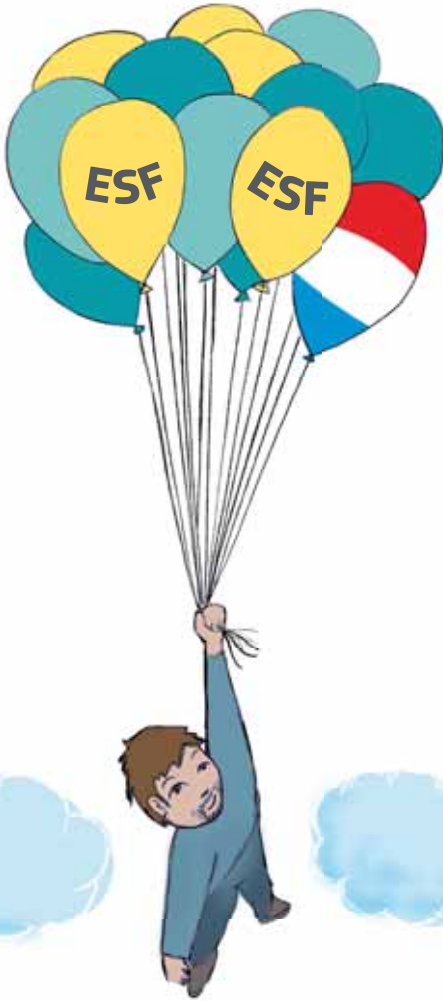




European  
Commission



# THE NETHERLANDS AND THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND

With ESF support, the Netherlands is dedicating close to EUR 2 billion to proactive measures to help more people into work and improve skills. Part of this effort includes reaching out to disadvantaged groups, and reducing the number of early school leavers. In addition, the Netherlands is encouraging its companies to train workers in new skills and to seek new, innovative ways of improving performance.

*Social  
Europe*

THE NETHERLANDS

# INVESTING IN PEOPLE AND JOBS: THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE NETHERLANDS

Although the Netherlands' economy has weathered the crisis relatively well, future economic growth is threatened by an ageing workforce and a slowdown in productivity growth and female employment. So the country needs to take measures to combat these challenges, including by encouraging people to work longer, providing more incentives for women to work and return to work, and helping disadvantaged groups such as the long-term unemployed, immigrants and the disabled to overcome obstacles and enter the workforce.

To help more women into jobs, the Netherlands is stressing the need for initiatives to better reconcile work and private life, in particular for those with care responsibilities. The starting point is the belief that everyone can benefit if they recognise that both employers and employees have a common interest in smart and flexible approaches to work and working practices. Boosting lifelong learning, including vocational training, is another important aim if employers and workers are to develop the skills commensurate with a longer working life. The Netherlands has well-developed systems for training, based on continuing co-operation between education institutions, companies and local authorities.

*“A better balance between work and family life”*

New technologies and innovation are well integrated into companies and industrial sectors in the country, and the number of young people completing higher education exceeds EU targets. So, while the share of graduates in the workforce will continue to grow, the Netherlands aims to reduce the number of school leavers without basic qualifications to 8% by 2020 – a social inclusion measure to ensure that more young people can benefit fully from the highly skilled jobs on offer in the Dutch economy. Social policy-making in the Netherlands recognises the important social function of employment as a safety net against poverty, so the government wants to lower the number of people with only part-time work opportunities and bring them into full-time jobs. Through this, the Netherlands aims to reduce the number of people in low work-intensity households – including the disabled, immigrants and older people – by 100 000 by 2020.

## ESF spending in the Netherlands

For 2007–2013, the Netherlands is receiving EUR 796 million in ESF funding. With national co-funding, this brings the total ESF spending on jobs to EUR 1.94 billion. Spending is shared between programmes to increase the labour supply, promote access to employment for all, and increase adaptability and investments in people and jobs.



# THE NETHERLAND'S ESF PRIORITIES

## Helping disadvantaged groups

Local authorities in the Netherlands are using ESF funds to help the long-term unemployed back to work. Projects are concentrating on several groups: people facing specific obstacles, such as young and older people; those who want to work, but owing to illness or disability can only hold down a part-time job; and young people who are disabled or have suffered from a chronic illness that has prevented them getting into a normal job. For example, the town of Tilburg is helping 150 at-risk young people a year to find a first job or go on to training with ESF support. Help is also being offered to offenders and people undergoing rehabilitation who can follow education or training programmes to improve their job prospects – close on 7 000 have benefited so far with over 2 000 getting qualifications.

## Keeping the young in education

The ESF is supporting many projects that aim to reduce the number of unqualified young people and early school leavers. Those who have difficulties with the standard curriculum are guided to more practical education and training options – ensuring they can get the qualifications that will help their job

*“Wanted: more young people with qualifications”*

prospects. Those with learning difficulties receive the special-needs teaching and training that will allow them to participate in the workforce like everyone else. Much of the funding goes through schools, such as the De Baander school in Amersfoort which takes poorly performing pupils and uses specialist teachers and small-group teaching to provide an intensive preparation and new skills for the transition into working life.

## Better workers and better businesses

The ‘Educating employees’ programme funds companies and business organisations to upgrade workforce skills and improve the employability and productivity of workers. For example, the HBD organisation that represents the retail sector provided a range of training options, covering sales techniques, management, leadership and computer training, as well as specialised training for workers in specific sectors such as jewellery, garden centres and pet shops. The ESF is also funding innovative, employee-focused projects to improve the flexibility, productivity and sustainability of companies. One example is the refrigeration systems firm which used outside advisors to improve employee safety at work. Another is the manufacturing company that overcame problems with a fixed work schedule by implementing a core-team approach which both improved productivity and offered more flexible working arrangements to all workers who wanted them.

# THE ESF IN THE NETHERLANDS: SOME EXAMPLES

## A helping hand in tough times

The economic crisis has affected most businesses in some way and hampered job creation. Yet an ESF-sponsored project in the IJssel-Vecht region of the Netherlands is promoting an innovative form of job creation for the younger generation by providing job vouchers for local companies to take on apprentices. Municipalities offer firms the vouchers, which cover 50% of the minimum wage of a new young employee – the aim is to issue 320 in total. A big communications drive was initiated to inform companies, schools, young people and municipalities in the region about the scheme. As a result of this project, young unemployed people have been given a chance to get on the first rung of the job ladder whilst also receiving an education in school.

## Moving ahead on social innovation

The rail-engineering consultancy Movares is not only a leader in designing European transport systems. It also seeks innovative ways to motivate and retain its 1200-strong workforce of highly trained professionals – and attract more. The ESF ‘Sustaining movement’ project sought new, bottom-up approaches for cultivating a working environment based around mutual trust, flexibility and the confidence to try out new ideas. With employee involvement, the project set up several ‘nurseries’ for social innovation – covering issues such as flexible working conditions, other ways to evaluate performance, new pay structures, and a ‘buddy system’ for younger workers. Movares is now moving ahead to implement several of the project’s themes more widely in the company – a successful conclusion that helped win a ‘Best Employer’ award in 2010 from among 380 large companies in the Netherlands.

### Do you want to...?

- ...learn more about the ESF in the Netherlands?
- ...understand better how the ESF works?
- ...see video clips on projects from across the EU?

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