

Evaluation of the ESF support to Lifelong Learning

Final Report

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Executive Summary

This summary relates to a study of the use of the European Social Fund (ESF) to support lifelong learning (LLL) during the 2000-6 and 2007-13 programming periods. LLL encompasses a broad range of interventions in support for individuals that has a longer term objective of sustainable employment with ongoing and planned support aimed at enhancing skills, learning and employability. Individuals are likely to participate in different forms of LLL provision over a period of time, ideally as a continuous joined up pathway.

In particular the study focused on three target groups: young job seekers (up to the age of 24), low skilled workers (those with qualifications up to ISCED level 2) and older workers (55 plus). The focus of the study has been on the economically active, ESF participants in work or actively seeking work. The study had less of a focus on individuals not actively seeking to enter the labour market.

The study was based on ESF data sets, the European Union Labour Force Survey, reports and evaluations of ESF provision, and case study work in eight Member States: Austria, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the UK.

The overall achievements of ESF supported LLL

There are significant achievements in terms of:

- The reach of ESF – an estimated 5 million young people, 5.5 million individuals with low skills, and 576,000 older people benefitted from ESF supported LLL activity across the EU27 between 2007 and 2010. There will be some overlap between these figures, however, in that some young people will also be low skilled and likewise some older workers will be low skilled.
- The proportion of the adult population (25-64) engaged in LLL varies from 32.8% in Denmark to just 1.2% in Bulgaria (amongst the case study countries the highest % was 24.5 in Sweden) but all Member States have a strong policy commitment to LLL which has risen in recent years in most cases is evidenced by a bespoke LLL strategy.
- Employment rates after ESF provision, typically of 20-35% depending on attributes of participants. These are similar to comparable interventions for participants with similar labour market characteristics where comparisons can be made.
- In addition immediate employment is not the only target of importance. Progression in training and learning for example, leading in the long term to sustainable employment is a key outcome of LLL.

ESF has been a major funder of LLL across the European Union. Without the resources of the ESF there would have been considerably less LLL provision, nevertheless the relative importance of ESF and its contribution to LLL varies between Member States. However, ESF support to LLL often does not mean the provision of a holistic pathway for participants and is not supported by referral and tracking systems, where they exist.

The achievements of LLL need to be seen in the context of the economic crisis from 2008 onwards with rising levels of unemployment (especially amongst younger people), an increase in vulnerable jobs as businesses close or downsize, and a reduction in new employment opportunities.

The ESF is designed to support and improve national systems and priorities, not to promote a separate provision. As a result there are significant variations between ESF supported LLL between Member States, reflecting differing national labour markets and national priorities (and also in some countries, regional variations). The key variations noted in the study were:

- The focus of target groups – most countries have targeted young people but in Greece for example, the overwhelming focus is on the low skilled aged 24 years or more (by contrast it is less than 10% in Cyprus for this target group). In Germany young people comprise more than 50% of all ESF participations (the data does not distinguish LLL from other ESF provision). Amongst the case study countries the Operational Programmes in Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the UK had a particularly strong focus on young people and especially those in socially excluded groups/communities.
- The choice of target groups – there is no set definition of groups and the target groups (and their precise focus) varies. In some cases rather than target low skilled workers there is a focus on groups marginalized from the labour market including those which tend to have lower level skills.
- The choice of measures – the policy focus varies as evidenced by national LLL strategies. In Austria for example, provision for young people is focused largely on early school leavers and helping young people gain qualifications whereas in Spain there is a stronger focus on integrating young people into the labour market. These variations reflect policy variations which in turn are influenced by past policies at Member State level and labour market research.
- The achievement of targets - in practice target values and achievements vary largely – in some cases the overachievement suggests that the targets might have been set particularly low.
- Gender balance – differences in terms of participation and achievements are often due to cultural and historic factors as much as labour market conditions. In most of the case study countries the gender balance generally reflects demographic factors but the Netherlands stand out for a very strong male bias for ESF LLL participations despite government measures to address this imbalance.
- Measurement and monitoring systems – including the use (or not) of official surveys, the coverage of evaluations and adherence to ESF data sets (the SFC).
- The stage of development of LLL policies and infrastructure – in general LLL is less well established in Central and Eastern Europe (hence very low levels of LLL participation in countries such as Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia, although Estonia performs more strongly in this respect).

