52.4</b>	358	<b>58.9</b>	53	<b>41.2</b>	0		0		477	<b>55.3</b>
BE	307	<b>45.0</b>	378	<b>45.9</b>	162	<b>48.1</b>	0		0		846	<b>46.0</b>
BG	304	<b>56.0</b>	908	<b>54.2</b>	83	<b>63.4</b>	159	<b>63.0</b>	10	<b>60.0</b>	1,464	<b>56.0</b>
CY	0		8	<b>53.4</b>	17	<b>68.2</b>	0		0		25	<b>62.4</b>
CZ	243	<b>55.3</b>	4,456	<b>50.6</b>	312	<b>61.7</b>	89	<b>63.3</b>	36	<b>69.2</b>	5,137	<b>51.7</b>
DE	620	<b>41.8</b>	1,731	<b>42.6</b>	674	<b>51.6</b>	0		14	<b>49.0</b>	3,040	<b>44.2</b>
DK	22	<b>49.0</b>	23	<b>43.2</b>	0		0		0		45	<b>45.8</b>
EE	107	<b>56.2</b>	520	<b>62.8</b>	0		31	<b>70.7</b>	0		657	<b>62.0</b>
EL	342	<b>63.8</b>	1947	<b>54.5</b>	51	<b>58.0</b>	84	<b>64.8</b>	0		2,424	<b>56.1</b>
ES	4,917	<b>59.4</b>	2665	<b>47.7</b>	0		0		0	<b>69.8</b>	7,582	<b>54.7</b>
FI	78	<b>53.1</b>	184	<b>52.4</b>	0		0		6	<b>55.5</b>	268	<b>52.7</b>
FR	1,630	<b>55.0</b>	930	<b>44.9</b>	888	<b>48.5</b>	0		0	<b>0.0</b>	3,448	<b>50.2</b>
HR	5	<b>66.6</b>	1	<b>63.4</b>	4	<b>65.0</b>	1	<b>66.1</b>	0		11	<b>65.7</b>
HU	140	<b>51.7</b>	2,218	<b>55.4</b>	337	<b>62.0</b>	127	<b>60.1</b>	0		2,822	<b>56.1</b>
IE	276	<b>52.9</b>	364	<b>56.4</b>	0		0		0		640	<b>54.8</b>
IT	1,012	<b>49.9</b>	3,660	<b>52.3</b>	214	<b>44.4</b>	8	<b>54.3</b>	23	<b>57.6</b>	4,916	<b>51.4</b>
LT	317	<b>57.4</b>	271	<b>69.2</b>	0		63	<b>67.8</b>	0		650	<b>62.7</b>
LU	3	<b>40.5</b>	11	<b>42.6</b>	0		0		0		14	<b>42.1</b>
LV	264	<b>59.8</b>	144	<b>62.1</b>	54	<b>59.6</b>	36	<b>72.5</b>	0		498	<b>61.3</b>
MT	7	<b>51.6</b>	36	<b>46.1</b>	0		9	<b>43.7</b>	0		52	<b>46.4</b>
NL	158	<b>41.2</b>	272	<b>28.2</b>	64	<b>31.8</b>	0		0		494	<b>31.9</b>
PL	951	<b>56.7</b>	3,307	<b>54.3</b>	656	<b>68.0</b>	252	<b>68.4</b>	0		5,165	<b>56.8</b>
PT	140	<b>62.4</b>	4,864	<b>56.6</b>	246	<b>51.8</b>	0		0		5,250	<b>56.5</b>
RO	209	<b>53.2</b>	427	<b>57.0</b>	149	<b>70.8</b>	43	<b>60.6</b>	0		828	<b>58.2</b>
SE	62	<b>45.9</b>	181	<b>56.9</b>	0		0		0		243	<b>53.6</b>
SI	71	<b>53.9</b>	349	<b>61.0</b>	34	<b>61.4</b>	1	<b>66.9</b>	0		454	<b>59.8</b>
SK	598	<b>41.5</b>	255	<b>66.1</b>	168	<b>48.4</b>	20	<b>47.6</b>	0		1,041	<b>47.0</b>
UK	1,838	<b>35.3</b>	832	<b>45.6</b>	0		0	<b>56.4</b>	0		2,671	<b>37.5</b>
<b>EU28</b>	<b>14,687</b>	<b>50.9</b>	<b>31,300</b>	<b>51.9</b>	<b>4,166</b>	<b>53.3</b>	<b>921</b>	<b>64.1</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>60.1</b>	<b>51,163</b>	<b>51.9</b>
CON	7,140	<b>55.2</b>	23,287	<b>53.8</b>	2,339	<b>58.3</b>	886	<b>64.1</b>	59	<b>62.7</b>	33,752	<b>54.6</b>
RCE	7,547	<b>47.4</b>	8,012	<b>47.0</b>	1,826	<b>48.0</b>	35	<b>64.0</b>	30	<b>55.7</b>	17,450	<b>47.3</b>

Source: AIR2014(excluding Technical Assistance)

First of all, a number of MS show considerably lower female participation rates than others, such as UK (37.5%), NL (31.9%), and LU (42.1%). For these MS, the lower share of women can mainly be related to the fact that most projects targeting employees involved sectors of industry that are traditionally male-dominated. Also, in the UK, despite gender-specific approaches, the largest PA was set up to help a high proportion of unemployed and economically inactive people, of whom a disproportionately high percentage are male<sup>67</sup>. In other MS, ESF supported a substantial majority of women, such as HR (65.7%), LT (62.7%), CY (62.4%), EE (62.0%) and LV (61.3%). More generally, the table suggests that across all priorities and MS, ESF in CON regions supported consistently more women than in RCE regions (54.6% versus 47.3% respectively). However, there is insufficient evidence to explain the reasons of overrepresentation of women in these regions.

Considerable differences in the participation of women can also be observed between ESF priorities. Overall, interventions targeting employees have on average the lowest female participation rate in almost all MS (except BE, DE, UK), often because these target employees in sectors that are traditionally male-dominated (as noted above, in particular for NL and LU). While the aggregated EU share of female participations in Access to Employment interventions are around 50%, marked differences can be observed for specific interventions. As could be expected, interventions that specifically seek to reduce gender-based segregation and promote employment for women have almost only women as participants (99% female vs. 1% male), e.g. the Slovak intervention, presented in the

<sup>67</sup> See Annual Implementation Report 2014, England and Gibraltar European Social Fund Convergence, Competitiveness and Employment Programme 2007-2013.



box below, where 95% of participants were female. Moreover, interventions that 'support PES and other labour market institutions' are dominated by female participants (71% female, versus only 29% male). However, this overrepresentation does not reflect a deliberate gender sensitivity approach, but merely displays the dominance of female employees in these types of institutions. The thematic evaluation for Social Inclusion also noted this for interventions that seek to improve public services under Social Inclusion.

**Effective gender sensitive intervention: "SUPPORTING EMPLOYABILITY OF PARENTS OF CHILDREN YOUNGER THAN 3 YEARS" (Slovakia)**

The Slovakian intervention, 'Supporting employability of parents of children younger than 3 years', provides contributions for childcare services. Despite its modest financial size, it is a national project, which operated for one year between June 2013 and June 2014. It provided support to 1,215 parents who were working or studying at the time of the intervention, including 1,153 women (95%) with an average contribution of EUR 200 per month for one year. By offering a small contribution (200 EUR) per month for one year, it allowed women to continue working or studying, which was coherent with the OP objective of maintaining a harmonious balance between work and family life in order to increase individuals' employability. The achievements of outputs were consistent with expectations.

- The intervention targeted parents with children aged below 3 (age group 0-2) that, due to the working or studying obligations, could not arrange childcare;
- Participants that received the support have been able to continue working or learning, which compensates the initial investment.

Interventions in the field of Human Capital target a majority of women in most MS (except in BE, DE, DK, ES, but with an EU average of 51.9%). This value masks considerable differences between HC interventions targeting employees (46.3% of participations is female) and other Human Capital interventions (54.2% of participations is female). The thematic evaluation of Human Capital interventions shows that this overrepresentation of women is mainly caused by interventions clustered under 'upskilling adults' (61% female) and 'Quality of Higher Education' (62% female). However, these differences can mainly be explained by the higher participation rates of women in these education sectors (as teachers and as students), and that these differences cannot necessarily be related to specific choices in ESF programming.

#### **7.4 Effectiveness by gender**

The findings above, but also the analysis in the various thematic evaluations at OP and intervention level, demonstrate that MS did not develop an explicit and robust operational strategy to monitor the effectiveness of their approach in terms of gender sensitivity. There is a lack of data and information at intervention level on participation and results by gender. In most of the interventions studied in detail, data on women's involvement was not available, even though such information is reported at PA level to comply with the formal requirements of the Structural Funds regulations. This is even the case for most interventions with a specific focus on gender issues that directly seek to tackle issues related to women's employment. This suggests that gender mainstreaming as a strategy is not fully implemented by ESF programmes, because an adequate implementation requires an integration of a gender equality perspective in every phase and at all levels of the policy making process.

The lack of reliable data at intervention level also hinders an accurate assessment of the results of ESF interventions from a gender perspective. Based on the indicators that are available, the thematic ESF evaluations find no systematic differences between the effectiveness of interventions for men or women. In some instances, better results are found for women, while in other instances men achieved better results. To illustrate this variety of findings, the thematic evaluation on Human Capital refers to interventions that focus on 'transitions to the labour market for young people', where young women achieved better placement results, but with worse contractual conditions. In CZ, with relatively similar participation rates, women more often obtained a qualification than men (126,200 qualifications awarded to men against 25,700 male recipients). In BE (OP Flanders), various indicators showed that women consistently achieved better results (in terms of flows out of unemployment and into employment), including among different categories of disadvantaged groups, such as disabled individuals and the elderly. At the same time, the thematic evaluation on Human Capital mentions various interventions where men achieved better results than women.

## 8 Investments in Young People

### Key Findings

- Although there are few references to 'young people' in the Regulations governing ESF 2007-2013, the ESF has an important role in the implementation of policy initiatives in the area of youth. Young people are among the most important target groups across all ESF priorities, with a **total of 30.1 million participations of young people** registered in ESF 2007-2013, **30.5%** of all participations.
- Within ESF programming, a great diversity of approaches under the various ESF Priorities target young people. While most measures relate to Access to Employment directly, other types of measures for young people are often linked to education and training measures (Human Capital) to improve young people's position in the labour market in the longer term. While these interventions do not always exclusively target young people, broader interventions can cater to young people's needs as well.
- Despite the emphasis on young people in many OPs, relatively few MS defined OP-specific indicators focusing on outputs and results for young people supported by ESF investment, which prevents the assessment of the actual results of such interventions for young people specifically.
- The increased policy attention at EU level for youth unemployment and the introduction of various specific youth employment policies between 2010-2013 has not directly translated into an increase of participation in the second half of the ESF programming period. In fact, despite some exceptions, various MS reduced the share of participations after the start of the crisis, giving more space for ESF participation of individuals between 25-54 years old.

### 8.1 Background and context of investments in young people

Due to the economic and financial crisis, youth unemployment reached unprecedented levels in many European MS during the implementation of the ESF 2007-2013 programmes (see chapter 2). In March 2013, 5.7 million young people were unemployed in the EU27. In some MS, more than half of the young people were unemployed (EL: 59.1% in January 2013; ES: 55.9%). Moreover, after years of decreasing rates of young people that are not in employment, education or training (NEET), the rate increased again in 2009 to 12.4% and remained high during the remainder of the ESF programming period (13.1% in 2012). This group of young NEETs is heterogeneous and consists of the conventionally unemployed, the unavailable (e.g. young people with family obligations), the disengaged, the opportunity-seekers, and the voluntary NEETs.<sup>68</sup>

In this context, supporting young unemployed people became a key policy priority at the EU level, where a number of key developments specified policy directions for youth employment including:

- A Communication on Youth on the Move (October 2010);
- A Communication on Youth Opportunities Initiative (November 2011);
- A Commission initiative to set up Youth Action Teams in eight MS with highest levels of youth unemployment (EL, IE, IT, LV, LT, PT, SK, ES) (January 2012);
- The 'Youth Employment Package' (December 2012), including:
  - Communication on Moving Youth into Employment,
  - Commission Proposal for a Council Recommendation on the Youth Guarantee;
- A Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on a Quality Framework for traineeships (December 2013)<sup>69</sup>.
- The launch of the Youth Employment Initiative (February 2013).

Altogether, the initiatives cover numerous actions and interventions and their different lines of actions can be summarised as follows:

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<sup>68</sup> Eurofound (2012), NEETs: Young people not in employment, education or training: Characteristics, costs and policy responses in Europe.

<sup>69</sup> This proposal followed up on the COM adopted in December 2012 as part of the Youth Employment Package.

- Encouraging and providing support to MS and stakeholders in designing and implementing national Youth Guarantee schemes (i.e. an outcome-based structural reform which aims to ensure that a set of policy interventions ensuring that all young people aged 15 to 24 receive a good quality offer of employment, continued further education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education).
- Easing the transition from school to work (e.g. encouraging key stakeholders to increase the quality and supply of apprenticeships across the EU and to change mind-sets towards this type of learning; to increase access to training opportunities and to improve the quality of traineeships both in terms of content and fair working conditions).

Promoting labour market mobility (the EC has also launched a reform of the European Employment Service (EURES) to strengthen this network and boost mobility, including via EU level actions and programmes) including 'Your first EURES job'.

- Ensuring that EU funding contributes to fostering youth employment (dedicated EUR 6 billion from the ESF to the Youth Employment Initiative between 2013-2018)
- Strengthening the analysis and monitoring of relevant policies at the national level, and encouraging policy dialogue and mutual learning across MS.

All MS also received CSR to improve the employability of youth, except DK and NL. More specifically, for EL, LT, SE and UK these recommendations were already given from 2008 onwards.

## **8.2 Role of the ESF in supporting youth employment**

In response to the CSR, youth employment has indeed been high on the policy agenda in most MS and a broad range of measures were adopted by MS over the 2007-2013 period to improve prospects for youth. Within ESF programming, a wide diversity of approaches to target young people can be found under the various Priorities. There is a distinction between interventions that are designed to target specifically young people and those that are defined more broadly, but cater for the needs of young people as well. Interventions that focus on young people generally have a particular emphasis on low-skilled young people who are at a distance from the labour market. Some of the common interventions in the field of Access to Employment include:

- wage subsidies (e.g. in BE, BG, EL, HU, LV, FR, IT, PT, UK);
- reduction of non-wage labour costs (e.g. BE, EL, ES, FR, HR, PT, SI, NL);
- work placements (e.g. in CY, PL, SI);
- counselling (e.g. in AT, DE);
- public sector employment opportunities (e.g. in BG, FR, HU).

While most measures relate to Access to Employment directly, measures are often linked to education and training measures as well (Human Capital). With the exception of DK, EL, HU, IE, IT, PL, SE and UK, most MS were recommended to assist certain vulnerable groups by improving access to, or improving their position in the labour market, with the help of education and training. Such measures were introduced throughout the EU, also by MS that did not receive such recommendations, such as:

- youth internships and apprenticeships (e.g. in BE, CZ, DK, EL, ES, FR, FI, HU, IT, PT, SE, UK);
- measures to tackle early school leaving (e.g. in PT, FR, NL).

