

Lower Saxony



The European Social Fund in Lower Saxony, Germany, 2007-2013

As Germany's second largest Land, Lower Saxony has strong disparities in growth and jobs. Lower Saxony as a whole lags behind national averages for employment. Under the strategy 'Job creation through economic growth and improved competitiveness', Lower Saxony's two ESF programmes intend to raise the region's performance with a mix of measures to create more and better jobs.

The European Social Fund in brief

The European Social Fund, created in 1957, is the European Union's main financial instrument for investing in people. It supports employment and helps people enhance their education and skills. This improves their job prospects.

Member States and regions devise their own ESF Operational Programmes, in order to respond to the real needs 'on the ground'. Over the period 2007-2013, the ESF will spend over 10 billion euros per year across all Member States. This represents more than 10% of the European Union's total budget.

These are the five priorities of ESF funding at EU level:

- Helping workers and enterprises adapt to changing circumstances in the economy
- Enhancing access to employment and participation in the workforce
- Improving training and skills, both for individuals, and through better education and training systems
- Promoting partnerships between actors such as employers, trade unions and non-governmental organisations, for reform in the fields of employment and inclusion in the labour market
- Reinforcing the social inclusion of disadvantaged people and combating discrimination in the labour market

In some Member States and regions, the ESF can also support actions to improve the capacity and effectiveness of public administrations and public services.



The socio-economic and employment situation in Lower Saxony

Lower Saxony (Niedersachsen), with some 8 million inhabitants, achieved a GDP of €214.4 billion in 2008, continuing a rising trend in GDP growth since 2003. Productivity growth between 2003 and 2008 was 28.9% higher than the average for West Germany. The overall employment rate in 2007 was 74.1%, just below the 75.4% figure for West Germany. Unemployment fell between 2003 and 2008 by 1.9 points to 7.7%, which is 1.3% over the average for the old federal states. Unemployment in the mainly rural region of Lüneburg was 6.9% in June 2009, below the federal state figure of 7.7%.

Lower Saxony is the second biggest German region (Land) measured by surface area. This contributes to strong structural and economic disparities that pose considerable challenges; in particular growth and employment are quite heterogeneous. Three municipal areas show reasonable economic growth but this is in contrast to the quite high unemployment in these same areas. Overall, Lower Saxony as a whole faces significant challenges from globalisation, which include the need to adapt to more knowledge-based and innovative industries.

Because of demographic trends, a reduction in the labour market participation rate is anticipated, from 74.1% today to below 60% by 2030. Downgrading of skills through long-term unemployment poses an additional risk in this context.

In Lower Saxony, more men (80.8%) than women (67.3%) are in employment. Education and training levels among the unemployed are low – in June 2009, 48.1% of all unemployed have not completed vocational training. These educational and training deficits are yet more marked amongst young unemployed people (under 25). In June 2009, 54.9% of young unemployed people had not completed vocational training.

ESF priorities in Lower Saxony

The Lower Saxony strategy for EU Structural Funds for 2007-2013 is shaped by the socio-economic context and by German and European development targets. Within this wider framework, the regional ESF Operational Programmes concentrate on improving human capital as a driver of growth.

Within the strategy for Lower Saxony, there is a separate ESF Operational Programme for the Lüneburg region, which reflects its lower economic performance and particular needs. The Lüneburg and the Lower Saxony programmes have the first three priorities in common. Lüneburg adds a transnational priority to its programme. Both programmes put a strong emphasis on social inclusion by respectively allocating 54.8% (Lower Saxony) and 43.5% (Lüneburg) to this priority – the fight against

unemployment is the dominant theme. Compared with the rest of Lower Saxony Lüneburg allocates a higher share of its programme (28.8%) on the adaptability of its workforce.

The Lower Saxony programme has three priorities, each with a different emphasis. Priority 1 takes an enterprise-based approach; priority 2 addresses the needs of individuals via systems and institutions for training; and priority 3 takes a more social, local and network-based approach.

In view of the broad variety of challenges, Lower Saxony's overall objective is to concentrate ESF funds in areas that will ensure the most sustainable benefits for employment and growth.

Priority 1 : Improving the adaptability of workers and enterprises

- Enhancing the strategic competences in SMEs, in particular in the field of staff and organisation, including a better balance between work and family life;
- Enhancing the general qualification level of employees.