Table 1 – Reach, impact and the critical success factors for the three target groups

	Reach	Impact	Critical Success Factors
Young People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than a third of ESF LLL participants are young people • About 5 million young people have been reached by ESF LLL 2007-10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20-30% of ESF LLL participants in this target group take up employment. There is also a significant transition into further training and education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tailored provision and engagement activities geared to young people in many Member States • National priorities to address youth unemployment have raised profile of provision for this target group and positively impacted on marketing, awareness raising etc.
Low Skilled	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide variations from under 10% to more than 80% of ESF LLL participations across Member States • Low skilled are not always an explicit target group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25-35% of ESF LLL participants in this group gain employment but higher levels normally apply to those in employment or closest to employment • Improved skill levels including softer skills to help participants access and sustain employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tailored provision has proved effective although disparate nature of the low skilled target group require bespoke projects • ESF LLL has been generally more effective in keeping people in work (e.g. through employability support measures). Those who are 'further away' from employment have benefited from softer skills and education provision rather than employment outcomes.
Older Workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally the hardest of the three target groups to reach because many have not trained for some years and because they have a lower priority than the other target groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment outcomes are less than for young people and low skilled, partly because a higher proportion of older workers are in employment already. Renewing and changing skills is a key impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful projects recognise that older workers are not necessarily low skilled, but can have inappropriate skills for modern labour markets • Tailored provision is generally more effective. In some cases projects have had to encourage older workers back into training and employment (effectively out of 'retirement')

The importance of good delivery systems

Whilst national factors are important the design and operation of ESF processes and delivery systems can also influence impact. For example:

- Specific targeting (and 'marketing' of ESF provision) to can improve reach and subsequently the levels of impact. The report gives a number of examples including projects focusing on disadvantaged young people in Spain, young people with disabilities in the Netherlands, low skilled 'at risk' workers in Italy, low skilled women in Austria, and older workers in Poland. Provision is not always targeted in this way but support aimed specifically at certain groups can result in improved engagement of those that are harder to identify and/or encourage ESF LLL participation.
- The report identifies activities that can enhance positive outcomes (employment, further training) including individual learning accounts, personal action plans and complementary life skills provision. These do not always work as effectively in all circumstances. The evidence on individual learning accounts for example is rather mixed.
- Delivery mechanisms seem to be a key factor in determining a stronger performance in Spain compared to Italy in respect of reaching and securing positive outcomes for young people. The key strengths in Spain are more explicit targeting of young people in the Operational Programmes (OPs) and LLL policies tailored more to young people, including measures to delay school leaving amongst 'early leavers'. Provided the higher youth unemployment Spain has also a larger number of potential participants in this target group which will impact on the reach of ESF.

Reach and Impact - Young people

Young people form a high proportion of those benefitting from LLL activities. Across Member States this group has frequently been prioritized in line with national policies and as a response to high levels of youth unemployment which has risen from 4.1m in the EU27 in 2007 to 5.3m in 2010. Above all young people need the experience of initial employment and opportunities for such employment have been hit hard by the economic crisis. Furthermore, there are groups of young people, including early school leavers with no or few formal skills and qualifications, and a degree of alienation from education and training provision. These groups present additional challenges. Equally though, there are also unemployed graduates who are highly qualified and skilled but not in the areas that are likely to generate employment opportunities in the near future.

In a number of countries specific provision has been developed for young people, reflecting the fact that this group is generally given a high priority within OPs. In some cases there is also an evident correlation between levels of participation amongst young people and the degree to which OPs explicitly target young people through specific activities. More so than the low skilled or older workers groups, activities are often designed specifically with young people in mind in order to (re-)engage them in learning and develop skills relevant to entering and progressing in the labour market.

In addition to progressing directly into employment young people participating in ESF supported LLL activity have benefited from increased confidence and the experience of 'structured' days to simulate the working environment, often delivered in the context of life skills. In some countries (e.g. Lithuania and

Spain) there has been a strong focus on work experience projects, providing young people with both the experience and the tools to improve their CVs. This could extend to 'tasters' for further and higher education as tried in Austria. In the Netherlands there was a focus on continuing education and training once participants had found work which has helped to ensure continuing learning.

Reach and Impact - The low-skilled

As with young people, a notable share of ESF supported LLL activity benefits those with low skills or in many cases outdated skills in the context of modern labour markets. While the extent to which Member States actively target the low skilled varies, there is nonetheless a significant level of participation in ESF supported LLL activity amongst this group. Particularly in countries with weaker vocational and training systems, and lower skill levels amongst workers in general, ESF acts as a supporting route to raising skill levels and improving labour supply. This is true both of in-work LLL support and activities designed to raise skill levels to help the unemployed to access the labour market.

This target group presents a high degree of variety from those in work, in vulnerable employment, to those who have not worked for many years, or may never have worked. In all cases a lack of confidence can be a factor and LLL provision often involves additional non-vocational training (such as work and life skills) and employment support (for those in employment). A general characteristic of the low skilled target group is a sporadic interaction with the labour market and as result the continuity that LLL can provide is a specific benefit.

