



European
Commission

The European Social Fund at work

More jobs, less marginalisation



Someone in a job is less at risk of poverty and more engaged with society. But the job market is not a level playing field. Getting work can be harder for some social groups and individuals. Whether because of ethnic origin, education, disability or age – a number of people find the job market closed to them. The challenging economic climate just amplifies the problem.

Projects supported by the European Social Fund (ESF) can help those who may fall through the

net of national policies aiming to reduce unemployment and poverty.

Between 2007–2013, a third of all people targeted by ESF projects belonged to disadvantaged groups: 9% were disabled, 12% were migrants, 4% belonged to minority groups such as the Roma and 9% were reported as belonging to other vulnerable groups.

The Fund takes a two-pronged approach to bringing down the barriers holding some people back from full participation in society in order to avoid social exclusion. Certain ESF projects work directly with people at risk, through training, counselling and better job opportunities. Others tackle public perception and social systems, raising awareness of the effects of prejudice and improving public services.

The ESF – actively involving everyone

Through breaking the poverty cycle by getting people into work...

When it comes to combating social exclusion, the ESF is used in various ways throughout the EU, in the context of the cultures and the needs of the people involved. But the goal remains the same: to help people into work and in doing so, break the cycle of poverty and marginalisation. Social enterprises can help achieve this.

Although these businesses are commercial, their primary objective is not to make a profit but to

serve their communities. One way of doing this is by creating jobs for people who could otherwise remain unemployed. The ESF supports a range of these enterprises, such as The Welcome Café in Sweden, which gives migrant women the chance to learn Swedish while working according to their abilities.

Partnerships between organisations, including at the level of local communities, can be instrumental when it comes to addressing specific needs in a particular region. The Fund can be used to help people get the know-how, skills and equipment they need to run projects in their communities to tackle the complex issue of social inclusion.

Providing people with opportunities is one of the Funds' priorities, but people need to be ready to take these opportunities up. 'Integrated pathways to work' can help them to do so.

This concept involves individual counselling to identify the participants' hopes and needs and put in place relevant training. Once the participant has the skills, they are then accompanied on their job-hunt with help and advice given on applications and interviews. When they find work they continue to be supported, often in cooperation with their employer.



Through a focus on the vulnerable...

Drug and alcohol abuse, inability to speak the local language, homelessness, poor healthcare, debt or limited access to education keep people marginalised. Racism and discrimination also prevent people from playing an active role in our society.

ESF supported projects try to counter these barriers by offering counselling, training and education, support for the self-employed and access to healthcare.

In the case of people from the Roma communities, the EU's biggest ethnic minority, some ESF projects are bringing mediators and assistants from the community into schools to help smooth the way for Roma children. Others are putting forward Roma role models to inspire and motivate youngsters to stay in education. For the self-employed, the ESF supports Roma women who wish to set up their own craft enterprises.

But it doesn't stop with the Roma. Some disabled people in Berlin are benefitting from a new approach to vocational training thanks to the services of qualified sign language interpreters. Drug addicts in Berlin are also being helped to find ways of learning that work for them through the use of flexible scheduling. New training methods are also being promoted in Spain, where Galicia is using ESF support to offer modular courses in basic skills for people with no qualifications.



Setting up 'special learner' programmes in Estonia

A day care centre in Tallinn has been supporting children and adolescents with disabilities. Since 2000, along with rehabilitation activities, the Kõo Centre has been enhancing its children's independence through self-care and skills classes.

But participants who had completed their basic education were not able to continue on vocational programmes even if they wanted, since none were adapted to their needs.

The Centre, in cooperation with the Continuing Education Centre of the University of Jyväskylä in Finland, used ESF support to create courses and train teachers to teach learners with special needs.

Thirty teachers were trained between 2007–2008 and two courses are now on offer to those who want to go on to a vocational programme at the centre.

Through fighting discrimination...

The ESF helps people develop their skills and gain the confidence they need to become part of their wider communities.

To target discrimination in the work place, and in society as a whole, the Fund's work raises public awareness of the problem and helps businesses adopt better practices. For example, the 'Berlin Needs You!' project is using ESF support to encourage and help employers, principally the public sector, to fill up to a quarter of their traineeships with young people from migrant backgrounds. Within the first three years the number of trainees in the public sector has almost doubled.

An innovative approach to child care

The challenge of finding good child care can drive some women out of employment. Around Europe, state nursery schools can be over-crowded and privately run options are often prohibitively expensive. In the Czech Republic some employers are using ESF support to help out.

They are setting up crèches called 'Children Groups' which are run directly in the workplace and take seven to 24 children. Care is provided in a number of ways, through local schools, social enterprises or the employers themselves.

Public services frequently do not take special needs into account. The Fund supports activities to improve the quality of service offered, through staff training for example, or the adaptation of services on offer.

What lies ahead?

The earlier projects can start to work with people who are at risk of exclusion, the more effective the intervention is. The European Social Fund is boosting its efficiency by dovetailing its activities with other EU funds to achieve a greater impact, targeting help to people at every stage of their lives.

New solutions for society's urgent needs are more pressing than ever as the economic climate remains challenging. Socially innovative approaches offer a way forward. As unemployment rises, it is the vulnerable groups that are hit hardest. A special emphasis on supporting social innovation will help find ways to lessen the impact.

The Fund will be working with local partners to get them ever more involved, supporting them with better access to funding. Education institutions, workers' organisations, NGOs dealing with employment, social inclusion and disadvantaged groups, and employers' organisations all have important contributions to make to ESF programmes.

More information on the ESF:

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

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