

Education



Education and Training in the European Social Fund 2007-2013

Supporting the development of *'human capital'* is a priority for the European Social Fund (ESF). Thus the ESF supports Member States and Regions in the development of a range of actions including the design, introduction and implementation of reforms in education and training systems, and the strengthening of innovation and research.

This responds to the Maastricht Communiqué which underlined the importance of “the use of the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund to support the development of vocational education and training (VET)”. Ministers of 32 European countries, the European Social Partners and the European Commission agreed to strengthen their cooperation with a view to:

- modernising their vocational education and training systems in order for Europe to become the most competitive economy, and
- offering all Europeans, whether they are young people, older workers, unemployed or disadvantaged, the qualifications and competences they need to be fully integrated into the emerging knowledge based society, contributing to more and better jobs.

1. POLICY BACKGROUND

The Conclusions of the Spring European Council (23-24 March 2006) state that *“Education and training are critical factors to develop the EU’s long-term potential for competitiveness as well as for social cohesion. The search for excellence and innovation at all levels of education and training, in particular through better links between higher education, research and enterprises, is crucial. Reforms must also be stepped up to ensure high quality education systems which are both efficient and equitable. National lifelong learning strategies should provide*

all citizens with the competences and qualifications they need, increasingly assisted at Community level by educational and training programmes such as Erasmus and Leonardo. To support greater mobility and an efficient labour market, progress on a European Qualifications Framework (EQF) should also be achieved.”

The integrated guidelines of the Lisbon Strategy call on Member States to expand and improve investment in human capital and adapt education and training systems in response to new competence requirements.

Lifelong learning has an important role in achieving the economic, employment and social goals for Europe. The Lisbon strategy both confirms the importance of well-developed lifelong learning strategies in Member States – this includes the effective implementation of the strategies for achieving the agreed goals – and places a clear emphasis on the role of vocational education and training, alongside general and higher education, in this strategy.

All Member States now consider that the Lisbon strategy is a factor in national education and training policy development.

The Community Strategic Guidelines stress the need for Europe to invest more in human capital and to develop and implement effective national lifelong



learning strategies for the benefit of individuals, enterprises, the economy and society.

The European Council of 20-21 March 2003 highlighted “using benchmarks to identify best practice and to ensure efficient and effective investment in human resources”. Three of these benchmarks are:

- an EU average rate of no more than 10% early school leavers
- at least 85% of 22 year-olds in the EU should have completed upper secondary education by 2010
- the EU average level of participation in lifelong learning should be at least 12.5% of the adult working age population (25 to 64 age group)

These benchmarks are also used as indicators to monitor Guideline 23 for the employment policies of the Member States – *Expand and improve investment in human capital*.

Education & Training 2010

The European Council agreed the *Education & Training 2010* work programme in 2002 as a major contribution towards the Lisbon strategy. The work programme is aimed at modernising and adapting education and training systems in view of the challenges of the knowledge-based society, globalisation and demographic changes.

It is based on the strategic goals and concrete objectives of education and training systems in Europe, agreed by the Education Council in 2001, and also integrates the follow-up to the 2002 Council resolution on lifelong learning, which stressed the need for all Member States to develop coherent and comprehensive strategies for lifelong learning. Education and Training 2010 also integrates specific actions for vocational education and training (the “Copenhagen process”) and higher education (including the results of the “Bologna process”), as well as the follow-up of the 2001 recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on mobility.

The Council (Education) and the European Commission undertook to review progress in implementing the *Education & Training 2010* (E&T 2010) work programme every two years. Their 2006 Joint Interim Report declares E&T 2010 to be a key contribution to the implementation of the new integrated guidelines for jobs and growth.

According to this report, reforms at national level are moving forward, and E&T 2010 has become a clearer part of the national policy landscape.

The European Youth Pact

As a component of the streamlined, re-launched Lisbon Strategy, the European Council adopted a *European Youth Pact*, which aims to improve employment, education, training, mobility, and social inclusion of young Europeans. In addition, the Community Strategic Guidelines call upon Member States to pay special attention to “*implementing the European Youth Pact, by facilitating access to employment for young people, by easing the transition from education to work, including through career guidance, assistance in completing education, access to appropriate training and apprenticeships*”.

High rates of unemployment and low responsiveness of education and training systems are the main obstacles to overcome. Efficient education and training systems produce a well-educated, well-equipped and adaptable labour force that, in turn, helps achieve stable and sustainable economic growth.

2. THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND AND EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The main task of the ESF is to “*contribute to the priorities of the Community as regards strengthening economic and social cohesion by improving employment and job opportunities, encouraging a high level of employment and more and better jobs*” (Article 2(1)).