For this target group employment impacts have been supported through retraining and the acquisition of new skills. This has also resulted in participants undertaking additional (post ESF) education and training. Having qualifications that employers recognise was seen as a key benefit (especially in the UK case study consultations). Survey evidence (again from the UK) highlighted increased job security for more than half of the participants from the low skilled target group who were supported whilst in employment. As with young people increased confidence and self esteem was highlighted in most case studies (especially Sweden).

Reach and Impact - Older workers

Reaching older workers has been an issue in most countries despite some good examples of projects that have successfully targeted this group. Whilst some older workers elect to leave the labour market there are others who could benefit from LLL provision but have probably not participated in training or other support for many years. In some countries targets for older workers have been reduced as the prioritization of young people has increased. In the longer term though labour market and demographic trends will require a greater emphasis to be placed on older workers as this group becomes an increasingly larger segment of the labour market. In addition the reduced value of pensions and changes to pension age in some countries has resulted in this target group re-engaging with the labour market, but requiring both the stimulus and information to do so. The engagement of older females has been an issue with generally lower levels of participation than their male counterparts. Whilst there is an overlap with the low skilled target group the issue with older workers is less that they are low skilled but more that the skills and competences they have, and the work practices they are used to are no longer appropriate, calling for re-skilling, or the augmentation of existing skills.

Updated and new skills was highlighted as an impact in the case studies, as was increased job security for those in employment. In the Polish case study the promotion of self employment and entrepreneurialism was perceived as an important impact although quantitative evidence was not readily available aside from information on specific tailored projects.

Looking ahead to 2014-20

The case studies highlighted the considerable attention being given to the next programming period by most Member States. The current and previous periods were planned at a time of relative economic stability and generally low unemployment across much of Europe. In contrast the economic crisis will dominate the next round of OPs.

Rising unemployment rates across all groups and in most countries could fuel a demand for training and employment support that is unlikely to be met, especially given pressures on national budgets. The nature of targeting may also change with more individuals in vulnerable jobs or the recently unemployed with a good skills base. Keeping the first group in work or getting the second back into work is likely to fit national labour market policies, possibly at the expense of those groups furthest away from employment. Some difficult choices may need to be made.

There will no doubt be pressures on the ESF to support short term job creation but this should not be at the expense of LLL which will be integral in delivering the strong and adaptable skill sets Europe will require in the coming decade.

Recommendations

There are some key messages and some operational recommendations that cut across the three target groups, namely:

1. Key messages

- Lifelong learning is generally most effective when the elements (activities that participants benefit from - training, advice, informal skills, counselling etc) are connected and preferably continuous. It implies a degree of co-ordination and nurturing to ensure the individual gets the best experience.
- Employment is not the only measure of the success of LLL, at least not in the short term. Outcomes concerned with skills development and education for example, are valid in improving the labour market position of individuals.
- The focus on young people is entirely understandable. They are critical to the recovery and growth of Europe and there is considerable wasted talent within this age group. Longer term the change in demographics and pension ages is likely to see a growing number of older workers in the labour market, a group where participation levels in LLL have been under represented.

These are not new messages but they have been confirmed again from the research undertaken for this study.

