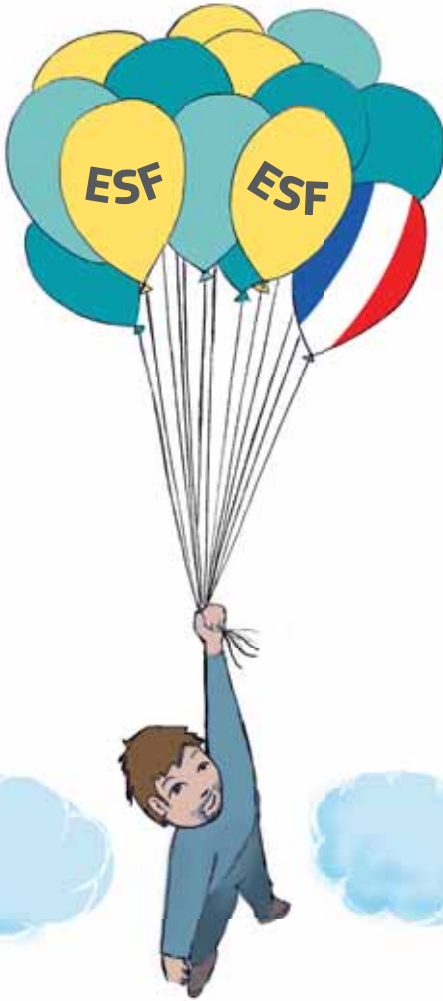




European
Commission



FRANCE

AND THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND

France receives EUR 5.4 billion of ESF funding to implement employment and training actions on the French mainland and in France's overseas departments. This ESF support also enables France to fight inequality and to help companies adapt to economic development. These are the strategic priorities for boosting growth and strengthening France's international competitiveness.

INVESTING IN PEOPLE AND JOBS: THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR FRANCE

Employment is one of France's main challenges. Young people under 25 years of age, people with few or no qualifications, and people with immigrant backgrounds are those most affected by unemployment. Furthermore, unemployment is growing within groups who were relatively safe from it in the past, in particular managers, better-qualified workers and those over 50 years old. Since 2009, the unemployment rate nationally has remained above 9% whilst long-term unemployment is increasing. This explains why the majority (58%) of those benefiting from ESF-financed actions are people without work. The low employment rate among the under 25s is curbing growth, which is why France is very proactive towards young people without formal qualifications – young people currently represent 44% of ESF-funding beneficiaries. Added to this is the growing problem of job security. Although still in a minority, fixed-term contracts, temporary contracts and apprenticeships are all on the increase,

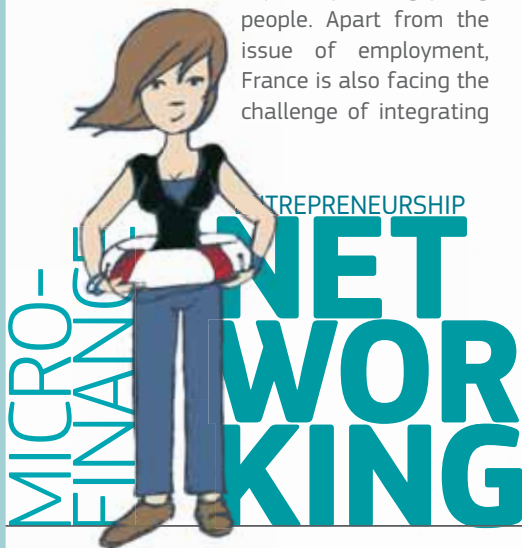
especially among young people. Apart from the issue of employment, France is also facing the challenge of integrating

those people experiencing difficulties, whether they are young or without qualifications, older and jobless, immigrants or the disabled. Finally, companies themselves, the main creators of jobs, need support in adapting to economic change.

ESF spending in France

Every Member State manages its ESF funds according to its own particular challenges. For the 2007-2013 period, France is receiving EUR 5.4 billion of ESF funding, plus national and private co-financing of more than EUR 4.8 billion. This takes the total ESF spending to over EUR 10 billion. ESF funding is implemented under the 'Regional competitiveness and employment' Operational Programme. The four overseas departments – Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Martinique and Réunion – receive a total of EUR 900 million for use in their own Operational Programmes.

*“Targeting a 70%
employment rate for
women by 2020”*



FRANCE'S ESF PRIORITIES

Adapting to economic change

France uses part of its ESF funds to support those companies and workers having to adapt to constant changes in the economy. Projects financed by the ESF aim to improve access to lifelong vocational training, to encourage sandwich courses for young people – during which they divide their time between the classroom and hands-on experience in the workplace – and to enhance the employability of older workers. For example, the fishermen on Réunion Island have been given the opportunity to become more professional by following courses on regulations and sustainable fisheries management. Micro-business is another sector receiving ESF support. Thanks to the ESF, more than 1 000 workers in VSE (very small entities) acquired the necessary skills to take over their company whilst, at the same time, the managers learnt how to pass on their know-how to their successors.

Finding a new job

ESF funds have also been used to fight unemployment, especially long-term unemployment. Thus, France has set out two objectives: improving the efficiency of public employment services and boosting measures aimed at encouraging people back into work.

“Reducing the school drop-out rate to 9.5 %”

Schemes financed by the ESF can be quite original, such as helping young mothers to access childcare so that they can return to work, or supporting retraining schemes for workers in sectors hit by the recession.

Improving social cohesion

The ESF aims to strengthen social cohesion and fight discrimination, too. Numerous initiatives are being taken in France to support the return to work of people who are remote from the job market. They include mentoring schemes, advice services, training, and geographically targeted measures for residents in sensitive urban areas. In the Nord-Pas-de-Calais area, a job centre set up a scheme whereby young people excluded from the job market were mentored by older or retired workers. The young people were given guidance throughout their search for a job and continued to receive advice after finding a job. Another ESF action concerns the fight against racial discrimination, both at the recruitment stage and at work.

THE ESF IN FRANCE: SOME EXAMPLES

Setting up a company

People setting up very small companies need a broad skill base. The ESF supported men and women in Burgundy who wanted to set up or take over a micro company. To this end, it financed 37% of a project piloted by a business incubator and linked to a micro-credit organisation and a network of management-support agencies in the Saône-et-Loire department. As a result, 1 000 people received support, more than 350 companies were set up or taken over, and 47 businesses were given micro-credit support.

Finding a lasting job

The 'Aisne Action Emploi' association in the Picardy region supports recruitment and the sustainable employment of workers in companies. This initiative, supported by the ESF and the Picardy regional authorities, targets the long-term unemployed and those who are socially excluded. The idea is to identify companies' recruitment needs, to put candidates forward and to support the new workers throughout their trial period so that they stay in their job. This action has helped more than 300 people.

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