The ESF provides financial support for the implementation of the European Employment Strategy by Member States in line with the integrated guidelines and recommendations, with a view to achieving the Lisbon objectives.

The Structural Funds have always invested substantially in education and training systems. In 2000-2006 the ESF has supported Member State actions in the area of education and vocational training mainly in the policy field ‘**promoting lifelong learning**’.

While the bulk of ESF funding in the 2000-06 period takes the form of assistance to **persons** (through training, re-training, counselling, guidance etc.),



the ESF also funds assistance for the development and modernisation of educational **structures and systems**. ESF support is also used to promote innovation in the field of education and training.

By way of example, in **Portugal** the key pillar for ESF was employability. Building on the good start during the previous programmes, ESF provided support for improving the transition from school to the labour market through developing more and better “sandwich courses” and by providing alternative education and training routes for those who failed at school.

The project “Junior fast track to IT” carried out in **Ireland** developed a comprehensive training programme offering young people the opportunity to gain industry skills which would complement academic qualifications. The project also addressed soft skills such as motivation, interest, commitment, work ethic as well as technical obstacles in the areas of literacy and numeracy.

In **Greece**, efforts were directed towards improving education and training through improving the link to the labour market and the extent of certification of continuing training. There were also substantial efforts to develop the information society in education, business and other areas of economic importance.

The European Regional Development Fund has contributed to education and training establishments as well as to learning centres like libraries in terms of infrastructure – buildings, equipment, ICT.

3. PROGRAMMING PERIOD 2007-2013

For the period 2007-2013, ESF will continue to support education and training systems, particularly under the **‘human capital’** priority. Whilst retaining a focus on the labour market and the need for adaptation of education and training systems, the new regulatory framework reflects the comprehensive policy approach to education and training. Thus:

- The scope of ESF has been broadened to reflect a **life-cycle approach** to education;
- There is an increased emphasis on strengthening **research and innovation**, particularly through enhanced collaboration between education, technology and companies;

- An important **flexibility** is offered in the next programming period by the “cross-financing clause” introduced by the General Regulation (Art.34.2) which provides the possibility to finance infrastructure investments within ESF programmes (up to 10% of each priority axis), provided that this is necessary for the successful implementation of the ESF operations. This flexibility ensures that education/training actions can be fully implemented in order to successfully achieve their objectives.

Human Capital in all Member States and Regions

For the period 2007-2013, the ESF can support actions in all Member States and regions (Article 3.1 (d)), towards:

- *“the design and introduction of reforms in education and training systems in order to develop employability, improving the labour market relevance of initial and vocational education and training and continually updating skills of training personnel with a view to innovation and a knowledge based economy”*
- *“the promotion of networking activities between higher education institutions, research and technological centres and enterprises”*

Thus the ESF will continue to focus on adapting educational and training systems to labour market requirements and to the needs of a knowledge based economy. These require well-designed reforms which ensure that those leaving the education system are equipped with the necessary competences and occupational skills. Education and training systems should be flexible and allow for the adaptation of skills throughout professional life.

Acknowledging the importance of initial education and secondary education in contributing to a well-skilled and adaptable labour force, the adaptation of education and training systems could cover all educational levels. Actions should pay special attention to the requirements of the labour market and the knowledge-based economy, and should promote innovation. An indispensable element of such an approach is constant training and upgrading of the skills of teachers and training personnel.

In order to become the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based society in the world, the Union also



needs to invest in research and innovation. The ESF will therefore support the promotion of networking activities between higher education institutions, research and technological centres and enterprises. This is in line with the conclusions of the Barcelona European Council (2002), which set the target of increasing the overall spending on R&D and innovation in the Union to 3% of GDP by 2010.

The Community Strategic Guidelines highlight the following priorities for all Member States:

- *“expanding and improving investment in human capital including the development of appropriate incentives and cost-sharing mechanisms for enterprises, public authorities and individuals;*
- *supporting coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategies, with particular attention given to addressing the skill needs of the knowledge economy, including support to co-operation and the establishment of partnerships between Member States, regions and cities in terms of education and training to facilitate the exchange of experience and good practice, including innovative projects. Particular attention should be given to addressing the needs of disadvantaged groups;*
- *supporting the design and introduction of reforms in education and training systems using where relevant common European references and principles, in particular to raise the labour-market relevance of education and training;*
- *strengthening the links between universities, research and technological centres and enterprises, in particular through networking activities and joint actions”.*

Human Capital under the Convergence Objective

To take account of the greater needs of the convergence regions and Cohesion countries, under the Convergence objective, the ESF can also support (article 3.2 (a)):

- *the implementation of reforms in education and training systems especially with a view to raising people’s responsiveness to the needs of a knowledge-based society and lifelong learning;*
- *increased participation in education and training throughout the life-cycle, including through action to achieve a reduction in early school leaving, gender-based segregation of subjects and increased*

access to and quality of initial, vocational and tertiary education and training.