Young people were among the most frequently addressed target groups as part of disadvantaged groups, and also feature in interventions under Social Inclusion. Indeed, all MS considered youth (including early school leavers and young people in the NEET group) as a group requiring specific support. Depending on the OP, in addition to young people unemployed or in the NEET group, different subgroups could be identified in some MS, e.g. young people with migration background (AT, FR), young people with learning deficiencies and/or risk of underachieving (NL, UK, CY) or young people leaving care or the state protection system (e.g. in RO, UK).



### 8.3 Involvement of young people in ESF programmes

The table below summarises the share of young people among the total population reached by ESF interventions for the main ESF priorities, by MS and by type of region.

Table 21. Absolute number and share of young people (15-24) among total participations

MS	Human Capital		Access to Employment		Social Inclusion		Institutional capacity		Promoting Partnerships		All priorities	
	X 1,000	% total	X 1,000	% total	X 1,000	% total	X 1,000	% total	X 1,000	% total	X 1,000	% total
AT	143	23.5	31	24.8	83	64.6	-	-	-	-	257	29.8
BE	346	42.1	155	22.7	79	23.5	-	-	-	-	580	31.5
BG	633	37.8	69	12.7	13	10.3	14	5.4	2	9.7	731	27.9
CY	1	6.6	-	-	4	15.1	-	-	-	-	5	11.8
CZ	2,641	30.0	17	3.9	20	4.0	0	0.0	4	8.0	2,682	27.0
DE	2,514	61.9	352	23.7	518	39.7	-	-	18	61.4	3,401	49.5
DK	9	17.2	24	54.2	-	-	-	-	-	-	33	34.1
EE	405	48.9	32	16.5	-	-	3	5.8	-	-	439	41.3
EL	980	27.4	53	9.9	8	8.9	1	0.7	-	-	1,041	24.1
ES	2,503	44.8	1,752	21.2	-	-	-	-	0	67.9	4,255	30.7
FI	45	12.8	46	31.4	-	-	-	-	2	15.4	93	18.3
FR	616	29.7	1,383	46.6	442	24.1	-	-	-	0.0	2,440	35.5
HR	0	1.6	3	31.6	0	7.7	0	21.3	-	-	3	19.2
HU	1,641	41.0	79	29.3	171	31.5	5	2.3	-	-	1,896	37.7
IE	163	25.3	150	28.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	313	26.8
IT	1,997	28.5	689	33.9	205	42.5	0	0.1	23	59.3	2,913	30.5
LT	125	32.0	106	19.1	-	-	8	8.7	-	-	239	23.0
LU	2	7.2	6	67.5	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	22.1
LV	103	44.5	40	9.1	39	43.0	4	8.6	-	-	186	22.9
MT	18	23.5	10	72.5	-	-	1	6.3	-	-	30	26.5
NL	222	23.0	218	56.7	155	76.7	-	-	-	-	595	38.4
PL	2,376	39.0	682	40.7	244	25.3	17	4.6	-	-	3,320	36.5
PT	1,048	12.2	26	11.5	30	6.4	-	-	-	-	1,104	11.9
RO	182	24.3	110	28.0	47	22.4	3	5.0	-	-	343	24.1
SE	17	5.3	61	45.4	-	-	-	-	-	-	78	17.2
SI	121	21.2	22	16.7	8	15.2	0	10.6	-	-	151	20.0
SK	113	29.2	378	26.2	65	18.7	2	5.1	-	-	557	25.1
UK	440	24.1	1,906	36.6	21	22.3	0	2.6	-	-	2,367	33.2
<b>EU28</b>	<b>19,404</b>	<b>32.2</b>	<b>8,398</b>	<b>29.1</b>	<b>2,153</b>	<b>27.5</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>33.0</b>	<b>30,062</b>	<b>30.5</b>
<b>CON</b>	<b>13,966</b>	<b>32.3</b>	<b>3,229</b>	<b>24.9</b>	<b>864</b>	<b>21.5</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>24.3</b>	<b>18,140</b>	<b>29.4</b>
<b>RCE</b>	<b>5,438</b>	<b>31.9</b>	<b>5,169</b>	<b>32.5</b>	<b>1,289</b>	<b>33.9</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>48.3</b>	<b>11,922</b>	<b>32.3</b>

Source: AIR2014

Young people were amongst the most frequently specified target groups in the PAs and sub-priorities assigned to Human Capital and constitute 61.9% of the participants in DE, 48.9% in EE and 44.8% in ES. General education students were targeted in 24 MS and early school leavers were targeted in 25 MS. Over 30 million young people were targeted by ESF until the end of 2014 (including various subgroups defined in the indicators such as pupils, students in general education, VET, HE, etc.). The table also suggests differences between the ESF approaches in different regions. RCE regions targeted substantially more young people than CON regions, which holds true across all ESF Priorities.

These figures show the importance of ESF interventions for young people. Particularly in comparison to the share of young people in national ALMP, ESF Access to Employment PAs have much higher participation rates of young people, which underlines the added value of ESF in terms of scope (see chapter 9.2). This is particularly the case in MT

(72.5% vs 29%); LU (67.5% vs 18%); DK (54.2% vs 16%).<sup>70</sup> The table above shows considerable variation between MS across the ESF Priorities. However, at the EU level the three major ESF Priorities have relatively similar shares of young people.

While no specific figures are available on the exact size of financial investments dedicated to young people by ESF, the share of young people reached by the various ESF programmes can serve as an indication of the importance of this group in the overall programming. It is estimated that from the total ESF budget available in 2007-2013, roughly €35.4 billion benefitted people between 15-24 years old. This figure is based on the share of participations aged 15-24, as collected by MAs at the PA level.<sup>71</sup>

Despite the clear importance of young people throughout the programming period across the EU, no clear relation was found in the additional efforts at EU level to combat youth unemployment in the years 2011-2013 and increased participations of young people in ESF. Participations of young people in ESF investments remain relatively stable over time. The specific objective of Youth Action Teams, active since 2012 in the 8 MS with the highest youth unemployment rates, was to mobilize ESF funds to target youth unemployment. Therefore, we may expect an increase in participations of young people at least in these MS (highlighted in the table below). As table 22 below shows, this increase in involvement is clearly visible in EL, IE, LT, but cannot be found in ES, IT, LV, PT, and SK. In fact, in ES the share of participations of young people has decreased since the start of the crisis. Similar to ES, also in FR, RO, and MT the recorded participation rates of young people has gone down since the crisis.

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<sup>70</sup> See for a detailed discussion of these figures ESF Thematic Evaluation on Access to Employment – Volume V.

<sup>71</sup>The data used in this section is based on the SFC database compiled by ESF Managing Authorities and concerns cumulative values for participants in the 2007-2013 period. Values refer to new entries, which may differ from the number of unique participants (individuals supported under several ESF interventions are counted more than once).

Table 22. Share of young people (15-24 years old) among total participations in ESF<sup>72</sup>

Country	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	
Austria	23,1%	26,9%	29,5%	31,0%	31,3%	30,5%	30,1%	29,8%	
Belgium	39,0%	34,7%	34,4%	34,2%	32,6%	33,1%	33,6%	31,5%	
Bulgaria		21,5%	26,2%	28,8%	27,7%	25,8%	27,4%	27,8%	
Cyprus	0,0%	0,0%	0,4%	10,6%	11,2%	11,7%	12,1%	11,8%	
Czech Republic			17,5%	20,2%	29,2%	27,8%	25,1%	26,9%	
Germany	77,7%	57,7%	53,8%	53,5%	51,7%	50,9%	50,2%	49,5%	
Denmark	42,1%	12,9%	13,9%	36,5%	41,8%	41,9%	37,2%	34,1%	
Estonia		13,4%	14,7%	16,9%	29,9%	35,2%	40,5%	41,1%	
Spain	25,1%	38,6%	34,9%	34,0%	33,5%	32,0%	31,5%	30,7%	
Finland	0,0%	14,4%	15,1%	15,9%	16,6%	17,3%	17,8%	18,3%	
France	31,8%	42,1%	40,2%	41,6%	39,8%	38,4%	36,6%	35,5%	
Greece		2,2%	0,9%	11,3%	17,4%	17,9%	22,8%	24,1%	
Croatia							9,3%	19,1%	
Hungary	1,2%	30,5%	38,1%	40,5%	39,9%	39,2%	38,9%	37,7%	
Italy	54,9%	28,8%	26,5%	26,0%	30,5%	30,4%	30,5%	30,5%	
Ireland	10,9%	12,9%	18,5%	21,3%	22,7%	24,7%	24,8%	26,1%	
Lithuania		45,3%	19,9%	15,7%	17,4%	20,2%	21,6%	23,0%	
Luxembourg		4,8%	15,6%	19,5%	19,0%	19,2%	19,5%	22,1%	
Latvia		7,7%	37,1%	30,4%	26,3%	24,8%	23,3%	22,9%	
Malta			33,8%	34,5%	34,4%	30,3%	27,8%	26,5%	
Netherlands	33,6%	33,2%	29,4%	31,5%	31,9%	34,0%	34,7%	36,1%	
Poland		37,1%	34,7%	34,9%	34,9%	35,0%	36,9%	36,5%	
Portugal		0,9%	7,7%	10,0%	11,1%	11,4%	12,0%	11,9%	
Romania		27,7%	34,9%	28,2%	27,0%	25,2%	23,6%	24,1%	
Sweden		21,5%	17,6%	16,0%	15,2%	15,6%	16,8%	17,2%	
Slovenia	0,0%	21,7%	18,4%	14,8%	24,0%	22,9%	20,1%	20,0%	
Slovakia		0,0%	9,5%	21,6%	24,8%	25,0%	24,7%	25,1%	
United Kingdom	55,5%	42,0%	33,6%	32,6%	32,7%	33,2%	33,4%	33,2%	
<b>EU</b>	<b>29,7%</b>	<b>34,5%</b>	<b>31,1%</b>	<b>30,7%</b>	<b>31,3%</b>	<b>30,8%</b>	<b>30,5%</b>	<b>30,4%</b>	

Source: author's analysis of AIRs 2007-2014

An important finding of the evaluation is therefore that despite the efforts at policy level, overall involvement in ESF 2007-2013 has not increased for young people as the crisis unfolded. Though exceptions are noted, in many MS the share of participations of young people has been reduced, to give more space for individuals between 25-54 years old (see chapter 4). Possibly, the ongoing preparations for the ESF 2014-2020 programming period, the subsequent planning for the Youth Employment Initiative and the implementation of Youth Guarantee reduced the need to adjust the Operational Programmes for ESF 2007-2013 for the last years of implementation. Another possible explanation is that MS focused on young persons in the 25-30 age group category.

## 8.4 Results of investments in young people

Throughout the entire ESF programming, interventions aimed at young people are diverse and supported a wide range of activities. In view of this diversity, an important distinction is between interventions that are designed to specifically target young people and those that are defined more broadly, but cater for the needs of young people as well. Often, indicators defined by MS do not distinguish results by age, and therefore do not

<sup>72</sup> Values are calculated on the basis of cumulative values to reduce possible single year distortions. This means that the value 2011 shows the share of participations of young people from 2007-2011 from the total number of participation in the same period. A similar analysis was conducted based on individual years, which shows comparable results. Please note that empty fields signify that no participants were recorded for that MS in that year(s), 0% means that there are participations reported, but none fits the category 15-24 years old.

allow the monitoring of the results of interventions for young people specifically at programme level. This is an important drawback in the existing monitoring systems, particularly in view of the priority placed on supporting young people through ESF since the onset of the global recession, which warrants due attention in the next programming period.

This analysis of results is therefore built on a more qualitative in-depth assessment conducted by the thematic ESF evaluations. Interventions under **Access to Employment** and **Social Inclusion** tend to emphasise low-skilled or otherwise disadvantaged young people who are at a distance from the labour market. In addition to young people unemployed or in the NEET group, different subgroups could be identified in some countries, e.g. young people with migration background (AT, FR), young people with learning difficulties and/or at risk of underachieving (NL, UK, CY) or young people leaving care or the State Protection System (e.g. in RO, UK). The thematic evaluations show that these interventions mostly focus on providing guidance, additional training, apprenticeship places and entry into vocational training opportunities, or removing other social barriers that prevent young people from participating in the labour market. Some of the specifically targeted interventions focus on outreach strategies through youth organisations to engage with those at a distance from institutional labour market structures. Other interventions focus on providing employment opportunities through subsidised work and employment incentives. From 2013 onwards, many of the interventions are inserted/included in the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plans, or are (being) reformed under the influence of the implementation of Youth Guarantee related policies.

In **Human Capital**, interventions included internships with employers, stipends for VET, acquisition of skills and competences, support for out-of-school activities, and the development of new learning programmes and curricula). The thematic evaluation on ESF investments in Human Capital shows that interventions aimed at early school leaving, transition to the labour market and the participation in higher education were particularly successful (see good practice in SE below). Less successful were activities to increase the quality of school education and improve the quality of vocational education and training.<sup>73</sup> For young learners in the initial stages of their human capital development, the attractiveness of the learning offer made a difference, including a combination of traditional classroom based and out-of-school activities, the inclusion of vocational training, the use of e-learning and the flexibility of learning delivery (including from home). This requires teaching staff trained and confident to use the new teaching approaches and tools. Well-integrated accompanying measures (including career advice and guidance) were also key, especially for young people at risk (such as early school leavers). Students in higher education were typically an already highly motivated group, hence for them the key to success was providing the support which met a real demand (scholarships for studies, international relevance and links with employers), as well as ensuring that the ESF delivery procedures are efficient and well managed.

**Effective intervention: "PLUG IN" (Sweden)**

Plug In is the biggest initiative ever in Sweden to support young people to complete secondary school with nearly 80 workshops in 47 local municipalities. The project is of significant size even at European level. A multi-level structure involving actors at national, regional, and local level with a wide geographic spread has enabled processes that promote long-term structural change.

Plug In is seen as a good example in that the project has contributed to development at local, regional, and national level. The development is in line with cohesion policy, and the project has contributed to structural change at local and regional level. A key success factor is that Plug In was designed to develop solutions for preventing early school leaving that was adapted to the local conditions of the relevant actor. A regional and national support structure has enabled local actors to develop successful activities that has ultimately been mainstreamed in organisational procedures.

- In total, nearly 80 methodology workshops in 47 local municipalities have been implemented. 4,168 men and 3,390 women (7,558 total) have participated in the

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<sup>73</sup> See Thematic Evaluation on Human Capital.

workshops.

- The workshops have mainly focused on people in grade 1 of secondary school, indicating a strong emphasis on preventive actions aimed at combating school dropout for students at risk of failure. The impact evaluation concludes that it has been difficult to follow up the results of such interventions at individual level.
- At organisational level, the theory-based impact evaluation concludes that new approaches have been developed at the local level, and that local authorities have been given increased opportunities to implement these approaches in their organisational processes. Knowledge regarding mechanisms for early school leaving has increased.
- At structural level, the evaluation concludes that cooperation within and between regions and local municipalities has increased. Structures for collaboration between the regions and actors at local level in terms of working with early school leavers have been developed.

While it is difficult to assess common **success factors** among this large variety of ESF interventions aimed at young people, the following could be identified:

- The provision of tailored, individualised assistance based on the needs of young people, covering both classroom based learning activities but also out-of-school activities and practical work experiences in the real working environment, is a crucial success factor. The evaluations show that some interventions that widened their target group (for instance under influence of the crisis) to include individuals facing very different challenges were less effective.
- Making use of the experience and knowledge of institutions working closely with young people was successful in reaching out to them.
- Interventions focusing on changing the working relationships between young people, educational institutions and employers contributed to achieving successful results.
- The combination of support provided for the acquisition of both formal qualifications recognised in the education and training system and the development of general competences and skills (such as how to apply for jobs) added significant value for young people.

