

Northern Ireland



The European Social Fund in Northern Ireland, 2007-2013

Northern Ireland is using ESF funding to build on its past economic growth, combat the impacts of the economic crisis, cut long-term unemployment and address its skills gaps. New training and support schemes will help disadvantaged people back into work, bring more opportunities to poorer rural and urban areas, and help create an innovative and business-friendly region with a skilled workforce.

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.

These are the five priorities of ESF funding:

- 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

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 spends over 10 billion euros per year across all Member States. This represents more than 10% of the European Union's total budget.



The socio-economic and employment situation in Northern Ireland

Before the onset of the economic crisis in 2008, Northern Ireland's economy had witnessed a period of sustained economic growth since the early 1990s, expanding in the latter years by around 4.5% per annum. Nevertheless, it remains one of the poorest regions of the UK, with GDP per capita well below the UK and EU-25 averages. The region also has large disparities in economic performance: for example, Belfast's GDP per capita is twice as high as that of any other area in the region. Northern Ireland is, moreover, the UK's least productive region, partly due to its reliance on traditional, declining industries, its poor performance in terms of innovation and enterprise, a low skills base, and a lack of investment in infrastructure.

Like all other parts of the UK, the Northern Ireland economy has not escaped the effects of the global economic recession. All the main industrial sectors have contracted considerably with job losses and declining output. Overall, unemployment has increased significantly but the unemployment rate (7.2% in July-Sept 2009) remains below the UK average (7.8%). Total employment has fallen, with the working-age employment rate (66.1%) currently the lowest of the UK regions.

The better qualified often leave Northern Ireland to study in Great Britain, and many do not return. As a result, a higher proportion of the Northern Irish workforce has no qualifications compared to the UK as a whole. This skills deficit is made worse by the fact that fewer people receive job-related training in Northern Ireland than the UK average.

Although jobless rates in Northern Ireland had halved over the decade before the crisis, it still has the highest levels of long-term unemployment of all the UK regions. It also has the highest levels of economic inactivity – i.e. those not seeking or available for work – of the UK regions, 7.6% above the UK average. Northern Ireland still has some way to go in facing up to its skills shortages and employment problems and narrowing the gap with the rest of the UK.

Northern Ireland's ESF priorities

Northern Ireland will use ESF funding to improve education and qualification levels in its workforce. Giving workers the most sought-after skills is a key strategy, which will make it easier for a worker to get the job he or she wants, and easier for businesses to get the workers they need. More vocational training and lifelong learning opportunities will help raise Northern Ireland's qualification and skill levels to those of the rest of the UK – and will make the economy more productive.

In addition, there will be a focus on removing barriers for individuals and groups who face difficulties in getting a job – for example, because of a disability, or a health condition, or because they

are considered too old. These people will be helped into training and into work. Flexible support that is tailored to individual needs is key to Northern Ireland's effort to help more of its people to get a job and address its skills shortages. The priorities for Northern Ireland's ESF Operational Programme are:

Priority 1: Helping people into sustained employment

- This priority targets the unemployed and also disadvantaged groups – people facing particular obstacles to getting a job, such as those with disabilities, lone parents, older people, and young people seeking a first job.

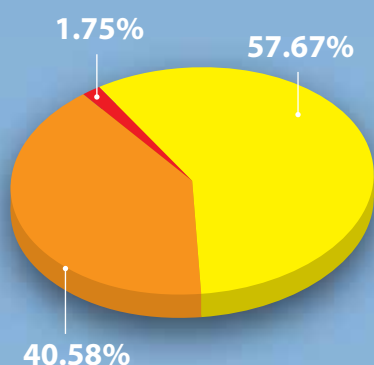
- Through training, job-seekers will gain the skills that are in demand in the workplace. They will then have more and better job opportunities.
- Groups and individuals facing particular barriers to work will receive extra help to improve their chances of getting and keeping a job. By bringing these people into the workforce, overall economic inactivity in the region will be reduced.


Priority 2: Improving workforce skills

- This priority focuses on those in work, improving their skills and qualifications and meeting the needs of the companies they work for.

- Training will raise the skill levels of the workforce and equip workers with the right skills for the future, and companies with the right workers for the future.
- There will be a focus on training for low-qualified workers, as well as for those who lack basic skills, for example in numeracy and information technologies.
- By making it easier to participate in education and training, workers with disabilities and health conditions, women, lone parents, and older people will acquire the skills that will help them progress in their jobs and get better jobs.

Financial Plan for the European Social Fund in Northern Ireland 2007-2013 (euro)



	 Community funding	National counterpart	Total funding
Helping people into sustained employment	95 597 174	143 395 761	■ 238 992 935
Improving workforce skills	67 280 121	100 920 182	■ 168 200 303
Technical assistance	2 900 005	4 350 007	■ 7 250 012
Grand total	165 777 300	248 665 950	414 443 250

Some earlier ESF projects in Northern Ireland, 2000-2006

- 'CSV Media Action N.I.' pulled communities together by improving media skills among jobless people. The project helped train over 55 unemployed people in ICT and media skills, arranging work experience with the BBC in Northern Ireland and enabling them to get more involved in social media projects in their communities.
- The Newry Technology Centre gave training to people with acquired and congenital physical disabilities. Focusing on key skills, such as accounting and ICT, the project also addressed personal development and literacy/numeracy issues, all with a view to raising participants' confidence and reducing their dependency on care services. By 31 December 2006, the project had helped close to 50 people with disabilities to improve their skills and seek employment.
- The 'Bytes project' provided new hope for young and jobless people in deprived areas of Northern Ireland. Funding ten drop-in centres, it helped youngsters to develop a variety of ICT skills while carrying out community projects. Since opening in October 2002, some 24 young people have obtained qualifications, 67 have found jobs, and 44 have gone into full-time training.
- The 'Euterpe project', a broad programme of vocational training and confidence building, was designed to meet the needs of women in the community. The aim was to remove barriers to getting involved, such as lack of childcare facilities, lack of confidence, and language and cultural barriers. By 30 November 2006, the project had benefited over 200 women, 66 of them gained new qualifications and six of them found jobs.

ESF contacts

In Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland ESF Programme 2007-13
 Managing Authority Unit
 Department for Employment and Learning
 Adelaide House
 39/49 Adelaide Street
 Belfast BT2 8FD
 United Kingdom
 Tel.: +44 (0)28 9025 7644
 Fax: +44 (0)28 9025 7646
www.delni.gov.uk/eu



At the European Commission

Information service of DG Employment,
 Social Affairs & Equal Opportunities
 Communication Unit
 BE-1049 Brussels
 Fax: +32 (0)2 296 23 93
 E-mail: empl-info@ec.europa.eu
<http://ec.europa.eu/esf>

Eligible regions 2007-2013



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

■ Northern Ireland with a GDP per head of more than 75% of the EU-25 average is eligible under the regional competitiveness and employment objective.