- *the development of human potential in research and innovation, notably through post-graduate studies and training of researchers.*

The educational and training needs in the regions covered by the Convergence objective are more substantial. These regions often face severe problems in the structure of education, gender-based segregation of subjects, insufficient accessibility, low quality of education and training, lack of training offered after formal education etc. In these regions comprehensive reforms will often be necessary. To this end, the current focus on comprehensive and overall reform of the education and training systems should be continued and could include support for the implementation of such reforms.

Early school leaving (ESL) is a serious problem which is likely to lead to unemployment and social exclusion of the people concerned. Reducing the percentage of early school leavers is essential to ensure full employment and greater social cohesion. Targeting early school leaving – which may require substantial reforms of the education system – should be an ESF priority in the Convergence regions.

The causal factors of ESL (such as absenteeism, learning difficulties and behavioural problems) are established in earlier years, calling, therefore, for earlier interventions. While the ESF has not generally supported **primary education** in the past, within the scope of the future ESF regulation actions could also be eligible in this area, including actions linked to the prevention of school failure and/or early school leaving.

To enable the Convergence regions to reach their full potential the ESF will also support the development of human capital in research and innovation, such as through post-graduate studies and training of researchers.

The Community Strategic Guidelines highlight the following specific priorities in addition to those that apply to both objectives:

- *“ensuring an adequate supply of attractive, accessible and high quality education and training provision at all levels, including the improvement of staff competences and qualification, promoting flexible learning pathways from an early stage, actions to achieve a*



significant decline in early school-leaving and higher completion rates of upper secondary education and improved access to pre-school and school education;

- supporting the modernisation of higher education and the development of human potential in research and innovation, through post-graduate studies, further training of researchers, and attracting more young people into scientific and technical studies;
- promoting the quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training, including apprenticeships and entrepreneurship education;
- ensuring, where appropriate, greater mobility at regional, national or transnational level, and promoting frameworks and systems to support the transparency and recognition of qualifications and the validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- investment in education and training infrastructure including ICTs, where such investments are necessary for the implementation of reform and/or where they can significantly contribute to increasing the quality and effectiveness of the education and training system."

4. METHODS TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE IN THE OPERATIONAL PROGRAMMES

Programming structure

Member States may choose to have an Operational Programme or a separate priority axis dedicated to human capital (as defined in Article 3.1.d or 3.2.a of the ESF regulation) which would fully concentrate on education and training.

Complementarity with other priorities

The other ESF priorities should complement and reinforce actions implemented under the **'human capital'** priority, creating a comprehensive strategy for human capital development.

While the prevention of early school leaving could be supported under the human capital priority, the reintegration of early school-leavers into the labour market could be supported under the priorities "reinforcing of **social inclusion** of people at a disadvantage" (Article 3.1 (c)) or "enhancing **access to employment** and the sustainable inclusion in the labour market" (Article 3.1 (b)).

Similarly, the need to address youth unemployment is emphasised in the priority "enhancing access to employment and the sustainable inclusion in the labour market" (Article 3.1 (b)). Within this priority Member States are called upon to implement active and preventive measures ensuring early identification of needs with individual action plans and personalised support, such as tailored training.

Moreover, in the Convergence regions and Cohesion Countries the educational and training systems can also benefit from overall reforms of the public administration and public services implemented under the **'institutional capacity'** priority (Article 3.2. (b)). This priority recognises the need to support the strengthening of institutional and administrative capacity as a key element for promoting structural adjustments, growth and jobs, as well as economic development.

5. KEY EDUCATION AND TRAINING ISSUES FOR THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND

The education and training priorities of the ESF support the *Education & Training* 2010 work programme. Based on the 2006 Joint Interim Report of the Council and the Commission, three policy areas for education and training were identified:

- Investing in the future: improving the level of basic competences
- Transformation of systems to make Lifelong Learning (LLL) a reality for all
- Increasing the quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training

The list set below describes these priorities.

Investing in the future: improving the level of basic competences

- Increasing **access and participation of groups at risk of exclusion** (immigrants, ethnic minorities), both in formal education (including higher education) and in adult education.
- The acquisition by all, by the end of compulsory education, of the **basic competences** needed to live and work in the knowledge-based society.