## 9 Added Value at EU level

### Key Findings

- Considerable added value was generated by ESF 2007-2013 in terms of the volume of investments provided. ESF 2007-2013 provided a significant contribution to national employment and social policies in a majority of MS, particularly in newer MS.
- ESF 2007-2013 also provided added value by broadening the scope of existing national interventions. By making use of ESF interventions, MS were able to offer more tailored and intensive services to specific target groups such as people with disabilities, young people at risk of early school leaving, or persons with low qualifications.
- ESF 2007-2013 contributed to changing the role of public services, particularly in the fields of Human Capital and Promoting Partnerships. In these fields, ESF has been used to test and implement new and innovative activities, and provides Community Added Value (CAV) through the introduction of new ways of cooperation between various stakeholders.
- The evaluations show that ESF interventions had added value in terms of process effects, mainly in the field of Promoting Partnerships and Strengthening Institutional Capacity. Interventions in these fields contributed to the adoption of systemic reforms and administrative capacity building in public services, such as PES or educational institutions, mainly in CON regions.

### 9.1 Volume effects

The most visible aspects of EU added value (CAV) are the volume effects in providing the additional resources used to reach and increase participation numbers. These can be observed across the various ESF Priorities and different MS. Chapter 3 clearly shows the significance of ESF 2007-2013 in comparison to national funding in a majority of MS. In addition, in various MS and particularly in OPs in CON regions the share of ESF funding compared to spending on education is also substantial. The volume effects in RCE regions are overall smaller than in CON regions.

Across the 28 MS, 98.66 million participations have been registered in the various ESF funded interventions between 2007 and the end of 2014. This shows the significant reach (volume) of ESF investments. This is particularly the case in MS where the ESF investments are of high significance compared to national funding (e.g. in EL, RO and SK for labour market policies, or for PT, CZ, BG in the field of education). The same level and scale of participations and interventions would have not been achieved without the ESF. However, also in MS where the ESF investments are less significant in terms of budget, important volume effects can be observed in specific areas; the thematic evaluation on Human Capital investments found that particularly interventions clustered around school education, early school leaving, transition to the labour market, and targeting employed reached high volume effects.

Volume effects are of particular importance in the face of the impacts of the economic crisis during the ESF programming period. Indeed, national resources allocated to the interventions would have been lower in the absence of the ESF, especially in those MS with severe national budget restrictions following the crisis. This is confirmed by the country reports, which assessed the extent to which ESF had been used as additional funding to mainstream certain labour market policies into the MS context. As such, ESF offers the possibility to support the implementation of more structural reforms, within the framework of national reform programmes.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Article 4(1) of the ESF regulation 1081/2006.

Table 23. Additional volume to national resources<sup>75</sup>

	AT	BE	BG	CY	CZ	DE	DK	EE	EL	ES	FI	FR	HU	IE	IT	LT	LU	LV	MT	NL	PL	PT	RO	SE	SI	SK	UK
A2E	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓			✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
SI	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
HC	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Source: Country synthesis reports

## 9.2 Scope effects

The ESF can have a Community Added Value by broadening the scope of existing national interventions (scope effect). A mapping of the Human Capital interventions across 27 MS shows that ESF was able to reach to target groups that were initially not targeted with national support in half of the MS (BG, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FR, HU, IT, LT, LV, PL, PT, RO). Table 24 below shows that also under the other main Priorities, additional target groups were reached thanks to ESF funding.

Table 24. Additional target groups reached through ESF<sup>76</sup>

	AT	BE	BG	CY	CZ	DE	DK	EE	EL	ES	FI	FR	HU	IE	IT	LT	LU	LV	MT	NL	PL	PT	RO	SE	SI	SK	UK
A2E		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓			✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
SI	✓	✓				✓		✓	✓	✓					✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
HC			✓		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓			✓	

Source: Country synthesis reports

In addition to expanding the reach of support to new target groups, ESF also offered Community Added Value by strengthening or deepening the existing service offer for specific groups as well (for instance in CY, IT, DE, FR). The major scope effect of ESF has therefore been the ability to offer *more tailored* and intensive services to specific target groups, which would otherwise not have access to such services (new target groups) or which would only have access to mainstream services, such as counselling or training (existing target groups). For various target groups such mainstream services are not sufficient as these are not tailored to their specific, and often more intensive needs. Such target groups included:

- People with disabilities
- Inactive people
- Young people at risk of early school leaving
- Unemployed with low qualifications
- Employees on fixed or short term contracts
- Adults with lower levels of education

## 9.3 Role effects

The ESF has the potential to change the form and shape of social policies taken by MS, for instance by encouraging local, regional or national innovations in social policies. Through such innovations, ESF support can have a role effect, by mainstreaming these into the regular social policy toolkit of MS.

An in-depth assessment of ESF interventions shows that ESF has been used to test new and innovative activities in the field of labour market and inclusion policies in more than half of the MS. As the table below shows, in almost all MS, at least some innovative actions are supported by the ESF (the only exception is EL). However, it is insufficiently reported whether the mainstreaming of ESF funded actions into national policies takes place. Some successful interventions in the field of Access to Employment and Social Inclusion were taken over into mainstream policy, e.g. in Belgium, France, Spain, Italy and Sweden. However, role effects are most clearly visible in the field of education and training. In 25 MS, ESF investments were used to test and implement activities that were

<sup>75</sup> This table is based on an analysis in the thematic evaluations, which did not include HR.

<sup>76</sup> This table is based on an analysis of the thematic evaluations, which did not include HR.



new to the educational context (AT, BG, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, HU, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, PL, PT, RO, SE), e.g. the introduction of new ways of working between education system stakeholders, the development of pedagogical innovations in the curriculum and new ways for delivery of learning.

Table 25. *ESF used to test new and innovative activities*<sup>77</sup>

	AT	BE	BG	CY	CZ	DE	DK	EE	EL	ES	FI	FR	HU	IE	IT	LT	LU	LV	MT	NL	PL	PT	RO	SE	SI	SK	UK
A2E	√	√	√			√	√	√	√	√	√		√			√	√			√	√		√	√	√	√	√
SI	√	√	√	√	√	√		√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√		
HC	√		√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√		√	√		√	√		√			

Source: Country synthesis reports

#### 9.4 Process effects

CAV can also be expressed in terms of its lasting effects on processes in the MS, observed in terms of improved systems or methods or, for instance, in terms of improved co-operation between various public sector actors.

The various thematic evaluation reports show evidence of such process effects, for instance in the adoption of systemic reforms and administrative capacity building in public services, such as PES or educational institutions. Examples of such process effects are particularly found in CON regions where administrative reform was supported by the ESF. Various examples were found where the ESF contributed to administrative capacity building through encouraging educational providers and public authorities to work together to improve their planning and management methods, and increasing the monitoring and reporting discipline and transparency of delivery. In almost all MS, ESF interventions were used to improve the existing delivery systems and methods of the public actors involved.

Table 26. *ESF used to improve the delivery systems and methods*<sup>78</sup>

	AT	BE	BG	CY	CZ	DE	DK	EE	EL	ES	FI	FR	HU	IE	IT	LT	LU	LV	MT	NL	PL	PT	RO	SE	SI	SK	UK
A2E	√	√	√			√	√	√		√	√		√		√	√		√		√	√		√	√		√	
SI	√	√		√	√	√				√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√			√	√	√	
HC	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√			√	√

Source: Country synthesis reports

Secondly, the ESF provided CAV by supporting and extending the cooperation between various stakeholders, such as education providers and employers. In Estonia for instance, the ESF support improved the way some labour market services are offered to target groups, contributed to the establishment of new partnerships and strengthened the capacity of various organisations and institutions. In Spain as well, important process effects were noted in the administrations and organisations of the regional public services.

<sup>77</sup> This table is based on an analysis of the thematic evaluations, which did not include HR.

<sup>78</sup> This table is based on an analysis of the thematic evaluations, which did not include HR.



## 10 Socio-economic impact

### Key Findings

- The various evaluations conducted at MS and European level confirm the important role of ESF 2007-2013 in driving towards the EU2020 objectives for smart and sustainable growth and social and economic cohesion within and between MS. While the current evidence base does not allow the establishment of a direct link to broader macro-level impacts of ESF specifically, the generally positive results of ESF indicate the relevance of ESF 2007-2013 in limiting the negative effects of the crisis at the macro and micro level in most MS. Moreover, a broader ex-post synthesis evaluation of Cohesion Policy found a contribution to economic development and growth.
- The ESF 2007-2013 contributed to meso-level impacts through its focus on capacity building, systems development and partnership promotion, which are particularly relevant in CON regions. The ESF created valuable impacts at the meso-level, for instance by increasing the scope of mainstream social services in various MS.
- Given the ESF's primary focus on interventions for individuals, micro-level impacts created by the ESF 2007 have been central throughout the evaluation. First of all, a substantial share of the targeted populations have been reached with ESF 2007-2013. Among those that have been reached by the end of 2014 30.24 million individual positive results (such as obtained qualifications, secured employment, other results) have been achieved that can be linked back to 68.97 million participations. These numbers are likely to increase in the final year of implementation, and show the contribution and relevance of ESF towards improving social and economic cohesion in the EU, both between and within MS.

### 10.1 Macro-level

The ex-post synthesis for Cohesion Policy concludes that Cohesion Policy has contributed to jobs and macro-economic growth. Based on macro-economic models developed by that evaluation, it concludes that disparities in GDP per head and employment between regions narrowed over the programming period due to Cohesion Policy. Moreover, it points to a sustainable effect of Cohesion Policy long after the expenditure has come to an end, due to the combination of individual support and strengthening the productive potential of national economies.<sup>79</sup> When assessing the individual impacts of ESF at the macro-level, independently from other Cohesion Policy and Structural Fund Programmes, a similar direct influence on progress with regard to the challenges defined by the EU2020 objectives could not be established.<sup>80</sup> First of all, the volume of EU-level ESF investments in relation to national expenditures on education and training or social inclusion is relatively limited. Nevertheless, in the specific contexts of BG and PT, which allocated significant budgets to reducing early school leaving, clear impacts at national level can be observed. To disentangle the various factors that affect such indicators, a sophisticated macro modelling of such impacts would need to be further developed in the future. For this, ESF impacts need to be related to the development towards the EU2020 objectives for smart and sustainable growth, as listed below:

- The employment rate decreased in a majority of MS, amounting to a -1.1 percentage point decline across the EU between 2008 and 2014. The employment rate declined most significantly as a result of the crisis in MS such as EL and ES, while MS such as PL saw their employment rate increase. The employment rate decreased particularly in the early years of the crisis, particularly among men.
- Between 2008 and 2014, long-term and very long-term unemployment increased in a majority of MS. The exceptions are DE and PL. The differences between new and old MS are not substantial.

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<sup>79</sup> Ex-post synthesis evaluation of Cohesion policy programmes 2007-2013 financed by the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund, Work Package 1: Synthesis.

<sup>80</sup> Similarly, the ex-post evaluation of the ESF 2000-2006 period found little socio-economic impact at the macro level, see LSE et al (2010).

- The share of early school leavers decreased between 2008-2014 on average by 3.3 percentage points across the EU. On average, the old MS perform slightly better (4.2% decrease, against the average 2.2 reduction of ESL in newer MS).
- The levels of higher education attainment increased considerably across the entire EU, on average with 4.95% from 2008 to 2014.
- The share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion increased in 2008-2014, in particular in RCE regions and MS affected by the crisis. In the same period, in various CON regions – especially BG and RO – were successful in considerably lowering the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

To investigate the possible impact of the ESF on these macro-level indicators, variations on these indicators can be linked to the varying share of ESF in national contexts, for instance in comparison to the share of national ALMP investments or national spending on education. However, there is no convincing evidence that can link the share of ESF investments and labour market or educational results.

For educational outcomes, as for the impact on the employment rate, no significant correlations were found with the share of ESF investment. However, it needs to be borne in mind that such broad macro-level developments take time to materialise, and are influenced by a large number of other macro-level developments, such as productivity levels, wage level developments, and other key impacts secured over the long term. These are influenced by many factors other than the size of ESF investments. Moreover, the size of ESF investments in the field of education are small compared to the overall investments in education. On average, ESF investments in the field of education are only 1% of the national expenditure on national education and training.

In almost all MS, the crisis exerted a significant negative influence on the employment rate (the only exception is DE). There is insufficient evidence on the impact of ESF to evaluate the extent to which ESF has prevented potentially more negative effects. The thematic evaluation on Social Inclusion, however, does find a significant correlation between the national share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in MS and the share of ESF investment. This is made particularly clear by the reduction of poverty in various CON regions (especially BG and RO). This suggests that MS where ESF has been more significant in the national context made more progress in reducing the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion.<sup>81</sup>

Despite the fact that there is insufficient evidence to link ESF to wider EU-level impacts across the EU in the 2007-2013 period, considerable improvements were found in the thematic areas targeted by ESF: the rates of early school leaving decreased on average by 3 percentage points, higher education attainment rates increased by 4.95 percentage points and gender gaps in the key education and training indicators narrowed.<sup>82</sup> In addition, the expenditure on education and training and R&D increased, albeit minimally (by 0.2 percentage points). Impacts of interventions in the field of Strengthening Institutional Capacity can be found in an increase in the perception of the quality of governance, which in fact increased between 2007 and 2014 in ten out of the fourteen MS (the four exceptions were EL, HU, MT, UK).<sup>83</sup>

## 10.2 Meso-level

Impacts of ESF programming at the intermediate level are mostly found in the interventions that contributed to capacity building, systems and partnerships (taking place in Promoting Partnerships and Institutional Capacity). However, system-level improvements can also be found under Human Capital or Access to Employment investments. Particularly in CON regions, interventions have been implemented that contribute to the modernisation and strengthening of public services (such as PES and other labour market institutions for active labour market actions, but also for instance in the field of education). Training of public servants worked as a catalyst for bringing about

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<sup>81</sup> It is important to note that this correlation does not imply causality, as many factors other than ESF investment had an impact in explaining the evolution of the risk of poverty in MS.

<sup>82</sup> See ESF Thematic evaluation on Human Capital

<sup>83</sup> See Thematic Evaluation on Strengthening Institutional Capacity.

more structural reforms. This included practical improvements in terms of (IT-) infrastructure, but also broader impacts achieved by the development and maintenance of partnerships and networks of actors capable of delivering holistic interventions at the local level, in order to increase the quality and the effectiveness of public services.

In terms of meso-level impacts, ESF first of all increased the scope of mainstream social services. Especially in the CON regions, the limited national budgets for key education, training and employment institutions in the MS were supplemented by the ESF. This increased the scope of public investments for people affected by the crisis and as such contributed to an important impact at the meso-level. The ESF also contributed to the testing and implementing of innovative approaches across the EU and across the various priorities. It provided financing to the development of pilot projects, and as such contributed to structurally innovating the modes, practices, tools and methods of service delivery, for active labour market policies, social inclusion or approaches in education. Another important role the various partnership approaches under ESF consisted of bringing people together through 'mutual learning actions'. This contributes to the effectiveness and efficiency of organizations and institutions. Actions aimed to 'increase of capacity for partnerships' build up the conditions for these impacts at the meso-level.