2. Operational Recommendations

- **Improving reach** - The 'problem' of reaching participants is not one of volume as can be seen from the overall figures on ESF LLL participations. It is instead issues of prioritisation, targets and target setting, and the specific activities required to engage or re-engage individuals from the target groups who would benefit most from LLL support. Often these individuals lack confidence and self esteem and/or are disengaged from the learning experience either through time (e.g. older workers) or through recent negative experiences of school, further education and vocational training. The research has shown critical success factors that could further enhance reach, and as a consequence the impact of ESF supported LLL activities. In general **tailoring provision to specific groups**, including bespoke activities aimed at young people, the low skilled or older workers, has proved effective, especially in attracting those who feel more comfortable in the company of other of similar ages and backgrounds (and in particular older workers and low skilled/older females). Such provision should sit aside the more generic, open to all, ESF provision that forms the mainstay of provision in most countries. Young people have tended to be better catered for with age specific activities designed to promote both engagement but also retention on projects (e.g. team working, outdoor pursuits). Such approaches should be further encouraged and extended (suitably amended) to other target groups. For the new OPs we would recommend a more consistent approach to targeting setting and use of labour market information to **set realistic but challenging targets** (we concluded that for 2007-13 some of the targets were artificially low). There also needs to be a **dialogue during the preparation of the OPs on the prioritization of older workers** in the light of the future importance and growth of this group. The position amongst the case study countries was mixed but a more explicit focus on older workers would raise the profile of the opportunities that could be afforded by ESF supported LLL activities.
- **Improving impact** - Whilst ESF supported LLL activities have had success in getting participants into employment there are measures that can be taken to enhance the LLL experience and lead to a longer term impact. None of the critical success factors we identified were especially new or radical but their application was neither universal nor consistent. The main shortfall is in relation to the ongoing support for individuals and the assurance that training was part of an 'LLL concept' rather than a stand alone activity. Our research highlights several areas of good practice, already present within the case study countries where a wider application would enhance impact. These include the following:
 - Tracking and referral systems that allow providers to monitor the progress of individual participants and for support agencies to use in assessing the additional provision required for individuals. Some progress has been made but the infrastructure required can be complex and costly. Such measures are only beneficial if supported by project level activities to assist participants take up new activities. In this respect counselling, guidance and information systems on available provision all play an important part. Ensuring that providers have a strong LLL 'ethos' that goes beyond their own activities is also critical.
 - Ensuring that outcome targets do not solely reflect employment but measure education and further training outcomes and progression in 'softer' areas such as increased levels of confidence and motivation. The provision of life skills and informal training will contribute to these outcomes.
 - The provision of a wide choice of activities and wherever possible giving participants an ability to chose (we recognise that evaluations have given mixed results on voucher schemes and individual learning accounts but if participants can exercise choice there are positive

benefits in terms of motivation levels). Choice is also important as part of the engagement and re-engagement process. The linking of training to employability support has proved successful in improving the labour market position of individuals. There are other measures including careers guidance and the promotion of further and higher education to school leavers that have proved effective across a range of labour markets. Choice also needs to recognise the needs of different target groups and the labour market position of participants (e.g. those low skilled and older workers in employment can benefit from tailored employment support). For young people ensuring that there are work (and education) experience opportunities is a key ingredient of the LLL package.

- **Data and intelligence** - We recognise that there is a strong Commission interest in the counterfactual, which with good levels of information can be a powerful analytical tool. However, we would prioritise other elements. For the 2014-20 programming period the definitions of the three target groups and LLL could be both sharper and more consistent through guidance to Member States. The SFC data set is a key information source but has its limitations including country gaps and a lack of a specific field to record LLL activity. Surveys of former participants (after six months and later) can provide valuable information on post ESF experiences, levels of satisfaction and impacts. The guidance in the preparation of the new OPs should stress the importance of specifically addressing LLL within programme evaluations.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This is the final report of the evaluation of the European Social Fund (ESF) support to life long learning. The study was timed to inform the 2014-2020 programming period and in particular to provide guidance for the next round of Operational Programmes and support in the negotiations of those programmes. Evidence has been drawn from the 2000-2006 and 2007-2013 EU Structural Funds programming periods. In the current period alone almost €32.5 billion of the ESF has been allocated to lifelong learning underlining the significance of this activity in terms of EU policy priorities and budgets (further detail is provided in Section 2.3 and Table 2.4 in particular).

The importance of life long learning (LLL) in developing the skills base and the economic competitiveness of the European Union (EU) has been recognized for many years. The provision of a range of support alongside vocational training (or as a precursor to training) has been shown to improve the employment prospects of those individuals in the labour market who are not in employment together with those in vulnerable employment. Directly and indirectly, EU policy, including the Europe 2020 strategy, stresses the role of LLL. The study has taken on added urgency as Europe continues to be in the grip of the economic crisis and whilst this was not officially part of the terms of reference it is impossible to ignore the position as it dominates discussions over the next programming period. The long terms solutions to the crisis are complex but a skilled workforce will be central to the future competitiveness of the EU.

This study is focused on the use of ESF to support LLL, which varies in scale and importance between Member States. In all cases though the ESF is used to work in the context of national strategies and programmes for LLL, which normally cover a wider range of age cohorts and activities than those allowed under the ESF regulation¹.

The study is explicitly concerned with the three target groups requested in the terms of reference defined as follows:

- **Young jobseekers** - individuals generally aged between 15 and 24 and not in full time education or employment (NEETS). In some Member States the age range has been extended to include graduates not in employment. Many, but not all, of this group are also low skilled, and there is overlap with the group below.
- **Low skilled workers**- officially defined as those with qualification levels up to ISCED 1 and 2 (International Standard Classification of Education). Some of this group are either young people or older workers and there are therefore overlaps between the target groups. For the purpose of this study we are most concerned with low skilled workers in employment, often in vulnerable positions, as well as those actively seeking employment. We focus less on those individuals who are distant from employment and require considerable support – and time – to be in a position to access

¹ Regulation (EC) no 1081/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the European Social Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1784/1999.

employment. This latter group is a key ESF client group. However, when we quote ISCED data it covers all of those who fall into the category (i.e. there is no convenient sub-division between those closest and furthest away from employment).