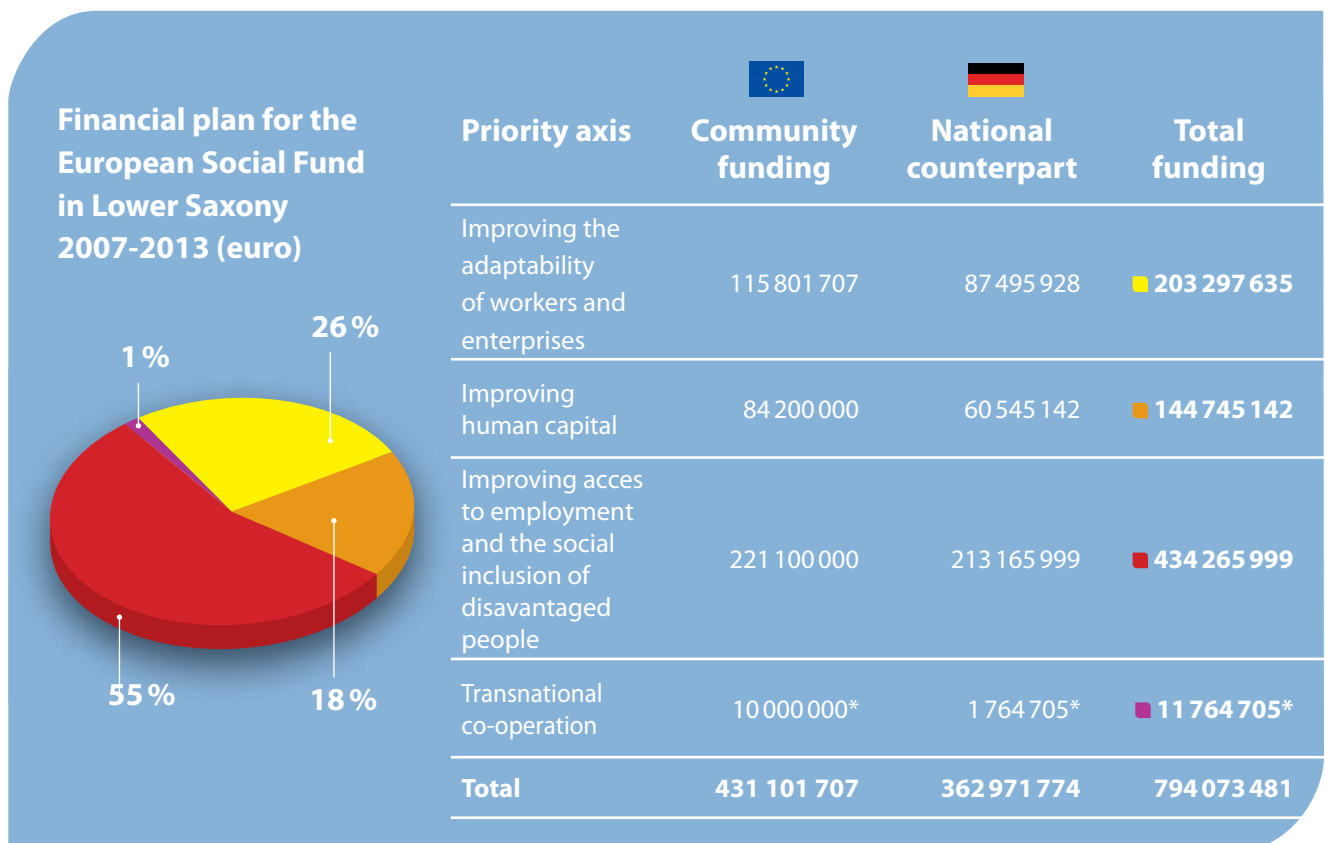
Priority 2 : Improving human capital

- Securing the existing volume of apprenticeship places and creating more;
- Improving the quality of the education and vocational training system, especially in the dual vocational training system, for example by improved coordination between enterprises and the school system.

Priority 3 : Improving access to employment and the social inclusion of disadvantaged people

- Job integration and social inclusion for disadvantaged youth, for example by continued support for specialised youth vocational training centres;
- Supporting sustainable access to their first jobs for disadvantaged groups;
- Enhancing the sustainable labour market participation of women, for example by supporting a successful network of counselling agencies for women who enter the labour market after having a family.

The implementation of Lower Saxony's two ESF Operational Programmes is the responsibility of the Ministry of Economy and Labour, which is supported by a monitoring committee that includes representatives from non-governmental organisations, local authorities, business organisations, trade unions and other ministries.



*This priority only concerns Lüneburg

Some earlier ESF projects in Lower Saxony, 2007-2009

- The 'Salzwerkstatt' project under the convergence objective aims to support young people under the age of 25 who have few skills, or skills which are no longer suited to the labour market. The goal is to prepare young adults without vocational training – for training or employment. It is achieved by means of a construction project creating a replica of a historical ship typical of Lüneburg (Ilmenau-Ewer), during which various manual skills (boat building, joinery, metal construction and painting and other items) are taught. The work is supervised by a master carpenter, a ship joiner and a social worker.
- In the offshore wind power plant construction sector, skilled personnel who have worked in other sectors also need to acquire specialised knowledge and skills. In order to provide these, a project entitled 'Profiling and skills training of employees in Cuxhaven's offshore construction companies' was designed and has been operational since May 2008. Training modules were designed in close collaboration with two companies recently established in Cuxhaven: CSC Cuxhaven Steel Construction GmbH (components for and assembly of offshore foundation structures) and AMBAU GmbH (manufacturer of steel towers for wind energy converters). The modules will train newly-appointed employees in the production of offshore wind energy plants. A major part of the training measures concerns welding. The new employees generally have insufficient or no experience of welding for this application. Metal plates up to 80 mm thick – far thicker than in shipbuilding – must be worked, and welded joints made to the strictest quality requirements. The training programme also involves computerised pre-cutting of these giant sheet panels, safe transport using gantry cranes of components measuring up to 40 m and up to 250 tonnes in weight, treatment with durable, rustproof coatings and the correct interpretation of engineering drawings. As part of the project, a special course was organised in a Scottish institute for the captains of turbine installation vessels. The project involves 384 employees, as of June 2009, 264 employees had already taken part. The project offers employees the assurance of a future job and also a means to update and broaden their specialist skills, which can then be deployed in other companies. The project has enabled an increase in the competitiveness of the newly established companies as well as support for the creation of new, high value jobs.

Eligible regions 2007-2013

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The level of ESF funding differs from one region to another depending on the relative wealth.

■ Lüneburg is a phasing-out region with GDP per head of more than 75 % of the EU-25 average but less than 75 % of the EU-15 average.

■ All the remaining regions are eligible under the regional competitiveness and employment objective with GDP per head of more than 75 % of the EU-25 average. They are covered under a separate ESF programme.