In the field of education for instance, ESF investments supported reforms to increase the participation in education and training, improve the quality of education and training systems and change some of education delivery mechanisms, to address the particular human capital needs of certain target groups and react adequately to the challenges posed by the economic crisis.

SIC thematic evaluation found concrete examples of the ESF's contribution to administrative capacity building in some specific areas:

- it helped to reduce the length of judicial proceedings in CZ, PL and SI, while for BG one intervention failed due to lack of interest from project promoters;
- it supported expansion of the number of services offered via e-government in SI, BG, PL and CZ, and reduction of the administrative burden for companies in SI, PL and LT; and
- in Poland, it helped fund simplifications to 92 legal acts and the creation of one stop shops for start-ups, raised the quality of tax administration services and equipped the judiciary with skills for dealing with economic cases.

The support for developing partnerships creates impacts through a 'partnership ecosystem'. From the qualitative information collected by experts, valuable impacts at the meso-level have been reported, such as:

- The implementation of innovative measures within the mainstream ALMP (AT).
- In Finland partnerships were considered highly important for the success of their projects; without partnerships and networks the projects could not have been delivered.<sup>84</sup>
- The implementation of occupational training actions, organization of workshops, apprenticeships, seminars, fora and other events (ES).
- Partnership promotion activities have had the effect of improving the capabilities of agents and of promoting mutual learning. The implemented actions have provided the opportunity to put into practice new joint services, methodologies, tools and products (ES), transfer and adaptation of know-how from abroad (CZ), exchange of good practices, learning, local innovation opportunities, both at institutional and partners level, and the involved MA benefited from the availability of tools, instruments, technical solutions designed and produced through cooperation and networking with other relevant agents (IT).
- Geographical mobility interventions, supported by transnational and transregional networks, have contributed to developing the skills and competences of participants (students and teachers) in foreign languages and other professional areas.
- Improvement of NGOs capacities and work (SI).

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<sup>84</sup> According to project coordinators, in the national Spring 2012 Evaluation of ESF (quoted in AIR 2012).

- The awareness of the importance of NGOs' work has been raised and enhanced, as well as its visibility in the society (SI).

These impacts at the meso-level illustrate how ESF contributed to social and economic cohesion within but also between MS.

### 10.3 Micro-level

The thematic ESF evaluations find important achievements of ESF in increasing employability, improving qualifications and securing employment outcomes at the level of individual participants (micro-level). These were achieved both across all MSs and in the diverse interventions across the ESF Priorities. The socio-economic impacts are most pronounced at the micro-level.

To assess such impacts, this section first explores the reach of ESF throughout the 2007-2013 programme period to the targeted populations. Significant numbers of the (long-term) unemployed, people in education, aged 15-24, aged 55-64, with a disability or with a migrant background were targeted and participated in ESF interventions. Table 27 below summarises how the number of participations in ESF interventions in MS relate to the respective estimated populations of these target groups in MS, and at the EU level. When interpreting the figures presented it is important to emphasise again that every *participation* in an ESF intervention does not necessarily refer to one unique *participant*. The same individuals can participate in multiple interventions, and are counted as multiple participations. This is particularly the case in CZ and EE (see table 27 below), where the number of participations of young people (aged 15-24) is considerably higher than the total number of young people in these countries (119% and 139% respectively). Due to a number of interventions in CZ that target primary schools and count all pupils in these schools as participations, the number of participations in comparison to the total population of pupils and students in education is even higher, at 211%. This also means that care should be taken in interpreting the other figures in the table below, which may be lower percentages but may equally present multiple counts of individual participants.

Table 27. Share of participations in comparison to total target populations

	Budget Significance <sup>85</sup>	Unemployed (<12 months)	LT unemployed (>12 months)	In Education	Aged 15-24	Aged 55-64	Disabled	Migrants
<b>EU28</b>		<b>18%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>17%</b>
AT	Low	9%	20%	2%	14%	4%	8%	31%
BE	Med.	40%	52%	5%	24%	2%	3%	14%
BG	High	11%	5%	74%	46%	8%	5%	5%
CY	Med.	5%	7%	0%	2%	2%	0%	64%
CZ	High	16%	38%	211%	119%	11%	99%	14%
DE	Med.	6%	14%	6%	21%	2%	1%	2%
DK	Low	0%	1%	1%	3%	1%	0%	2%
EE	Med.	26%	48%	89%	139%	34%	8%	8%
EL	High	15%	8%	44%	47%	7%	5%	29%
ES	Med.	28%	12%	11%	49%	13%	6%	15%
FI	Low	5%	11%	3%	8%	4%	1%	7%
FR	Med.	17%	30%	2%	17%	2%	3%	0%
HR	High	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	4%	5%
HU	Med.	17%	18%	66%	85%	17%	2%	6%
IE	Low	28%	16%	9%	29%	14%	6%	6%
IT	Med.	14%	4%	26%	27%	5%	1%	4%
LT	Med.	19%	29%	17%	30%	17%	10%	0%
LU	Low	6%	4%	3%	7%	1%	6%	0%
LV	High	31%	66%	17%	36%	24%	2%	9%
MT	High	35%	42%	6%	29%	10%	5%	31%
NL	Low	3%	6%	1%	16%	3%	30%	2%
PL	High	15%	22%	22%	34%	5%	1%	6%

<sup>85</sup> Based on categorisation developed in chapter 3, in which MS were categorised on their relative importance of the ESF budgets in comparison to a national budgetary benchmark.

	<b>Budget Significance</b> 85	<b>Unemployed (&lt;12 months)</b>	<b>LT unemployed (&gt;12 months)</b>	<b>In Education</b>	<b>Aged 15-24</b>	<b>Aged 55-64</b>	<b>Disabled</b>	<b>Migrants</b>
PT	High	66%	54%	9%	53%	20%	0%	1%
RO	High	6%	8%	3%	7%	2%	5%	12%
SE	Low	0%	9%	0%	4%	3%	16%	8%
SI	High	35%	36%	15%	36%	18%	9%	4%
SK	High	75%	46%	10%	41%	19%	6%	3%
UK	Med.	15%	34%	1%	16%	4%	8%	14%

Source: Eurostat, combined with AIR 2014 data on Annex XXIII<sup>86</sup>.

The table confirms that the highest population coverage rates are also reached in MS where the ESF has the highest budgetary importance (summarised in the first column). A notable exception is the low coverage rate in HR despite the high investment. This is related to the fact that its programme is still running, and many participations could not be included in the evaluation (see also chapter 5). HR only completed the accession procedure in July 2013, and before that used the Instrument of Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). In AT, where the ESF investments are relatively low in the national context, the share of participations of migrants is equal to a third of the migrant, which is considerable. The table also shows differences in policy choices made for target groups between MS. CY for instance targeted a large share of its migrant population with ESF interventions, while hardly covering individuals in education or aged 15-24 / 55-64 years old. Another interesting case is PT. While the previous chapters have confirmed its primary focus on delivering education and training through ESF, this figure shows clearly that these efforts are not targeted at its student population that is already in education (participations equal 9% of this group), but rather at (long-term) unemployed (participations equal 66% / LTU 54% of these groups) and / or young people (53%). These figures show very substantial coverage rates of the entire population, thus underlying the importance of ESF in this context.

In ESF Priorities Human Capital, Access to Employment and Social Inclusion, by the end of 2014, a total of 30.24 million positive individual results have been achieved that can be linked back to approximately 68.97 million participations.<sup>87</sup> These numbers are likely to increase in the last year of implementation. These aggregated result figures refer to positive individual results, such as obtaining employment or a qualification, or other positive results. This corresponds to 44% of the total participations and should be seen as a minimum number, as a considerable number of result indicators could not be aggregated. In addition, in some cases it is possible that participants left the ESF intervention without obtaining positive results in the short term but may do so in the longer term. The results measured at the end of 2014 are likely to increase in the subsequent two years. This is because participants who started prior to 2014 (and are already counted in the reported participation figures) will complete the ESF activities and are likely to achieve a number of positive results in the future. Thirdly, the ESF evaluation (particularly the in-depth analyses of the thematic evaluations) found some indications of soft results as well on pathway to education and employment. However, due to the nature of such activities and results, the level of measurement is relatively limited, which does not allow the estimation of the significance of the impact of interventions in terms of soft results.

At the micro level of individual participants, significant achievements in the development of individuals' situation in the labour market were observed both across MS and the

<sup>86</sup> The size of the population was estimated based on the Eurostat data for the years 2007-2014 and compared against participations. To account for the natural in-/outflow of individuals in the official statistics, the average population size throughout the period was estimated. This estimation is based on: Unemployed <12 months (Eurostat: [une\_nb\_m] minus [une\_ltu\_a]), on average group changes yearly. LTU (Eurostat: [une\_ltu\_a], on average group changes every 2 years. In education (Eurostat: [tps00051], on average group changes every 10 years, age groups (Eurostat: [demo\_pjangroup]), on average group changes every 10 years. Disabled (Eurostat: [hlth\_dpeh005]), on average group changes every 50 years. Migrants (Eurostat: [migr\_pop2ctz]), on average group changes every 50 years.

<sup>87</sup> Not all participations could be linked to individual results. Therefore, the 75 million participations are lower than the total 98.66 million participations.

individual interventions. This directly contributes to the EU objectives on economic and social cohesion. The available evidence data collected in this evaluation shows that between 4% and 70% of participant outcomes in the labour market were sustained at the six-month point, with an average of 33%. In comparison to general ALMP results across the EU, this figure is reasonable, and comes with pronounced socio-economic impacts at the individual level.

Also in terms of qualifications achieved, considerable impacts could be observed. Over 8.7 million qualifications were gained with ESF support, which enabled unemployed participants to improve their chances of obtaining employment, while it offered employed participants the possibility to improve their position on the labour market. ESF also contributed to substantial socio-economic impacts at the micro-level without necessarily providing a qualification. Particularly in the CON regions, ESF contributed structurally to the education sector, and as such contributed to positive results among large numbers of students / pupils in education. On average in the entire EU, 21% of students at ISCED level 4 were reached, followed by 8% of students at ISCED level 3, 6% of students at ISCED levels 1 and 2 and 6% of students at ISCED levels 5 and 6.<sup>88</sup>

Impacts at the individual level also go beyond directly obtained employment and qualifications. Due to interventions in the field of Promoting Partnerships, established networks for collaboration between secondary vocational schools and potential employers have proven beneficial for students who gain better chances to find job opportunities since the training provided puts them in a better position to meet employers' needs and requirements (CZ). Another example found by the thematic evaluation is geographical mobility interventions supported by transnational and transregional networks, which contributed to developing skills and competences of participants (students and teachers) in foreign languages and in other professional areas (IT).

The diversity of socio-economic impacts at the micro level is illustrative of the contribution of ESF 2007-2013 to the overall objectives of EU 2020 on smart sustainable growth, and its contribution to social and economic cohesion across the EU.

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<sup>88</sup>Derived from calculations based on Eurostat data. See ESF Thematic evaluation on Human Capital



## 11 Key lessons learned

### Key Findings

- **Policy choices:** It is recommended to continue aligning ESF with EU and national policies, and concentrating budgets where the largest community added value can be obtained. The appropriate balance should be sought between new and existing activities, while ensuring sufficient flexibility in programming to respond to external shocks and the implementation challenges.
- **Target groups:** The results of the evaluation point to the need to increase support for disadvantaged groups, and target ESF interventions on specific target groups. This requires an improved understanding of the needs of specific target groups while planning interventions, and requires the promotion of customisation of interventions to meet the needs of specific target groups (targeted intervention proved to be most effective). There is a continuing need to focus on young, older people, and balanced representation between men and women.
- **Appropriate programming:** The objectives for the different policy priorities should be defined in a more robust and clearly demarcated way, sufficiently supported by clear and measurable targets. This would be helped by a common target setting methodology between MS, applying evidence-based programming, which engages stakeholders / partners in programme planning. In addition, more attention is required for the sustainability of programming, gender sensitivity, and inter-programme coordination.
- **Programme implementation:** It is recommended that monitoring tools for measuring programme performance are improved to reduce delays in implementation, and additional use is made of technologies and e-learning in ESF delivery. Social partners should be more involved in the design and implementation of the programme in order to improve programme implementation. Programmes should detect good practices in successful programme and project implementation and share these with a wider world.
- **Robustness of monitoring systems:** To improve robustness of the overall programme, ESF should aim for higher standardisation of programme indicators across OPs and MS, and require consistent and reliable data reporting in SFC, while longitudinal data for participations can be improved to measure effects over time. Data and target setting should be set at individual intervention level. Result indicators could be improved, better reflecting the expected change to be made by a specific intervention.
- **Robustness of evaluation systems:** It is recommended to reintroduce the concept of “final evaluation” at OP level, providing timely inputs to the ex post evaluation. Evaluations would further benefit by linking the data on ESF participations with administrative data, and including the qualitative aspects of efficiency, in order to draw lessons for improving the efficiency of the programme. Evaluations could also broaden their scope beyond employment and education by focusing on improved measurement and capture of soft results from ESF interventions like skills developed and empowerment (that play a role in the pathway to employment / education / social inclusion). There is a need to improve the robustness of the evaluations undertaken, and to further promote the use of counterfactual approaches in future programming periods. To allow cross-country and thematic analysis, evaluations could be further harmonised across OPs and MS. Finally, it is recommended to start exploring data and evaluation needs for the 2014-2020 ex post evaluation as early as possible. The Commission should continue working on the improvement of evaluation practice in the field of ESF in dialogue with the MS and the community of evaluation experts, facilitating peer learning and research.

### 11.1 Key lessons in terms of policy choices

#### ***Lesson 1: Continue to align ESF with EU and national policies***

Overall, the evidence collected for the period 2007-2013 shows the importance of ESF as an instrument to support national and EU priorities. Chapter 2 shows that ESF programming and CSR are closely aligned, which underlines the relevance of the ESF

2007-2013 for the main European policy priorities. The majority of OPs had a good evidence base for their ESF strategy, building on a number of sources. The ESF has also provided the necessary flexibility to adjust the initial policy choices to respond to emerging needs (such as in the crisis context) and new CSR, and to take into account the lessons learnt from the initial phase of implementation (see section 2.4).

The results of the evaluation underline the importance for programming to take the political and socio economic context into account. The Human Capital evaluation shows that the higher education interventions were more successful when linked to the relevant national reforms, while vocational apprenticeships tend to be less popular with employers unwilling to hire long-term apprentices in the economic crisis. In the field of Access to Employment, faced with increased unemployment during the economic crisis, the focus of ALMP shifted to short term unemployed. This provided the opportunity for ESF to support the most disadvantaged groups, like the long term unemployed and other disadvantaged groups which fell outside the focus of mainstream ALMP. Also interventions that aim at Strengthening Institutional Capacity are most effective when there is political backing and support, and the suggestion was made that the provision of ESF financial support for capacity building development should be conditional on proven commitment and capacity in the institutional and political context.

This close alignment should be continued. In the new programming period for 2014-2020, the Commission ensured this alignment by steering MS to be consistent with priorities established in the context of the European Semester, taking into account the National Reform Programmes and the most recent relevant country-specific recommendations, as well as the relevant Council recommendations based on the Stability and Growth Pact and the economic adjustment programmes.