- Improving **standards and quality** in compulsory and post-compulsory schooling (this is an especially important issue for “low-performing” countries and for countries with significant regional disparities in outcome and attainment).
- Ensuring **access to ICT** for all (both in terms of ICT infrastructure, and in terms of digital skills especially for teachers and older workers). ICT opens up possibilities for varied and flexible learning, ranging from assessing ICT skills and outcomes for learners with special needs to up-skilling people in the workplace and improving access to work for low-skilled women, as well as the professional development of teachers.
- **University restructuring, redeployment and modernisation:** implementing Bologna / internationalising higher education. Support initiatives to establish centres or poles of excellence. Implementation of quality assurance systems linked to ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education). Facilitate access to non-traditional students (e.g. workers).
- **Strengthening university-industry collaboration and knowledge transfer**, including through the support of start-ups, spin-offs, incubators, science parks etc. The regional dimension is crucial to improving university-industry cooperation. Actions to increase the number of students of mathematics, science and technology (for instance through grants or information campaigns) are also very relevant. The objective is to increase by at least 15% the total number of graduates in the areas mentioned by 2010. Specific attention should be paid in this context to gender balance.
- Significant adaptation/modernisation of **teacher training**. In most EU countries extensive reforms to teacher training have taken place or are under way. There is a consensus on the need to raise the standards of teacher training and to introduce or improve provision for continuing training. The same is true for the initial and continuing training of VET teachers and trainers. ICT, languages and pedagogies targeted on at-risk young people are particularly relevant.

Transformation of systems to make lifelong learning (LLL) a reality for all

- Better governance of systems through **partnerships** at all levels – that is, effective working arrangements between different government departments, not least between education and labour ministries, and the active involvement in partnership of social partners and other key stakeholders such as parents and teachers/trainers, the voluntary sector and local actors.
- **Increasing participation in adult education** and continuous training – especially important for those groups of workers for whom current levels of training are low (women, older workers, those with lower levels of initial qualification, and workers in industries that have low training participation rates). The objective is to ensure that at least 12% of the adult working age population (25-64 age group) have taken part in LLL by 2010.
- **Reducing levels of early school leaving:** The majority of Member States must increase their efforts in the coming years to help reach the EU target: to reduce to no more than 10% the average proportion of young people leaving school early (by 2010).
- Effective **analysis/anticipation of skill/competence needs** through co-operation with social partners: surveys, implementation of observatories/research networks, development or revision of occupational and/or competence standards.
- Development of **national qualifications frameworks** and quality assurance systems. The principal aims of a qualifications framework are to clarify for all users and stakeholders the main routes to a particular qualification, how progress can be made, to what extent transfer is allowed (including the use of credit), on what basis decisions for recognition are taken (including through validation of non-formal learning). Qualification frameworks are also used for quality assurance and development purposes.
- Development of systems for the **validation** of non-formal and informal learning. Validation is an important topic in the context of national debates and reforms, despite the wide range of levels of development and implementation.



- Improving **access to higher education by non-traditional students** i.e. workers, people from low socio-economic backgrounds or with other disadvantages – through systems for the recognition and validation of prior learning and experience, through grants, through provisions for continuing education and training (whether for degree programmes or diplomas) and through the creation of open universities and ICT-based learning.
- Development of coordinated and consistent lifelong **guidance and counselling** services, including through the networking of different services tailored to specific needs, in order to provide a service covering all stages of lifelong learning and work.

Increasing the quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training

- Increasing the **quality and transparency** of VET provision through quality assurance and development systems.
- Improving VET **infrastructure** through better links with enterprises.
- Improving **curricula** and creating **flexibility** in delivery – establishing flexible and open frameworks for VET in order to reduce barriers between VET and general education and increase progression between initial and continuing training and higher education. In addition, action should be taken to integrate **mobility** into initial and continuing training.

- Increasing **participation** in continuing vocational training of employees at all levels. With the expected impact of demographic change, special attention has to be given to the skills upgrading and competence development of **older workers**. The target for the employment rate for 55-64 year olds is 50%. Older workers are currently under-represented in the uptake of training, though it could certainly contribute to increasing their employment rate.
- Targeted investment, assessment of prior learning and tailored training and learning provision for **low skilled people and disadvantaged groups** such as migrants, refugees, Roma, people in prison, older workers, and people with special educational needs.
- Continuing competence development of **teachers and trainers** in VET, reflecting their specific learning needs and changing role as a consequence of the development of VET.
- Measures in favour of **work placements** – increasing the number of students undertaking apprenticeships or dual education, in order to establish better links with the labour market as the purpose in all cases is to take better account of enterprise needs.

Improving the **information** on VET provision through databases on learning opportunities available on the Internet to be connected at the European level.



The full version of the above text is available at:
http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/esf/fields/education_en.htm



For more information:

Information service of DG Employment, Social Affairs & Equal Opportunities

Communication Unit

B-1049 Brussels

Fax.: +32 2 296 23 93

E-mail: empl-info@ec.europa.eu

<http://ec.europa.eu/esf>