- **Older workers** - from the age of 55 upwards and normally up to 64, although changes in pension legislation at the Member State level are - and will - bring people over 64 back into the labour market. This group includes both older workers in employment or actively seeking employment. Our definition excludes those are formally retired or who are economically inactive and not actively seeking employment, nor registered as unemployed.

These are not the only ESF target groups but the study focus is on subsets of the young, the low skilled and older participants that are actively seeking employment and training, a distinction that it is not always clear from the data and studies concerning these groups.

The study also considers the gender balance in terms of the reach and impact of ESF supported LLL.

The study is primarily concerned with ESF LLL provision for individuals rather than the 'infrastructure' support for LLL which is also funded by the ESF (including the public employment services). However, the study has taken a pragmatic view given the inter linkages between the two and many of the critical success factors outlined in later sections focus on the delivery of ESF supported LLL.

1.2 The Terms of Reference

The terms of reference set four questions:

Evaluation question (EQ) 1 - How could the content and delivery of the ESF supported LLL activities aimed at the three target groups be improved in the post-2014 programming period? Will the new political framework require changes?

The main purpose of the evaluation is to produce conclusions and recommendations that look forward to the 2014-20 programming period (notwithstanding the need to agree the shape of future ESF programmes and the LLL content of those programmes), using the practical lessons from past and current programmes, tailored to local contexts. This is the main evaluation question. The second element of the question relates in part to the Europe 2020 strategy and the flagship initiatives 'Youth on the Move' and 'An Agenda for Skills' with specific targets set for LLL participation (see Section 2.3²). This question drew on evidence from all of the study tasks in the work programme and is reported in Section 5 (Community Added Value, Conclusions and Recommendations). We also comment on the linkages between mainstream ESF LLL provision and life long learning supported by the national Lifelong Learning Partnerships (LLP).

² European Commission (2010), *The European Social Fund: Education and Lifelong Learning*, Background Report

EQ2 - To what extent do ESF supported LLL activities reach the target groups? Is it possible to identify activities which are more successful in reaching the target groups than others?

The purpose of this question was to identify good practice in terms of 'what works' in the context of tackling constraints on participation, which can vary between the three target groups and different countries, as well as between different ESF activities. The focus has been the experiences of ESF in the current programme period (2007-2013) drawn in part from the literature (e.g. The European Social Fund: Education and Lifelong Learning published by the European Commission in 2010), the data from the 117 Operational Programmes (OPs), the findings drawn from stakeholder interviews and the case studies. The first part of the evaluation question is addressed in Section 3, the second part in Section 4 where it fits better.

EQ3 - What has been the impact of ESF supported LLL activities on the participants from the target groups? What are the key factors of success and failure?

This question has been informed, in part, by the evaluations of programmes (and LLL activities specifically) from the 2000-2006 programming period. We collated evaluation reports on the impacts of ESF but coverage is not comprehensive and for the New Member States ESF was a relatively late phenomenon. The case studies have augmented the findings from the literature, helping to fill in some of the gaps. Whilst employment outcomes are central to the evaluation this provides a narrow assessment of impact and 'people into jobs' does not necessarily equate to sustainable employment (the focus of the terms of reference). Qualifications and courses completed are not impacts in the strict sense but give a quantitative perspective of progression towards eventual employment. There are other non quantifiable measures of progression which are not reported in the data but which have emerged from discussions with stakeholders in the case studies. This evaluation question is addressed in Section 4.

EQ4 - What European Added Value (EAV) could be attributed to the ESF support to LLL activities for these three target groups?

Our analysis has been based mainly on the methodological note 'A framework to describe the Community Added Value of the ESF' produced by the Commission in 2008 which focuses on four effects of ESF action - volume, scope, role and process effects. This evaluation question is addressed in Section 5.