### ***Lesson 2: Concentrate budgets on areas showing the largest community added value***

Different policy choices have been made by MS, first of all shown by significant differences between regions with CON and RCE objectives (see chapter 3 on budget allocation towards policy priorities per MS). The focus of OPs in CON regions tends to be more on mainstream actions, where it also constitutes a larger part of overall active labour market, education and social inclusion policies funding compared to OPs in RCE regions (see chapter 9 on Community Added Value). The latter sometimes use their limited budgets for more innovative interventions, or for targeting groups that would otherwise not be reached, thus complementing national policies. ESF contributes to strengthening the capacity of institutions, as well governance in CON regions. As a result, ESF more often generates volume effects ('do more of the same') and process effects ('improve systems and structures') in CON regions. In RCE regions, ESF OPs focus more on scope effects ('addressing specific target groups'), and role effects ('test new innovative tools'). Nevertheless, most MS and OP address a combination of these effects (especially those in CON regions), while OPs in RCE regions generally focus more on one or two types of effects.

The Community added value of ESF depends greatly on the stage of transition towards convergence that regions are in, and is further influenced by the scale of the ESF budget. MS and regions that receive a smaller share of ESF should concentrate ESF on a limited number of priorities and interventions, ensuring sufficient Community added value. This has already been reflected in the Common Provisions Regulation and the ESF Regulation of the new programming period, addressing some relevant features to ensure that sufficient budget is focused on the most relevant challenges (asking that the largest share of ESF budget is allocated to the five largest IP in an OP; and ensuring there is sufficient budget allocated to social inclusion on MS level, minimum 20%). On top of that, the CPR requires that a minimum share of Cohesion policy funding should be allocated to ESF, in order to reverse the negative trend of decreasing share of EU resources allocated by MS on employment, human capital development, and social policies.



### ***Lesson 3: Find an appropriate balance between supporting new and existing activities***

The thematic evaluations of Human Capital and Access to Employment indicate that the balance between supporting new and existing activities needs to be maintained carefully (addressing the role effects), echoing one of the conclusions already made in the ESF ex post evaluation for the 2000-2006 period. This evaluation stated that, in the long run, ESF funding is most effective if it is spent on new or improved measures, which may then go on to improve mainstream policy. Any policy choice in favour of a well-established ALMP, education and social policy provision should therefore not ignore the very important role of the ESF investment in fostering innovation in the delivery of ALMP, education and social policies.<sup>89</sup>

The policy choices should therefore continue to provide space for the development of new approaches, methodologies, tools and processes. That said, when new activities are supported, sufficient time is needed to set them up appropriately before they can deliver products and services to participants. Their targets therefore need to be realistic, yet appropriately ambitious. Focusing on innovation and the development of new approaches, methodologies, tools and processes also address the need for stimulating partnerships and networking on local, regional, national and European levels, sharing experiences and transferring good practices (see thematic evaluation on Promoting Partnerships).

### ***Lesson 4: Allow sufficiently flexibility in programming***

ESF investments were implemented with a degree of flexibility, which allowed a more effective response to external shocks and implementation challenges. This flexibility allowed OPs to react to changing socio-economic contexts by adjusting the target groups and / or activities.

Conscious changes in funding and flexible modifications (but not deviating from the main policy orientation) should be made in the ESF interventions following changes in the external environment, and the issues generated by these changes. It is important to pursue a well-balanced, stable policy direction with flexible (and documented) modifications, if needed. The Regulation for the programming period 2014-2020 clearly continues this line of reasoning, providing this flexibility for adjustment to changing circumstance within ESF programming. Consequently, provisions should be made for procedures that allow for the amendment of those non-essential elements at national level without a formal decision by the Commission.

In many cases, the OPs had a range of broad priorities, and more narrowly defined sub-priorities which enabled the programming flexibility in terms of the design of calls for proposals. On the other hand, there are cases where the OP architecture and PA are too broad in terms of objectives, types of interventions and target groups addressed. This is associated with the lack of a strong intervention logic setting the direction of change by linking objectives, supported interventions, target groups and programme output and result indicators. In these cases, the objectives for the different priorities could be defined in a more robust way and supported by clear and measurable targets. The Common Provisions Regulation for the programming period 2014-2020 addresses the importance of having an adequate intervention logic, pointing to the need to specify how the selected investment priorities and specific objectives are likely to lead to the achievement of the expected changes.

For future programmes, authorities need to reflect whether the choice of and focus on particular target groups in ESF investments continues to be appropriate in the medium and long term (and needs careful monitoring over the programming period and the adjustment of programmes when necessary). The more general lesson is the need to support the development of a framework for the implementation of ESF investment that promotes the customisation of interventions to the needs of specific target groups.

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<sup>89</sup> see Volume 1 of the thematic evaluation on Human Capital, section 4.7

## 11.2 Key lessons in terms of target groups

### ***Lesson 5: Ensure that the appropriate target groups receive the appropriate amount of ESF support, in particular the most disadvantaged***

The thematic evaluations concluded that the ESF 2007-2013 generally supported the intended target groups to the right extent, in line with the needs and challenges experienced by individuals in the labour market, in education and from a social perspective. OPs receiving a large amount of ESF budget generally address a wide range of target groups (including both the traditional groups and marginalised groups), while OPs that receive a smaller share of the budget often use the limited funds to target those who do not benefit so much from mainstream policy, for example migrants and the long-term sick (as concluded in Volume 1 of the ex post evaluation of Access to Employment). Nevertheless, the analysis of participation data shows some gaps (see chapter 4):

- Although the share of employed, unemployed, and inactive were balanced at the end of 2014, the relative share of the unemployed among total participations decreased over the years (despite the increasing attention to this target group as a result of the financial and economic crisis).<sup>90</sup>
- The relative share of the inactive in education and training and the long term unemployed decreased over the programming period, while the relative share of self-employed is more or less stable over the period (with a slight decrease in the last years).<sup>91</sup>
- The relative share of migrants, minorities and the disabled decreased over the programming period, and especially migrants. This is contrary to the ambition of different ESF programmes to focus ESF support on people with disadvantaged backgrounds. However it is important to note that these target groups are generally underreported due to differences in the classification of individuals between MS and interventions; reluctance or restrictions under national data protection legislation to monitor groups such as migrants and ethnic minorities, and the classification of individuals as 'unemployed' or 'inactive' without further monitoring for 'disadvantaged' characteristics.

The lesson learned is that continued attention should be given to the disadvantaged groups by ensuring that:

- Disadvantaged target groups should be sufficiently addressed by ESF programming and targets for interventions. The in-depth evaluation of interventions in the thematic evaluations points to the difficulties in reaching out to the most disadvantaged groups, and the evaluations argue in favour of improved mobilisation / outreach strategies for these groups. Despite this challenge, thematic evaluations also report that ESF in some MS is relatively successful in reaching out marginalised groups and provides an "individual centred approach" not included in the mainstream social inclusion, education and employment programmes and interventions.
- The intervention should match the real needs of target groups, differentiating customised approaches between young people and adults, motivated and unmotivated participants, and individuals with different levels of competences and (work) experience.
- Participation data for disadvantaged groups could be collected in a more comprehensive and consistent manner by better demarcating / defining the groups that are considered disadvantaged, allowing a finer grain of analysis of performance by disadvantaged characteristics, and also allowing a better analysis in the future of

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<sup>90</sup> One should be careful with drawing conclusions on the relative share of certain target groups in the early years of the programme. Especially in 2007 and 2008, programmes are starting up, some target groups are better addressed than others because some (large) projects are launched earlier than others (such as for Public Employment Services addressing the unemployed, versus projects focussing on employers, addressing the employed). This misbalance will be correct over the years.

<sup>91</sup> There is no overarching explanation for this declining trend, but a few OPs report that they refocused their programmes from the most disadvantaged groups towards people who had recently become unemployed or faced the risks of unemployment as a result of the economic crisis.

what types of interventions work well for individuals with particular characteristics. Currently, the level of detail in the definition of target groups varies across countries, hampering comparisons. The thematic evaluation of social inclusion concludes that some groups can be considered as a separate target group by some OPs, while other OPs refer to a broader category of 'social excluded/disadvantaged individuals' which may encompass different subgroups.

### ***Lesson 6: Continue to focus on young and older people***

The employment situation of young people is often addressed in CSR and young people are one of the most mentioned target groups in the CSR. In response to the CSR, youth employment has indeed been high the policy agenda in most MS and a broad range of measures were adopted by MS over the 2007-2013 period to improve prospects for youth. Young people were among the most frequently addressed target groups in the different ESF priorities related to Human Capital, Access to Employment, and Social Inclusion, with a total of 30.1 million participations registered in ESF 2007-2013, equalling 30.5% of all participations. Moreover, the percentage of young people is probably even higher given the narrow definition of the European Commission of young people as under 25 years old (while the definition differs in the different MS). However, the increased policy attention at EU level on youth unemployment and the introduction of various specific youth employment policies between 2010-2013 has not directly translated into an increase in participation by young people in the second half of the ESF programming period. In fact, with some exceptions, various MS reduced the share of young people participating after the start of the crisis, giving more space to individuals between 25 and 54 years of age. Nevertheless, as concluded in the Access to Employment thematic evaluation (Volume 1), in a number of MS, ESF has been putting more emphasis on young people than the mainstream national ALMPs.

The share of participants aged 55-64 has been stable over the years (6.2% in 2014), but seems comparatively small when taking into account the increasing attention to active ageing in the context of rising retirement age and the reduction of incentives for early retirement (see chapter 2). There is also an indication that the group of older people is most probably underrepresented since definitions vary as well per MS. The thematic evaluation of ESF support to Human Capital concludes that the needs of older workers were not met well while the thematic evaluation of ESF support to Access to Employment indicates that interventions specially dealing with active ageing are quite limited, in comparison to the need expressed in many CSR to prolong working life longer in the context of the rising retirement age.

The lesson is that the ESF should continue investing in the young people and older workers. More information should also be collected on the result of interventions addressing these target groups. This has already been reflected in the Common Provisions Regulation and the ESF Regulation of the new programming period identifying specific Investment Priorities addressing young people (IP 8.II: Sustainable integration into the labour market of young people, in particular those not in employment, education or training, including young people at risk of social exclusion and young people from marginalised communities, including through the implementation of the Youth Guarantee) and older people (IP 8.vi: active and healthy ageing) having detailed information on financial performance and outputs and results.

### ***Lesson 7: Continue to focus on a balanced representation between men and women***

Although male and female participation in ESF 2007-2013 has been balanced overall, there are some clusters of interventions that need to improve the gender balance (as identified in the thematic evaluations for Access to Employment, Human Capital, and Social Inclusion). Few interventions were identified that focus on improving women's overall position in the labour market, getting women into better jobs, promoting female entrepreneurship, and changing employer behaviours with respect to the recruitment and promotion of women in their workforces (see also Volume I, Access to Employment thematic evaluation). Moreover, the thematic evaluation on ESF support to Human Capital indicated that only around one fifth of the interventions assessed in-depth took into account gender issues in the implementation and delivery of activities (see Volume 1, Human Capital Evaluation).

### ***Lesson 8: Targeted interventions prevail over the more general interventions***

The thematic evaluations report more positive effects for interventions that target their activities on a clearly defined target group (see Volume 1 of the Access to Employment and Social Inclusion thematic evaluations), compared to those having a wider focus (especially for the interventions addressing disadvantaged groups and those facing multiple challenges). Moreover, the thematic evaluation on Human Capital indicates that successful interventions are those that meet a real demand (especially for those who are already motivated) and address a clear gap in the labour market. Good practices identified address the need for a clear understanding of the characteristics and needs of proposed target groups in the design of interventions.

### **11.3 Key lessons in terms of the appropriate programming**

#### ***Lesson 9: Improve evidence based programming***

The three thematic evaluations report that the use of evidence-based programming has been uneven across MS. The thematic evaluations indicate that some interventions were funded without a prior appraisal of their anticipated effectiveness or considerations of similar experiences in the past (whereas the programme as a whole was subject to a careful ex-ante evaluation).

There is scope for even more evidence-based programming, selecting particular activities on evidence of their past effectiveness or ex-ante assessment of potential impacts.

#### ***Lesson 10: Continue effort for shared programming involving relevant stakeholders***

The thematic evaluations show (see Volume 1 of Human Capital thematic evaluation) that shared programming involving all the relevant stakeholders, such as social partners, enterprises, universities, research bodies and other stakeholders, can increase the commitment of stakeholders to ensuring effective programming and subsequently effective implementation. Significant stakeholder support for the choices and the implementation of the interventions is very important for their success. This is particularly important when ESF support is given to the new types of activities and experimentation for innovation where the quality of the partners can make or break the activity. Also, the thematic evaluation of Strengthening Institutional Capacity concludes that the motivation of beneficiaries is a key factor for success of a programme. Involvement of beneficiaries in the preparation of programmes may be effective to increase this motivation. Other ways to do this can be to provide concrete support to project managers in the form of training or mutual learning events.

#### ***Lesson 11: Clearly demarcate Priority Axes and sub-priorities***

While most OPs had a broad range of PAs and more narrowly defined sub-priorities which could be related to the main ESF Priorities set out in the Regulations, sometimes the OPs included different types of interventions/activities corresponding to multiple ESF Priorities (e.g. Access to Employment and Social Inclusion) within the same PAs. This issue was already flagged up in the 2000-2006 programming period<sup>92</sup>, where it was mentioned that it can increase the flexibility of the programme, but decreases the clarity and focus of objectives at the programmatic level. The thematic evaluations on ESF support to Social Inclusion and Access to Employment suggested that the future programming should consider allowing for the specific identification of interventions for disadvantaged groups, either through their positioning within discrete PAs or by issuing markers which clearly identify activities with a specific focus on disadvantaged groups. This also allows a better monitoring of the programmes.

The ESF 2014-2020 already reflects this lesson learned by introducing Investment Priorities related to more specific thematic priorities (for which budget and output

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<sup>92</sup> LSE Enterprise Ltd and others, Final Report for the Ex Post Evaluation of the European Social Fund (2000-2006), 2010.

indicators are identified), including specific objectives (for which result indicators are defined as well).

### ***Lesson 12: Better align output and result indicators with programme objectives***

The thematic evaluations show that outputs and result indicators were not always clearly aligned with objectives of the PA. Therefore, the objectives for the different priorities could be defined in a more robust way (and clearly demarcated) and supported by clear and measurable targets. This is already the case for ESF in the 2014-2020 programming period, which uses investment priorities and specific objectives that are more clearly linked to output and result indicators capturing the change anticipated.

### ***Lesson 13: the need for a common target setting methodology***

The evaluation teaches us that a number of ESF interventions are supported in the absence of targets set for the achievement of outputs and, even more importantly, results (see Chapter 4.1, discussing the data limitations). Often the targets were set to measure what was easily measurable, rather than to measure the progress achieved in reducing the problem and measuring the ESF contribution to the reduction of the problem. Moreover, baselines are in many cases not filled in or received a zero value, and the link between baselines and target are not sufficiently made. In cases where targets were set, programmes report a relatively large number of indicators that significantly over- or under-report targets, raising questions about whether the targets set are realistic. This is partly due to unrealistic target setting at the beginning of the programme, or not adjusting targets when programme changes are made during the programming period. Every programme has defined its own targets (based on their own target setting methodology) making it difficult to compare target achievement across OPs.

