



European  
Commission

## The European Social Fund at work

### Equipping Europe's youth for today's job market



Recent sharp increases in the youth unemployment rate, over 50% in some EU countries, are undermining a generation's ability to carve lives of their own. Investing in young people is investing in the EU's economy. The European Social Fund (ESF) is the EU's main tool to equip young people for the world of work.

The Fund focuses on giving young people access to the skills and training they need to find work.

It does this by supporting improvements to education systems, developing quality training options and increasing young people's access to jobs.

From 2007 to 2012, 20 million young people aged under 25 benefited from the ESF through training or mentoring. In some countries, young people account for almost half of all participants in ESF activities.

# ESF — Opening up opportunities for Europe's youth

## Through education and training...

Over the coming years, job seekers in the EU will need to be increasingly better qualified to find work. To help Europe's young people into work, the ESF opens up access to better education and training.

The large numbers of youngsters who drop out of school early face real barriers to employment. The ESF can offer ways back into formal education for those who change their minds. In other cases, informal education initiatives help young people to become employable.

Funded by the ESF, the Hothouse project in Cornwall, UK, targets 14 to 19 year olds who are showing signs of dropping out. By focusing on creativity, innovation, social and business enterprise and risk management, the project inspires youngsters to achieve more and gain confidence.

ESF support has helped a number of EU countries reform their higher education systems fundamentally. More students are leaving education and training systems with better qualifications thanks to: flexible, modular courses; improvements to distance learning; modernised teaching methods and retrained staff.

## Through bridging the gap between school and work...

On average around 50% of all students in upper secondary education are choosing vocational education and training. ESF projects are helping to make such courses more relevant to the needs of business and industry by involving employers in course design.

One area of priority for the ESF is helping people work and study in other EU countries so they can explore more opportunities. These include improving language skills, getting a work placement or acquiring skills which improve their chances for a job.

For those who want to start up their own business, ESF-supported projects can provide vital training. How to turn ideas into a business, deal with book-keeping and the ins and outs of financing can all be covered. Job fairs put them in contact with trained business mentors or potential employers.

Certain ESF participants can receive grants to get their own businesses off the ground. In Poland, 13 674 young people were funded to the tune of €25 000, maximum, at start up.

### Boosting employment and innovation

Helping young scientists to set themselves up in business is one way a Greek project is hoping to foster innovation. The 'Young self-employed scientists' programme supports doctors, engineers, pharmacists and lawyers through the development of a business plan for funding.

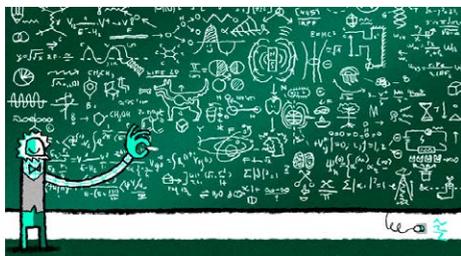
Almost 6 000 people have been helped on their way so far. One year after participation, 74% of entrepreneurs were still self-employed and 63% reported stable or rising turnover or profits. Around 3 000 additional jobs have been created.

In recent years, efforts to help Europe's young people get into employment have increased. Around €16 billion of EU funding was re-allocated in 2012 to speed up the access in particular young people have to training and employment. This sum is expected to help around one million young people and 55 000 small and medium-sized companies.

In Latvia, for example, the proportion of young, unemployed people benefitting from EU supported projects is set to jump from 24% to 40% in the next few years, thanks to an increased roll-out of EU projects.

## Through helping the young unemployed into jobs or training..

EU governments have agreed to establish youth guarantee schemes aimed at youngsters aged under 25 not in employment, education or training. These guarantee a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of having become unemployed or having left formal education. The ESF can offer significant support to the establishment of such schemes. The ESF co-financed Youth Employment Initiative will pursue the same goals, focusing on regions worst affected by youth unemployment.



## Through helping all young people to get the chances they deserve...

The job market remains challenging for many young people but certain social groups are likely to have an even harder time getting the education and training they need for quality work. The ESF supports projects that smooth pathways to work for disadvantaged young people. One way to do so is by helping families and communities understand the importance of pursuing studies and training.

### Stay in school, open up your opportunities

If you are from an ethnic minority in Denmark, you have almost double the risk of dropping out of school than other children.

The Hold on Tight Caravan project takes an all-round approach to helping children from minorities complete their education and leave with qualifications. Homework classes, personal mentoring for each child at risk, skills development for teachers and actively bringing on board parents: all these combine to create a safety net for a child that might be thinking of walking away.

Since it started in 2009, the project has seen dropout rates falling from 20% to less than 15% and a narrowing of the gap between dropout rates for minorities and the rest of the community.

In Slovakia and Germany, the Fund is being used to get hard-to-place youngsters into work. Slovakia encourages employers to take on disadvantaged job seekers for at least nine months. In Germany, vocational training programmes are offered to low-achievers.

## What lies ahead?

Putting Youth Guarantee Schemes into practice is a significant effort to respond more decisively and coherently to youth unemployment. The reinforcement of public employment services, support for training and apprenticeship schemes and improved education systems will all have to go hand in hand to achieve lasting results.

To focus financial support still further on the regions and individuals struggling most with youth employment and inactivity, the Youth Employment Initiative will concentrate on regions experiencing youth unemployment rates above 25% and on young people not in employment, education or training. It will amplify the support provided by the ESF for the implementation of the Youth Guarantee and the focused approach will ensure that the level of support per young person is sufficient to make a real difference in parts of Europe where the challenges are most acute.

Given the scale of the youth unemployment challenge across the EU, it is clear that young people will remain at the top of Europe's priorities over the coming years.

### More information on the ESF:

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

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