Figure 1.1 The Evaluation Road Map

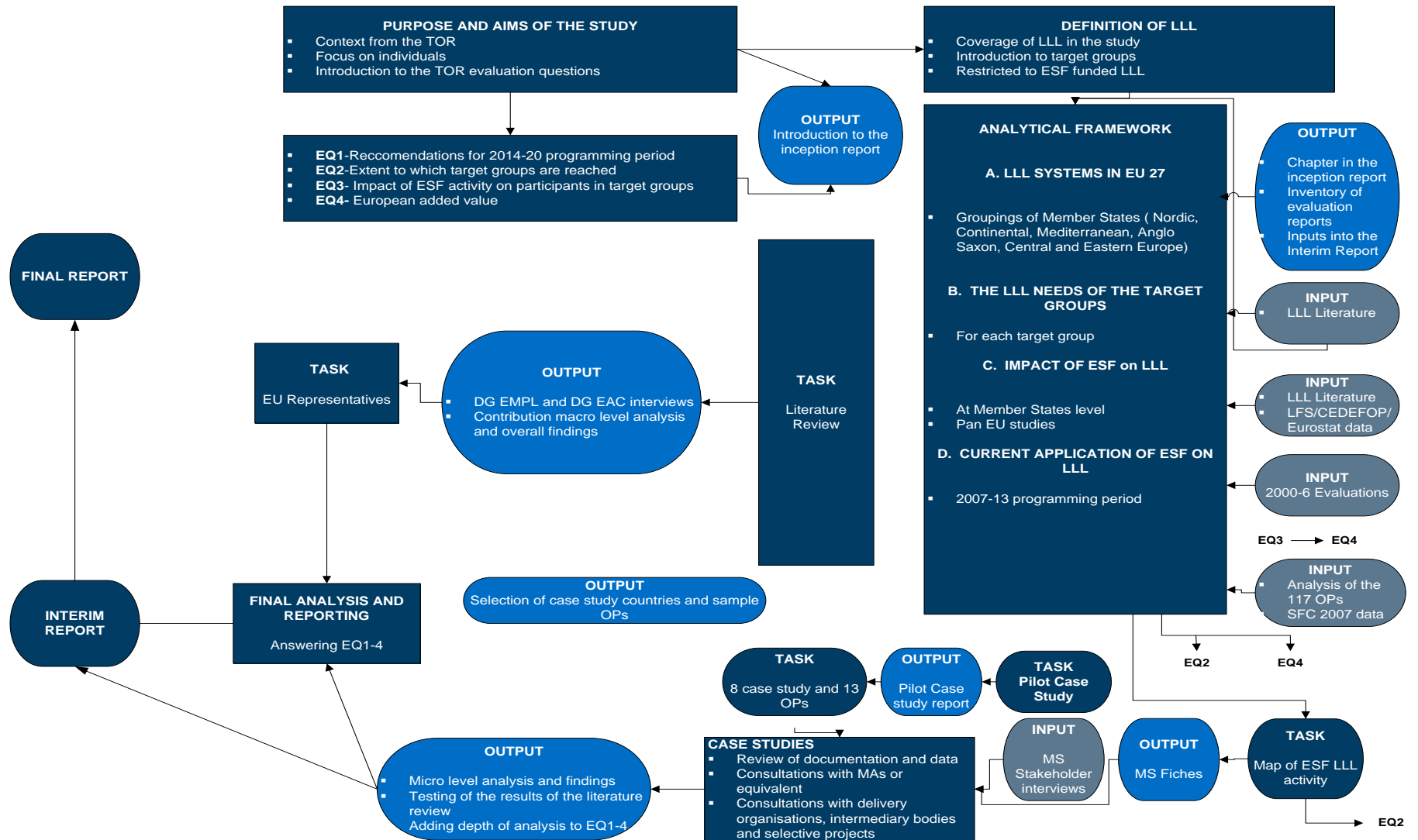


Figure 1.1 shows the relationship between the evaluation questions and the methodology, the key components of which are set out below:

- The starting point (top left) is the purpose and aims of the study, the four main evaluation questions set out above in Section 1.2.
- The second step was to agree a definition for LLL for this study (LLL supported by ESF in the context of the definition of the three target groups (see Section 1.1 above)). The definition is expanded upon in Section 2.
- The analytical framework for the study comprised four elements a) the delivery of LLL in the 27 EU Member States b) the LLL needs of the three target groups c) the impact of ESF on LLL (the core of the study) and d) The application of ESF on LLL provision in the 2007-2013 programming period.
- The framework has been informed by a literature review that includes the 2007-2013 Operation Programmes (OPs), evaluations from the 2000-2006 programming period, Eurostat data, information from the Structural Funds Common (SFC) database and other literature on LLL, especially that concerning the three target groups.
- The literature was also used to define clusters of countries as a basis for selecting the eight case study countries and representative OPs within those countries. The case studies were based on a mix of interviews and additional data and literature review and analysis. They were intended to provide additional detail, filling in the gaps in the evaluations, especially in relation to assessment of 'what works'. The selection of case studies is expanded upon below in Section 1.3.
- The mapping of ESF supported LLL was undertaken for the eight case studies and resulted in briefing papers to support the case study work.
- The case study work was augmented by selective interviews with EU representatives mostly drawn from DG Employment and Social Affairs and DG Education and Culture.
- The results of the study presented in this report were also developed in an interim and draft final report.