A key lesson from this evaluation is the need for a common target setting methodology at EU level (including the definitions, procedures and the desired types of targets) to ensure the targets are set in a comparable and appropriate way across OPs and MS, allowing benchmarking, but also to support better monitoring of target achievement and the need to embrace mechanisms to adjust targets mid-way. For the 2014-2020 programming period, important steps were taken with the introduction of standard unit costs and simplified cost options, and requirements for a more robust methodology for calculating unit costs and setting evidence based baselines (that was subsequently verified by the EC and guidance was provided). The experience with the use and take up of standard unit costs in the 2014-2020 programme period should be closely monitored, to draw lessons for the future. Moreover, the performance of programmes in terms of target achievement is carefully monitored in the new programme period as well as spotting under and over performance at an early stage (setting milestone targets in the performance framework).

### ***Lesson 14: Address sufficient attention to gender sensitivity***

Evidence was found that not always sufficient attention is given to gender sensitivity during project development, and that this remains an area for attention in future programming (emphasized in the thematic evaluation on Social Inclusion, Volume III report). The European Commission and MS could consider the (continued) provision of specific information and training on gender mainstreaming to intermediary bodies and project promoters in future programming rounds. However, such a focus on gender mainstreaming should not merely replace specific gender equality actions as this evaluation found in a number of cases. Instead, gender equality actions should be complemented by mainstreaming, which could include the dissemination of guidance materials and assessment approaches to help ensure that providers explicitly consider gender issues in the context of the experience of disadvantage at the individual level.

### ***Lesson 15: Balance between large and small projects***

Implementation choices were also made between a limited number of large-scale national projects and a larger number of smaller projects. The large-scale national projects benefit from the concentration of existing expertise, usually across a wide range of involved institutions. Additionally, these have sufficient scale and duration to support

thorough and evidence-based development of actions, testing/ piloting and subsequent adjustments. On the other hand, such projects mobilise substantial resources, requiring strong project management and risk control as the costs of failure are very high. Smaller projects allow more scope for experimentation; they are typically more flexible and respond to clearly identified needs, though often generating smaller scale outputs.

#### ***Lesson 16: Improve inter-programme coordination***

There are very few examples of inter-programme coordination between the ESF and the other ESI-funds. In some MS there was no formal link at all. The exception seems to be the field of developing entrepreneurship, where the ESF 2007-2013 funded training for start-ups and the further development of the new enterprises is stimulated by subsidies from the ERDF. Examples are also found in the field of Human Capital, where ERDF contributed to education infrastructure (school buildings, etc.), while the ESF supported the students, teachers, and education systems. In the new programme, more efforts could be done to better link EU programmes (with the help of Partnership Agreements).

#### ***Lesson 17: Sustain programme results***

Information was lacking to assess the sustainability of ESF interventions to help guide future policy making. Factoring in sustainability from the outset means that plans for sustaining the activities should begin alongside the programming (involving contingency planning for follow-on activity and / or appropriate exit strategies). In addition, information on participant results by gender and age were also missing to assess the long-term impact of ESF investments on key priority groups (such as young people or women).

### **11.4 Key lessons in terms of the effective implementation**

#### ***Lesson 18: Improve monitoring and anticipation systems for financial underperformance***

By December 2014, a total of 79.3% of the overall budget of ESF 2007-2013 had been spent. While some MS have achieved comparatively low implementation rates, there are no substantial differences between the implementation rates in CON and RCE regions. As projects can still be completed and expenditure declared until the end of 2015, a significant rise in the implementation rate is to be expected. The most frequently mentioned cause for delayed implementation was the economic crisis, especially in the CON regions, where administrative capacity and co-financing issues limited the use of ESF funds. Further reasons for low absorption were a delayed start to interventions, low take-up, a lack of management and administrative capacity of delivery partners, especially at the beginning of the programming period with signs of improvement since, political changes, eligibility issues, and time limits imposed (n+2).

More investment in ICT and management information systems is needed in order to ensure early identification of problems (e.g. slow absorption). Also, there is a need to improve management tools to support programme decision making, such as making use of the principles from the Earned Value Management methodology.<sup>93</sup>

#### ***Lesson 19: Continue to ease access to ESF support and administrative burden***

Further work could be done to ensure that application procedures are well-organised and supporting documentation is clear and easy to follow. Detailed methodological guidelines with clear parameters and instructions by MA on financial and performance reporting requirements are essential to facilitate sound administrative and financial management and reporting by beneficiaries. Moreover, the use of technologies and e-learning in the

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<sup>93</sup> Earned value management is a project management technique for measuring project performance and progress. It has the ability to combine measurements of the project management triangle: scope, time and costs. In a single integrated system, Earned Value Management is able to provide accurate forecasts of project performance problems, which is an important contribution for project management. The most basic requirement of an EVM system is that it quantifies progress using planned values (like financial targets and targets for outputs and result indicators) and earned values (realisation of targets). Nevertheless, the more sophisticated models include indicators that combine the relationship between financial spending and outputs created, as well benchmarking the progress made with similar projects (read other programmes).

ESF delivery increased the transparency, access and interest among the target groups and in several interventions generated sustainable practices.

### ***Lesson 20: improve information on good practices***

The evaluation shows that it was quite difficult to detect good practice in successful programme and project implementation, because MAs have limited information on successful interventions and the elements that explained success. Sometimes too little is done to communicate what worked well, or less well, and to build on earlier experience. There is a need to identify and showcase successful interventions. The thematic evaluations already point to some elements that can contribute to more effective programming in each ESF Priority, as presented in chapter 4 on effectiveness. Good practices exchange and peer learning between MS and MA should be further encouraged and facilitated.

### ***Lesson 21: Carefully select project promoters and project partners***

The capacity of organisations implementing the ESF was the key success factor in many of the different interventions that were studied in-depth, and this needs to be reflected in the beneficiaries to fund. This signals the need to continuously improve the ESF management and coordination practices. Such improvements could involve further capacity building, training and ongoing mentoring and support to applicants (particularly among stakeholders new to the ESF).

For interventions under the heading of Promoting Partnerships, it was indicated that it is important to include partners with a direct link to target groups. Moreover, the need to make good use of already existing partnerships and networks is also underlined (not developing new partnerships all the time). For interventions with a priority to Strengthen Institutional Capacity, success depended on the motivation and capacity of participants and organisations. This poses challenges for a pre-selection of partners before starting up a project, or already including stakeholders in the preparation phase of the project (as part the capacity development process).

## **11.5 Key lessons drawn in terms of the robustness of the monitoring**

### ***Lesson 22: Annex XXIII data are helpful for monitoring programme implementation and output achievements, but improvements still need to be made***

The obligation to provide the European Commission with standardised Annex XXIII data on ESF participations has been a crucial improvement in the availability of the most relevant monitoring data during the 2007-2013 programming period. As chapter 4 indicates, the only limitation is that the data recording procedures did not allow for differentiating between unique participants and individuals who participated in ESF multiple times (participants versus participations). In addition, indirect participations (such as all students in a school participating in the ESF project) were in some cases also reported, leading to a substantial over-reporting in participation.

At the same time, some disadvantaged groups are underreported (due to differences in the classification of individuals between MS and interventions; reluctance or restrictions under national data protection legislation to monitor groups such as migrants and ethnic minorities; and the classification of individuals as 'unemployed' or 'inactive' without further monitoring for 'disadvantaged' characteristics).

Data on socio-economic characteristics of participants (as defined by Annex XXIII) was not uniformly available in SFC2007 and often incomplete or partial. This is illustrated by the fact that while summing up participations of all age groups and / or qualification levels, this does not add up to the total number of participations reported, pointing to a systematic underreporting of certain groups (like young and older people). Moreover, as already pointed out, MS use different definitions for target groups in their programming (e.g. young people).

The collection of such data for all participants needs to be supported by clear guidance on the interpretation of categories and definitions used to avoid errors and gaps. Another limitation is that participation data from Annex XXIII is only collected at PA level, hampering reporting on number of participations at intervention level (especially in the

case where PA include multiple types of interventions). The evaluation further identified some cases where data is unavailable or unreliable due to inadequate data in MA management information systems, problems with project administration, or delays in entering the data.

***Lesson 23: Significant challenges are reported on the use(fulness) of programme outputs and result indicators***

Annex XXIII data in combination with the output and result indicators allows some aggregations at EU level, including at least the most basic information at PA level on recipients, placements, sustainability of jobs, etc. This is in sharp contrast to the situation in some MS in the 2000-2006 period. Nevertheless, the key challenge for the evaluation was the lack of reliable and comparable result data to inform an ex post assessment, due to a number of factors.

- The first factor is the quality of the programme indicators selected, as well as the baselines and targets set. In several cases, programme-specific result indicators do not sufficiently capture the expected change (and in some ESF Priorities, like Promoting Partnership and Strengthening Institutional Capacity, result indicators are often missing altogether). Moreover, result indicators often measure employment results and training completed / qualifications gained, without measuring “soft” results like improved confidence, experience, and/or competences gained. Moreover, baselines and targets are not always reported for output and result indicators, limiting the possibilities to track programme achievement and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions. Result indicators tend to be available at PA level and not at intervention level. This problem is partly solved in the new programming period in which result indicators are clearly linked to a specific objective (a level lower than the PA and Investment Priority), just like the output and result indicators. Many OPs defined impact indicators in their programme, but without making clear how ESF contributes to this macro indicator.
- The second factor is the lack of comparable indicators allowing aggregation of outputs and results across programmes and MS. Output and result indicators are by definition programme specific and therefore not amenable to aggregation. In some cases, the same indicator is labelled as an output indicator in one programme and as a result indicator in another. Another challenge hampering aggregation of achievement values across indicators is that some programmes report cumulative as opposed to annual achievement values. Moreover, result indicators are sometimes reported in percentages, but other times in absolute numbers. Programmes do not distinguish between the indicators where values are estimated by the MA (such as self-reporting) and indicators based on actual values achieved (hard data).
- The third factor is that it is not clear how many results are achieved by one individual participant in the same intervention. Moreover, some programme indicators count outputs and results relating to indirect participants of the intervention (e.g. all students in a school which participated in an intervention).

With the introduction of common output and result indicators in the new programming period 2014-2020, the above-mentioned challenges are partly solved for this period, with the exception of programme specific output and result indicators (see Annex 1 and 2 ESF Regulation). Moreover, an annual exercise of reporting the ESF achievements across all the OPs, as introduced in the 2014-2020 programming period, encourages better monitoring data management and reporting and gives visibility to the programme achievements on a systematic basis.

***Lesson 24: improve the information on long term results and impact of ESF***

Generally, there is a lack of longitudinal data (including information on participant results after a given time upon completion of the intervention), which limits the assessment of the overall ESF success and longer-term impacts. The real impact at the individual level of an intervention will sometimes show after a considerable amount of time.



It is recommended that programmes improve their knowledge on the situation of participants 12 and/or 24 months after leaving, for example by carrying out additional evaluations during the programming period. The programming period 2014-2020 already includes common longer-term result indicators that measure the results 6 months after the intervention (to be reported several times during the programming period, i.e. in the Annual Implementation Report 2018 and at the end of the programming period).

Furthermore, the programming period 2014-2020 requires Managing Authorities to establish a system that records and stores individual participant data in computerised form (see *Common Provisions Regulation, Art. 114(2)(d)*) which should allow the matching of different observation data (like other administrative systems or survey data). Already in the programming period 2007-2013, a number of MS did this, e.g. Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands and Sweden. They linked micro data of ESF participants to administrative social security data. This makes it possible to follow each ESF participant and people not participating in ESF alike in the labour market. This enables the use of counterfactual evaluation designs and gives a clear insight into whether they find a job, how long they keep their job, whether they become unemployed again and for how long, etc. In countries where the ESF interventions are mainly carried out by the PES, it should at least be possible to use the information system of the PES for monitoring and evaluation. Usually, PES systems contain information about interventions, individual characteristics and the unemployment/benefit period.

### ***Lesson 25: Improve information on cost effectiveness of interventions***

The assessment of efficiency was hindered by the lack of data on individual project activity costs. The lowest level of cost information available is the level of project, while AIR systematically report certified expenditure at PA level. However, as each project combines a range of activities (for example teacher training and the employment of a school psychologist, etc.) the budget also covers a range of activities. To facilitate the measurement of efficiency (in terms of funds spent per type of activity), monitoring data should capture the costs of different types of activities, alongside their outputs and results. Also at EU level, data should ideally be captured at intervention level using common indicators, allowing EU wide analysis. Moreover, information is lacking on the different types and intensity of support provided to participants, e.g. on the length of interventions.

## **11.6 Key lessons drawn in terms of the robustness of the evaluation systems**

### ***Lesson 26: Increase the relevance of ex-ante evaluation***

Ex-ante evaluations should not only be seen as a mandatory exercise but be put to good use to check the planned approach in relation to needs analysis, the adequacy of the interventions proposed, the plausibility of the indicator values, the coordination mechanisms planned, etc. The thematic evaluations showed different examples where programmes improved their programme strategy based on the results of the ex-ante evaluations, sharpening the territorial diagnosis, improving the intervention logic and the monitoring systems. In a number of cases, the broadness of the OPs was criticised, with the result that programmes improved the focus (in terms of objectives, target groups and interventions).

### ***Lesson 27: Further harmonise evaluations conducted allowing EU level analysis***

There is a need to further harmonise the evaluations conducted, including the agreements and coordination of the evaluation scope (ranging currently from the whole OP, a Priority Axis, sub-priority, a thematic priority or a horizontal principle to project level). The thematic evaluations already indicated that the existing EU and national level evaluations evaluated different evaluation objectives and levels of OP architecture, and not all ESF Priorities are addressed in a similar manner and / or assessed at different points in the implementation process. This made an aggregation of evaluation findings across the existing evaluations very difficult. The evaluation coverage and depth across the MS could be further expanded to ensure that all important ESF Priorities are assessed on a systematic basis. Having this information provides the possibility to implement a meta evaluation at EU level. This is particularly applicable in relation to the size of the

OPs in the national / regional contexts. In the OPs with more significant ESF resources more and more in-depth evaluations should be expected which differentiate between the different types and intensity of support. The current focus of evaluations on the implementation progress and challenges faced is understandable, but there is a need to ensure that the assessment of outputs, results and impacts achieved and the impact evaluation of the ESF investment takes place as well across the OPs.

As indicated, an important step has already been made by introducing the requirement to adopt an evaluation plan and the requirement to include an evaluation of all specific objectives.

### ***Lesson 28: Increased attention on impact evaluations***

This ex post evaluation concluded that the quality, methodology and scope of evaluations varied substantially between MS, and that these were mostly process evaluations rather than impact evaluations. Moreover, a wide variety of evaluation instruments are used to assess similar interventions across MS. There is a need to improve the robustness of the evaluations undertaken, and promote in particular the use of counterfactual approaches in future programming periods. The 2014-2020 programming period already includes an enhanced emphasis on advanced and counterfactual evaluation approaches. However, if this is to be achieved, active encouragement and methodological support to the ESF partners is likely to be required.

The lack of micro data also partly explains the lack of counterfactual evaluations. Moreover, only a small part of the MS have tried to carry out such evaluations, e.g. on the basis of surveys among former participants and a control group of other unemployed. Most of the time, there are difficulties constructing control groups as has been pointed out by the preparatory study for this ex post evaluation.<sup>94</sup> The availability of micro data is restricted in some countries (due to issues related to privacy legislation, the availability of micro data sets on ESF participants, or the lack of cooperation between different organisations hampering the interlinkage of databases). In some countries, at least data on final recipients of the PES is available, which should make it possible to carry out more effective evaluations for interventions in the field of Access to Employment. It seems, however, that only few MS have really made use of these micro data to carry out counterfactual evaluation. A reason may be that these data are richer on personal characteristics than on information about success on the labour market, and this again relates mostly to data on output and not on result indicators.

### ***Lesson 29: Enrich the efficiency analyses with more qualitative information on how to improve efficiency***

For measuring efficiency, it would be relevant not only to look at the actual amount of funding, but also at the qualitative aspects of the funding issue (which resources could have been saved? has the management structure facilitated an efficient allocation of resources?). Hardly any evaluations from MS have been identified which answer such questions. Better references should be made to the Better Regulation Guidelines.

### ***Lesson 30: Capture other effects contributing to the pathway to employment and education***

Many of the evaluations conducted by MS focus on effects and benefits that are directly related to employment and education outcomes. There is increasing evidence that active measures in the field of employment, social inclusion and human capital also entail other effects, e.g. on health and criminality, and benefits particularly in the case of interventions that are of longer duration such as vocational training and subsidized work, even if the interventions do not result in a regular (not unsubsidised) job. Partly these effects are inter-related with labour market participation. So, if a positive net effect on job entry chances occurs other positive effects may also occur, like soft results. However, usually such other benefits are not taken into account. Particularly for disadvantaged groups with multiple problems, this asks for a broader evaluation framework than the

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<sup>94</sup> Idem.

usual approach that only looks at the effect of active measures on job-entry chances and savings on unemployment benefits. This traditional approach probably underestimates the total return of active measures to society.

Effectiveness of ESF support in the field of Promoting Partnerships and Strengthening Institutional Capacity is difficult to measure (in terms of improved public services). A solution could be to focus the evaluation on measuring the empowerment of public services, stakeholders and professionals involved (improving knowledge, understanding and ownership to undertake action).

### ***Lesson 31: Introduce a final evaluation for each OP***

In several MS, no evaluations have been carried out since 2011/2012, so there is little information on the most recent years. As a consequence, no conclusions can be drawn on the years when most of the interventions were being finalised. It may be good to re-introduce the concept of the 'final evaluation'. Such evaluations were carried out during the 2000-2006 programming period near the end of the period. Preferably, the final evaluation should be counterfactual or at least theory-based, and should seek to combine quantitative with qualitative methods. The result of the final evaluation should be discussed with the most important stakeholders (maybe even combining this with the stakeholder consultation for the next programming period). The introduction of evaluation plans in the new programming period is already an important step forwards (ensuring that sufficient evaluations are performed reflecting all ESF priorities, as well as during the whole programming period).

### ***Lesson 32: Time the ex post evaluation to capture as many results as possible***

ESF interventions continued while the ex-post evaluation took place. As a result, it is not possible to provide final, cumulative data for expenditure, outputs and results at the end of the programming period. Hence, the timing of ex-post evaluations needs to be reviewed to ensure that they take place after the full closure of the OPs, or the expectations for the ex-post evaluation need to be managed to reflect the fact that many activities are still ongoing. The timing of the ex-post evaluation must balance the need for completeness in the data presented with the need to provide learning to inform the subsequent programme period. For the upcoming ex post evaluation of ESF 2014-2020, early preparation should be made considering which data / evaluations are required for the ex post evaluation, so MS can prepare the ground for this upcoming exercise, or even integrate this into their evaluation planning.

### ***Lesson 33: Continue working on the improvement of evaluation theory and practice of MAs and the community of evaluation experts in the field of ESF***

The Commission has already put considerable efforts into improving the evaluation practice of MAs and stressed the importance of well-designed evaluation plans at the OP level, making them compulsory along with impact evaluations by MS (promoting use of counterfactual and theory-based methods as much as possible). The Commission should continue working on the improvement of evaluation practice in the field of the ESF in dialogue with MS and the community of evaluation experts, facilitating peer learning and research.

## Annex I Participation data (Annex XXIII)

Table 28. Participation data (Annex XXIII)

(x1,000)	Total participants	Employed	Self-employed	Unemployed	LTU	Inactive	in education	Young people (15-24 years)	Older people (55-64 years)	Migrants	Minorities	Disabled	Others	ISDEC 1 and 2	ISCED 3	ISCED 4	ISCE D 5 and 6
AT	861.8	524.7	1.7	173.1	52.2	164.0	56.8	256.9	77.8	177.1	1.6	109.2	34.4	227.7	360.5	53.8	104.7
BE	1,840.9	346.8	15.8	1,176.5	462.9	317.6	203.2	580.3	53.4	399.4	-	62.4	262.5	588.5	663.9	63.2	256.0
BG	2,631.9	816.7	34.5	196.5	47.2	1,618.7	1,482.2	732.0	141.7	6.5	238.1	84.4	33.5	922.5	612.4	130.7	489.7
CY	40.0	20.2	0.3	15.4	3.9	4.4	0.5	4.7	2.9	9.3	-	0.3	4.0	4.0	11.8	3.4	20.7
CZ	9,980.2	2,335.1	41.0	538.0	269.7	7,107.1	6,967.4	2,682.4	288.6	296.4	783.1	1,465.0	285.6	4,585.9	1,670.1	169.7	1,544.9
DE	6,877.9	2,499.5	280.6	1,655.3	942.9	2,723.1	1,394.7	3,401.2	304.1	1,221.3	23.2	134.4	198.7	3,888.1	1,453.3	129.9	776.3
DK	97.1	57.7	4.9	8.9	2.9	30.5	28.7	33.1	10.4	8.3	-	-	-	36.1	34.6	13.2	9.8
EE	1,067.0	471.9	6.5	157.4	71.8	437.8	402.9	438.7	101.2	4.3	104.7	19.8	39.0	379.4	160.8	112.0	405.9
EL	4,323.1	1,034.0	184.4	661.9	197.0	2,627.2	1,318.6	1,041.2	166.2	84.2	89.9	95.4	149.5	2,028.5	1,021.3	236.9	840.1
ES	13,861.5	3,394.1	570.1	8,020.2	1,097.1	2,447.2	1,616.8	4,255.2	1,182.0	1,745.0	104.4	490.2	749.5	5,909.3	3,943.9	644.8	2,814.3
FI	509.7	334.5	51.4	96.3	23.3	78.8	63.8	93.1	57.8	29.2	2.4	4.6	10.8	93.8	171.7	60.6	183.5
FR	6,870.6	1,497.7	294.3	4,059.3	1,481.3	1,313.6	444.8	2,440.3	305.3	318.5	27.6	219.1	1,048.5	3,028.2	2,080.2	1,162.8	576.5
HR	17.2	4.9	0.1	9.3	3.8	2.9	0.9	3.3	1.1	0.1	2.0	1.5	2.8	2.6	4.1	0.5	7.5
HU	5,029.7	1,910.1	95.9	500.6	168.8	2,619.1	2,164.8	1,896.4	412.0	9.4	250.7	99.4	664.1	1,270.0	1,403.4	420.4	1,197.2
IE	1,167.8	245.9	12.0	414.2	99.1	507.6	177.7	313.3	114.5	40.8	20.7	80.4	79.0	535.7	356.7	60.4	14.1
IT	9,557.4	3,189.4	182.4	1,667.9	255.8	4,700.1	4,372.0	2,913.1	651.9	254.4	49.1	200.9	364.5	4,637.2	2,609.5	113.1	981.0
LT	1,036.4	518.7	33.2	273.0	100.5	244.7	211.7	238.9	107.7	1.3	26.4	43.8	120.4	229.8	197.3	117.7	465.3
LU	33.4	24.2	0.4	4.9	0.7	4.3	4.3	7.4	1.1	0.7	0.0	0.5	1.2	15.9	7.8	2.3	6.4
LV	815.2	233.3	7.1	417.1	190.0	164.9	119.1	186.4	107.7	0.5	162.7	46.5	517.3	210.6	317.0	36.6	207.7
MT	111.5	60.0	2.6	30.9	10.5	20.5	8.3	29.6	11.0	1.9	-	2.9	10.8	57.9	16.2	10.1	27.3
NL	1,550.0	1,083.6	9.6	125.7	47.3	340.8	61.3	594.8	121.6	248.3	244.8	67.6	199.5	762.3	670.0	-	73.2
PL	9,100.3	3,555.6	160.2	1,932.5	680.5	3,612.2	3,097.8	3,319.7	476.6	1.7	21.2	336.3	-	3,101.8	2,430.8	908.9	2,658.7
PT	9,299.1	4,931.0	248.5	2,902.3	883.1	1,465.7	317.8	1,104.5	470.5	32.7	145.5	427.0	69.0	2,827.6	1,832.3	254.8	993.0
RO	1,423.4	624.3	44.5	290.1	104.2	509.0	224.9	343.0	76.6	0.4	109.3	23.6	457.9	431.8	381.1	60.1	457.4
SE	453.1	318.3	5.7	28.8	28.8	106.0	-	78.1	75.0	85.7	-	-	-	73.3	194.2	24.1	149.8
SI	758.6	390.5	22.7	191.3	62.5	176.8	101.9	151.5	87.5	7.0	8.6	17.6	45.3	148.1	316.2	31.3	248.7
SK	2,219.6	559.4	45.0	1,292.1	534.2	368.1	178.4	557.5	225.6	2.4	266.9	146.8	533.9	946.2	431.2	83.5	312.8
UK	7,124.7	2,059.2	81.6	3,199.9	1,174.0	1,865.5	186.4	2,367.0	475.1	165.6	1,174.2	1,085.9	1,136.1	1,897.3	2,661.9	29.6	475.4
EU28	98,658.8	33,041.3	2,437.3	30,039.4	8,996.1	35,578.2	25,207.6	30,063.5	6,106.9	5,152.2	3,856.9	5,265.6	7,017.8	38,840.3	26,014.2	4,934.4	16,297.9

Table 29. Total number participations in ESF 2007-2013 per ESF priority in CON regions (until 31-12-2014)

<b>Annex XXIII indicators (x1,000 participations)</b>	<b>Human Capital</b>	<b>Access to Employment</b>	<b>Social Inclusion</b>	<b>Institutional capacity</b>	<b>Promoting Partnerships</b>	<b>TA</b>	<b>Total</b>
Total number of participations	43,273	12,942	4,015	1,383	95	58	61,766
Employed	15,528	2,335	1,023	1,339	55	54	20,333
of which self-employed	1,049	228	72	19	5	1	1,374
Unemployed	3,803	9,129	1,403	15	18	2	14,370
of which LTU	1,024	2,493	718	4	7	0	4,246
Inactive	23,943	1,479	1,588	29	22	2	27,063
of which in E&T	20,221	670	484	13	15	1	21,403
Young people (15-24 years)	13,966	3,229	864	58	23	1	18,141
Older people (55-64 years)	1,946	1,366	293	148	7	5	3,764
Migrants	600	573	111	0	10	1	1,295
Minorities	1,353	368	546	17	2	1	2,287
Disabled	1,826	663	701	9	3	1	3,203
Others	1,142	1,605	558	53	3	1	3,363
Primary or lower secondary education (ISCED 1-2)	17,981	4,796	1,354	34	22	1	24,187
Upper secondary education (ISCED 3)	9,424	4,001	990	175	31	6	14,627
Post-secondary non tertiary education (ISCED 4)	1,795	775	202	105	5	2	2,884
Tertiary education (ISCED 5-6)	7,992	2,059	453	799	32	47	11,383

Source: own figure on the basis of SFC2007 (AIR2014)

Table 30. Total number participations in ESF 2007-2013 per ESF priority in RCE regions (until 31-12-2014)

<b>Annex XXIII indicators (x1,000 participations)</b>	<b>Human Capital</b>	<b>Access to Employment</b>	<b>Social Inclusion</b>	<b>Institutional capacity</b>	<b>Promoting Partnerships</b>	<b>TA</b>	<b>Total</b>
Total number of participations	17,054	15,924	3,807	54	53	-	36,893
Employed	10,055	2,254	330	53	16	-	12,708
of which self-employed	830	187	44	-	2	-	1,063
Unemployed	2,612	10,770	2,266	1	20	-	15,670
of which LTU	622	2,947	1,177	-	5	-	4,750
Inactive	4,387	2,900	1,211	0	17	-	8,515
of which in E&T	2,924	602	267	-	11	-	3,805
Young people (15-24 years)	5,438	5,169	1,289	1	26	-	11,922
Older people (55-64 years)	1,167	984	186	4	2	-	2,343
Migrants	1,207	1,851	789	0	10	-	3,857
Minorities	427	1,067	76	0	0	-	1,570
Disabled	402	1,310	349	0	1	-	2,063
Others	693	1,881	1,075	0	6	-	3,655
Primary or lower secondary education (ISCED 1-2)	5,979	6,408	2,245	0	20	-	14,653
Upper secondary education (ISCED 3)	5,564	4,951	854	6	12	-	11,387
Post-secondary non tertiary education (ISCED 4)	1,080	718	249	1	2	-	2,050
Tertiary education (ISCED 5-6)	2,900	1,754	230	13	18	-	4,915

Source: own figure on the basis of SFC2007 (AIR2014)

## Annex II Result indicators

Table 31. Result indicators

Region	ESF priority	Employment	Qualification	Other positive result	Entities	Products
CON	Human Capital	1,049,476	4,352,417	7,950,761	135,711	12,619
	Access to Employment	2,073,336	903,460	557,033	12,361	54,480
	Social Inclusion	373,782	306,088	640,980	531	
	Institutional Capacity	-	511,232	87,100	2,125	1,644
	Promoting Partnerships	1,553		25,984		
	Technical assistance	-	6,214			
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3,498,147</b>	<b>6,079,411</b>	<b>9,261,858</b>	<b>150,728</b>	<b>68,743</b>
RCE	Human Capital	860,750	2,061,422	2,235,503	117,970	40,410
	Access to Employment	4,568,076	261,583	821,356	6,953	114
	Social Inclusion	496,826	300,030	1,344,701	421	
	Institutional Capacity	-				
	Promoting Partnerships	205		10,319		
	Technical assistance					
	<b>Total</b>	<b>5,925,857</b>	<b>2,623,034</b>	<b>4,411,879</b>	<b>125,344</b>	<b>40,524</b>
All regions	Human Capital	1,910,226	6,413,839	10,186,264	253,681	53,029
	Access to Employment	6,641,412	1,165,043	1,378,390	19,314	54,594
	Social Inclusion	870,608	606,118	1,985,681	952	
	Institutional Capacity	-	511,232	87,100	2,125	1,644
	Promoting Partnerships	1,758		36,303		
	Technical assistance	-	6,214			
	<b>Total</b>	<b>9,424,004</b>	<b>8,702,446</b>	<b>13,673,737</b>	<b>276,072</b>	<b>109,267</b>

Source: own figure on the basis of SFC2007 (AIR2014)



## Annex III Data and evaluations limitations for ESF ex-post evaluation

Table 32. Data and evaluations limitations for ESF ex-post evaluation

Issue	Limitations	Methodology used to address limitation
Aggregating data by ESF priority	Financial information, Annex XXIII data, and programme specific output and result indicators are only collected at PA level. As such, the PA is the unit of analysis for making aggregations and comparisons at the EU28 level	In order to analyse the contribution of ESF towards the ESF priorities, as identified in article 3 of the ESF regulation 1081/2006, each PA was labelled to one of the priorities (despite of the fact that one PA could support more ESF priorities at the same time). A further breakdown of data on this thematic level (provided at sub PA level) was often not available in the AIR and Commission reporting database (SFC2007), hampering a detailed analysis of ESF contribution and achievements by priority. In case the PA clearly belongs to more than one ESF priority, these PA were further scrutinized to find the most "dominant" priority for the PA (assessing the related Categories of Expenditures and nature of interventions). By making this arbitrary decision, sometimes part of the budget, output and result were allocated to a priority, while part of it actually belong to another. During the in-depth country studies within the thematic evaluations a further analysis was made on sub PA level exploring specific intervention, allowing a better allocation to policy priorities.
Aggregating Annex XXIII participations data	For aggregation of participants across PAs, OPs and countries the Annex XXIII participants' data provides a more solid basis for aggregation than the programme specific output indicators related to individuals, since Annex XXIII data is recorded in a systematic manner across countries (total number of participants and for sub groups like gender, employment situation, age, migrants/minorities, disabled, other, and educational level). The only limitation is that the data recording procedures did not allow for differentiating between unique participants and individuals who participated in ESF multiple times.	The solution adopted is therefore to refer throughout the report to 'participations', where reference is made to Annex XXIII. The analysis throughout the report is aware that the data may reflect multiple participations of the same participant. In addition, indirect participants (such as all students in a school participating in the ESF project) were in some cases also reported, possibly leading to over-reporting. In other cases, a single participant achieved multiple results, which balances out this problem.
Aggregating programme specific result indicators	Aggregating of programme specific result indicators can only be done if these have a common basis (definition, scope and unit of measurement). Based on their definitions and the evaluators' judgment, result indicators were classified and aggregated into five common categories of result indicators (employment obtained, qualification achieved, other positive result, entities with positive result, product successfully delivered). Various limitations of this method have been pointed out in the various thematic	By defining common categories of programme specific indicators the large variety of results was aggregated. Broad categories of indicators were developed to include a maximum variety of results indicators.