1.3 The Case Studies

The case studies were undertaken at country level although often with a focus on a specific OP (see Table 1.1). We reviewed thirteen OPs in detail. The case studies allowed us to get more depth to the research and to additionally identify reports and data, helping to provide context and details for the research findings of the study.

Eight case studies were selected based on a country cluster typology of Member States with the UK case study first reported in the Interim Report as a pilot, designed to test the case study methodology. In summary we adopted a country cluster framework based on a range of 'variables', including countries' approach to LLL; the structure of education and training systems; rates of educational attainment, patterns of early school leaving and adult learning participation; and the position of systems in respect of measures for the unemployed, low skilled and disadvantaged people (active labour market policies etc). Five broad country groupings were identified: Nordic, Continental, Mediterranean, Anglo-Saxon, and Central and Eastern European countries.

The typology helped ensure a representative sample of case studies which allowed us to draw conclusions at the EU level. Each case study has involved a series of interviews with key officials and representatives of providers of LLL activity which has helped to secure particular examples of practice.

Given the issues around the availability of both reports and data, the case studies represented the key part of the work plan in the latter part of the study.

Table 1.1 Case Study Countries

Country	Country Cluster	Operational Programmes under Review
Austria	Continental	Austria OP
Italy	Mediterranean	Piedmont OP Calabria OP
Lithuania	Central and Eastern Europe	Lithuania OP
Netherlands	Continental	Netherlands OP
Poland	Central and Eastern Europe	Poland OP
Spain	Mediterranean	Murcia OP Valencia OP Catalonia OP Andalusia OP
Sweden	Nordic	Sweden OP
UK	Anglo-Saxon	England and Gibraltar OP Lowlands and Uplands of Scotland OP

1.4 The Report Structure

The report follows as such:

- Section 2:** provides the context for the evaluation drawing extensively from the literature and data review
- Section 3:** draws from the literature and the case studies to assess the extent to which the three target groups have participated in ESF supported LLL, and how they have been targeted and encouraged to participate
- Section 4:** follows the pattern of the preceding section but with a focus on the impact resulting from ESF supported LLL as well as critical success factors
- Section 5:** provides an assessment of European Added Value under the four headings of volume, scope, role and process. The section also provides our overall conclusions and policy recommendations

2.0 Context and Background

2.1 Introduction

This Section establishes a context for the study. First, it sets out a definition of Lifelong Learning (LLL) in the specific context of ESF, drawn from the literature and data review, which provides a reference point for making evaluative judgements. Secondly, it examines the ways in which ESF is intended to achieve its objectives through LLL measures, in the process setting out the outline intervention logic for the evaluation. Finally it turns to look at the differing LLL needs of the three target groups that are the focus for this study.

2.2 ESF and LLL - definitions and context

LLL is often taken to be a general conception of an individual's learning across his or her lifetime. For instance, the Council Resolution 2002/C 163/01 refers to LLL broadly as encompassing '*all learning activity undertaken throughout life*'. The benefits of LLL are designed to be both longer term and more sustainable. It could be argued that the requirement of the ESF to demonstrate impacts in the short term is not always compatible with the objectives of LLL, but as this section shows the ESF is a major funder of LLL across the EU27.

In practical terms, LLL is distinguished from 'education and training' by its emphasis on, inter alia, the removal of barriers within education and training systems and complementing learning with non-learning support measures such as guidance and counselling. Such measures enable individuals to participate in education and training throughout their lives. LLL is likely to increase in importance in the coming years as workers with the ability to adapt to new skills will be strongly placed in new labour markets.

In order to evaluate the role of ESF a more focused definition of LLL has been adopted as required in the Terms of Reference. This is important to ensure that ESF interventions are judged solely against their intended effects rather than against a wider definition of LLL. This definition takes into account both the ESF's objectives with respect to LLL and the instruments through which it is intended to achieve them.

In terms of objectives, ESF is directed at the sustainable integration of both economically inactive people and job seekers³. Our primary focus, as stated in the Introduction, is on the latter group⁴ although the measures of progression include not only employment but increased participation in education and training, and actions that are aimed at achieving a reduction in early school leaving and in gender-based segregation of subjects as well as increased access to and quality of initial and tertiary education and training⁵.

³ Article 3, section 1 (b) of Regulation No 1081/2006 of the European Parliament and Council

⁴ The evaluation, in line with the Terms of Reference, is focused on ESF's support to people and not directly on systems and structures, although the latter clearly influences the former.