Issue	Limitations	Methodology used to address limitation
	<p>evaluations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First of all, various result indicators that could not be coded into these main categories could be not included in the aggregation, so the actual results achieved will be substantially higher than an aggregation will be able to measure (aggregation was only possible for 1,137 out of 3,489 result indicators).</li> <li>• Secondly, another group of indicators was not included in the aggregation since these were a sub indicator of another indicator, like the number of migrants (avoiding double counting).</li> <li>• Thirdly, it is also possible that more than one result will have been generated from a single intervention for a participant. In the absence of monitoring data on unique participants this aspect cannot be captured. Therefore, there is a significant possibility of participants achieving two or more results from the same intervention.</li> <li>• Fourthly, MS used different ways and points in time of <i>measuring</i> the results. Some MA measure the result direct after the intervention, while others sometime after the intervention (e.g. employment results). In some cases, an individual PA measures the employment result of a participant at different points of time (such as direct after the intervention as well as some time after the intervention). In this case, when it is possible to identify whether the same participant is involved, the indicator that is closest to the date of finalisation of the intervention is included in the analysis.</li> <li>• Lastly, some MS measured the success <i>rates</i> (the proportion of participants achieving the positive results) instead of the numbers obtaining positive results, requiring the conversion of the rates into numbers using the reference output indicator. The reference output indicator could not be found in all cases to allow such a calculation. As a consequence, the total results, as presented in this chapter, should be seen as the minimum result achievement of ESF, since many results are not captured by the AIR, nor reported to the EC, and even when this is the case it is not always possible to aggregate on national and EU levels.</li> </ul>	

Issue	Limitations	Methodology used to address limitation
3.Relating participants' data with programme results	<p>By combining participants' data and result data at PA level we would be able to report on the percentage of participants achieving a result. However, this analysis is hampered by the fact that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a number of PAs do not report result indicators that belong to the five common categories of result indicators, so measure participants without any results;</li> <li>• a number of PAs report results on another level than the level of participants (e.g. number of products developed or entities developed, like the number of schools) leading to very low success rates. On top of that it is not always clear whether result indicators measure results of participants or participations, while Annex XXIII data measure participations;</li> <li>• a number of PAs only provide results related to a share of participations reported (especially for broad PAs that include different sets of sub priorities and interventions, with a complex structure of result indicators);</li> <li>• the number of participation entries is measured at a different moment of time (at the start of the intervention) than results (at the end of the intervention), and as a result the results measured at the end of 2014 are likely to increase in the subsequent two years. This is because participants who started prior to 2014 (and are already counted in the reported participation figures) will complete the ESF activities and are likely to achieve a number of positive results in the future. Indeed, the results measured at the end of 2014 are significantly higher compared to the results measured at the end of 2013.</li> </ul>	<p>In order to minimise the risk of under-reporting, the following measures were undertaken in response to the limitations above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an additional analysis in order to establish success rates was carried out, excluding the PA (and related participants) where no results were reported (addressing limitation 1).</li> <li>• Moreover, PA were excluded where the results are reported on another level than participations (addressing limitation 2).</li> <li>• For limitation 3, no satisfactory solution could be found, since it is not always clear to what extent a result indicator covers the total number of participation per PA, especially in case multiple interventions fall under one PA and in case multiple result indicators were selected under one PA.</li> </ul> <p>In the end 283 out of 455 active PA report on results that could be aggregated, covering 79.6% of the ESF budget allocated. Given all data limitations as described above, and problems with comparability between Annex XXIII data with programme specific result indicators, care should be taken with drawing overall EU wide conclusions while comparing the total results with the total number of participations. Preferably both data sources should be separately reported and not in connection. Besides, success ratios could differ per type of intervention since for instance job placements after an intervention, are generally lower than the number of people gaining a qualification after the training supported by ESF (since the last is a direct consequence of successfully completing a training, while the first is very much dependent on the socio economic context as well).</p>
Assessing performance of programme specific output and result indicators	<p>In order to assess the effectiveness of the implementation of ESF across the EU28, the achieved results can be compared against the target values set by MS in their OPs. Nevertheless, this analysis is hampered by the following limitations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First of all, for a significant proportion of indicators no targets were defined (1,489 out of 3,680 output indicators; 1,238 out of 3,489 result indicators).</li> <li>• Secondly, for another proportion of indicators no values were reported (152 output indicators; 259 result indicators), even</li> </ul>	<p>No solution could be provided for the indicators without targets and achievement values, besides of clearly indicating for which share of ESF funding performance can be reported.</p>

Issue	Limitations	Methodology used to address limitation
	<p>though targets had initially been set.</p> <p>Thirdly, it was not possible to assess on a systematic basis whether the initial targets were set in a comparable and appropriate way across the OPs (e.g. were the set targets stretching, comfortable or realistic?). In OPs, the targets have also been adjusted over time, further complicating such like-for-like comparisons. In other cases, targets were not adjusted, despite of programme changes reallocating budget, resulting in strong over- or underperformance.</p>	
<p>The use of the evaluations from MS</p>	<p>In order to balance the limitation of the data included in the AIR and Commission database, this ex post evaluation also made use of evaluations implemented by MA during the programming period, providing more in-depth information on ESF supported interventions by updating the inventory of ESF evaluation across the EU28. Although evaluations proved to be rich resources to gain insight to the implementation of different ESF interventions, most evaluations are process oriented, and less focused on measuring the efficiency, effectiveness and socio economic impact of ESF. When this is the case these are mostly theory based evaluations, and report most of the time only gross effects of ESF interventions<sup>95</sup>. Only a limited number of counter-factual evaluations are providing information on the net effectiveness of the programme. In the context of this ex post evaluation, additionally it was not possible to conduct a systematic comparison with the results of similar non-ESF sponsored interventions in the national / regional contexts (firstly due to the lack of sufficiently similar non-ESF sponsored interventions and secondly due to the lack of results data on available comparators). The existing EU and national level evaluations evaluated different evaluation objectives and levels of OP architecture. Not all important ESF priorities were assessed in all MSs / or assessed at different points in the implementation process. This made an aggregation of evaluation findings across the existing evaluations</p>	<p>Evaluation were used to support the evidence collected by the monitoring systems in place and provide illustrations of the achievements on each of the evaluation criteria. Also to assess success factors</p>

<sup>95</sup> Studies addressing gross effects include information on the employment situation of participants directly or sometime after the intervention, while those focus on net effects provide better information how the intervention affects the individual by exploring what happened with participant in case of non-participation

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Limitations</b>	<b>Methodology used to address limitation</b>
	challenging.	

## Annex IV Benchmarks for significance of ESF investments

### Investments in labour market policies

Access to employment and sustainable integration into employment are keystones of national active labour market policy (ALMP) in the EU, and receive substantial attention at both the national and EU level. This becomes clear from the substantial share of budget allocated to Access to employment. The role of the ESF in national labour market policies varies widely between MS, both in terms of financial volume and implementation. On the basis of allocated expenditure, MS can be classified in the following way:

- 11 MS with low significance of ESF Access to Employment investment (below 10% of national spending on ALMP): AT, BE, CY, DE, DK, FI, FR, IE, LU, NL, SE,
- 9 MS with medium significance of ESF Access to Employment investment (10%-70% of national spending on ALMP): CZ, ES, HR, IT, HU, PL, PT, SI, UK;
- 8 MS with high significance of ESF Access to Employment investment (above 70% of national spending on ALMP): BG, EE, EL, LV, LT, MT, RO, SK.

Table 33. Total allocated ESF funding (Union and national) on A2E Priority Axes compared to expenditure on ALMP 2007-2013 in 28 MS

MS	Significance of ESF compared to national ALMP	Expenditure on ALMP (in € 1,000,000) <sup>96</sup>	Total allocated funding for PAs related to A2E (in € 1,000,000) <sup>97</sup>	% of ESF A2E in relation to overall spending on ALMP
<b>EU28</b>		418,337.0	39,654.04	9.5%
BE	Low	13,868.1	824.28	5.9%
BG	High	557.1	486.19	87.3%
CZ	Medium	1,691.4	809.92	47.9%
DK	Low	20,432.2	184.75	0.9%
DE	Low	85,812.3	4,132.10	4.8%
EE	High	126.3	155.72	123.3%
IE	Low	7,802.8	448.27	5.7%
EL	High	2,862.1	2,123.11	74.2%
ES	Medium	45,318.3	7,755.92	17.1%
FR	Low	96,474.5	2,786.32	2.9%
HR	Medium	157.5	52.87	33.6%
IT	Medium	37,927.0	4,792.61	12.6%
CY	Low	269.0	-	0.0%
LV	High	334.7	315.51	94.3%
LT	High	405.2	522.95	129.1%
LU	Low	1,219.7	15.01	1.2%
HU	Medium	3,080.3	897.04	29.1%
MT	High	28.0	36.90	131.7%
NL	Low	29,788.3	548.00	1.8%
AT	Low	11,921.3	414.85	3.5%
PL	Medium	10,962.1	3,109.03	28.4%
PT	Medium	5,571.6	846.06	15.2%
RO	High	381.1	778.90	204.4%
SI	Medium	561.0	164.73	29.4%
SK	High	823.7	791.40	96.1%
FI	Low	10,395.6	454.28	4.4%
SE	Low	22,774.3	929.44	4.1%
UK	Medium	7,956.1	5,277.89	66.3%

Source: AIR2014 and Eurostat

### Investments in Social Inclusion

An assessment of the magnitude of ESF SI investment compared to national SI investment would provide an indication of the emphasis placed on ESF SI investment and

<sup>96</sup> LMP expenditure by type of action - summary tables (source: DG EMPL) [lmp\_expsumm], Total LMP measures (categories 2-7), extracted on 13.03.2016

<sup>97</sup>Based on AIR2014 data, extracted from SFC2007

its importance within the national policy framework. However, there are no comparable national indicators which provide a picture on the level of expenditure dedicated to the types of SI activities funded by ESF. Instead, for illustrative purposes, the amount of ESF investment in SI can also be compared with national expenditure on active labour market policies, as ESF SI interventions also generally tend to focus on employability.

- 13 MS with low significance of ESF Social Inclusion investments (below 4%): AT, DK, EE, ES, FI, IE, IT, LT, LU, MT, NL, SE, UK;
- 8 MS with medium significance of ESF Social Inclusion investment (4%-20%): BE, DE, FR, HU, LV, PL, PT, SI;
- 7 MS with high significance of ESF Social Inclusion investment (above 20%): BG, CY, CZ, EL, HR, RO, SK.

### **Investments in education and training**

To assess the significance of ESF funding in each of the MS it can also be related to the national expenditure on education and training. On average (annualised data), across the 26 MS (except EL)<sup>98</sup> for which data were available, the total ESF HC investment in the 2007-2013 period, represented 1.5% of the national education and training expenditure (excluding primary education). While the comparison is limited in scope, particularly because national education budgets include many of the structural features that are beyond the scope of the ESF, considerable differences can be observed between the MS. The ESF funding for Human Capital ranges from 0.3% of the national education budget in SE to 10.4% in PT. On the basis of allocated expenditure, MS can be classified in the following way:

- 14 MS with low significance of ESF HC investment (below 2 %): AT, BE, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, IE, IT, LU, NL, SE, UK;
- 10 MS with medium significance of ESF HC investment (2-5 %): BG, EE, HU, LT, LV, MT, PL, RO, SI, SK;
- 2 MS with high significance of ESF HC investment (above 5 %): CZ and PT.

Analysis of the significance of the ESF Human Capital investment by CON and RCE objectives shows that out of eight MS with a high number of CON OPs, six MS had medium and high levels of ESF Human Capital investment significance in the national education and training expenditure. This signals a more important role played by the ESF Human Capital investment in the CON OPs, which is in line with the wider scope set out by the ESF Regulation for these OPs.

### **Investments in Promoting Partnerships**

Promotion of Partnerships is the ESF Priority with the smallest programmed allocation of ESF funds both in terms of dedicated Priority Axes, as well as in terms of expenditure allocated under Code 80 dedicated to "Promoting Partnerships, pacts and initiatives through the networking of relevant stakeholders. Only ten countries across 44 OPs have selected a PA relevant for PP. While the significance of PP investments are relatively modest even where such investments are supported, MS can be grouped by their relative attention for this ESF priority in the following way:

- 19 MS with no PA that can be linked to Promoting Partnerships: CY, DK, EE, EL, HR, HU, IE, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK;
- 3 MS with relatively small share dedicated to PAs linked to Promoting Partnerships: CZ, ES, FR;
- 6 MS with relatively larger share dedicated to PAs linked to Promoting Partnerships: AT, BE, BG, DE, FI, IT.

### **Investments in Strengthening Institutional Capacity**

During the 2007-2013 programming period, 14 MSs included specific SIC interventions in their programming; 22 OPs were dedicated to SIC or had one or more PAs dedicated to

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<sup>98</sup> Data for the national education and training expenditure for EL was not available from Eurostat.



this priority. As no national benchmark exists against which the investments dedicated under ESF to this priority can be compared, the significance of budgets are compared against the other ESF investments in each MS. Based on this, MS can be grouped by their relative attention for this priority in the following way:

- 10 MS with no PA that can be linked to Strengthening Institutional Capacity: AT, BE, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, IE, LU, NL, PT, SE;
- 7 MS with relatively low spending on Strengthening Institutional Capacity interventions (less than 5% of their entire ESF budget): CZ, HU, IT, LV, PL, SK, UK;
- 8 MS with relatively high spending on Strengthening Institutional Capacity interventions (more than 5% of their entire ESF budget): BG, EE, EL, HR, LT, MT, RO, SI.

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