⁵ Article 3, section 2 (a) (ii) of Regulation No 1081/2006 of the European Parliament and Council

ESF is intended to achieve these objectives through a range of instruments which, alongside reforms to systems and structures, include:

- pathways to integration and re-entry into employment for disadvantaged people
- the development of access routes into vocational education and training,
- apprenticeships and internships, which ensure improved access to training by, in particular, low-skilled and older workers,
- the development of qualifications and competences,
- accompanying actions and relevant support, community and care services that improve employment opportunities including guidance and counseling,
- the dissemination of information and communication technologies and e-learning

It should be borne in mind that ESF exists to support Member State employment policies and hence the specific activities undertaken through ESF will vary according to the approach to LLL that already exists within Member States. In this sense the way in which ESF has been used is 'path dependent'. Such variations provide part of the framework for interpreting our findings in relation to the effectiveness and appropriateness of the ESF in relation to the longer term objectives of LLL provision.

Table 2.1 - Case study country profiles

Case Study Countries	Average % population aged 25-64 participating in LLL	Average % 18-24 with at most ISCED levels 1-2 and Not in Education or Employment Training (NEET)	Average % population aged 25-64 with at most ISCED levels 0-2	Total no. participations in ESF 2007-2010	ESF budget 2007-2013	Proportion of ESF 2007-2013 allocation to direct LLL measures	Ratio Female/Male reached in ESF total number of participants 2007-2010
Austria	13.7	8.7	17.5	438695	€ 524.4 m	38%	56:44
Italy	6.2	19.2	44.8	3552370	€ 6,938.0 m	46%	56:43
Lithuania	4.0	8.7	8.0	235032	€ 1,028.3 m	50%	55:45
Netherlands	16.5	10.9	27.7	517867	€ 830.0 m	60%	35:65
Poland	5.3	5.3	11.3	3126997	€ 9,707.2 m	45%	Incomplete SFC data
Spain	10.8	31.2	47.4	6782220	€ 8,057.3 m	30%	55:45
Sweden	24.5	10.7	18.4	142967	€ 691.6 m	30%	47:53
United Kingdom	19.4	15.7	23.9	2250148	€ 4,474.9 m	36%	37:63

Source: Eurostat 2010, SFC data 2007-2010.

Table 2.2 Progress with Lifelong Strategies and Actions

Member State	Key Issues	Strategies and National Policies
Austria	Adult participation in LLL (13.7% of 25-64 year olds for minimum of four weeks) is above the EU benchmark (12.5%) (2010)	Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 agreed July 2011 with guiding principles and operational measures
Belgium	Falling participation in LLL since 2004. LLL participation (9.1%) is below the EU benchmark (<i>all figures are adult – as for Austria above</i>)	Flanders LLL strategy set out in documents in 2009 and 2010. Walloon and Brussels regions continuing to pursue a LLL approach
Bulgaria	Lowest LLL participation in EU (1.2%)	LLL strategy in place since 2008 and 2010-11 Lifelong Learning Action Plan
Cyprus	Below EU benchmark LLL participation (est. 7.7%). National target to reach 12% by 2020 (against planned EU benchmark of 15%)	LLL strategy in place since 2007, covering the period upto 2013. Focus on adult learning where participation is low
Czech Republic	Below EU benchmark LLL participation of 7.5%	2007 LLL strategy covers the period upto 2015. Focus on the Education for Competiveness Programme
Denmark	LLL participation (32.8%) is significantly in advance of EU average performance and benchmarks	LLL strategy covers the period 2007-12. Development of a national qualification framework for LLL
Estonia	LLL participation (10.9%) below the EU benchmark	Strategy is being renewed. Aim is to raise adult participation in LLL to 20%
Finland	High level of LLL participation amongst adults (23%)	Main policy focus is ensuring equality of access. Council for Lifelong Learning established in 2009
France	LLL participation (8.5% is behind the EU benchmark. Falling levels of participation amongst adults	Focus on guidance and accessibility to LLL provision, and raise adult participation
Germany	Participation in LLL (7.8%) is below the EU benchmark	No fully coherent or comprehensive LLL strategy in place but numerous policies that impact on LLL provision
Greece	Low LLL participation (3%)	National LLL strategy launched in February 2011. Aim to double LLL participation by 2013
Hungary	Low LLL participation (2.8%)	LLL strategy in place since 2005
Ireland	Participation in LLL (6.7%) below the EU benchmark	LLL policies enshrined since Learning for Life in 2000

Italy	Participation in LLL (6.2%) below the EU benchmark	No single comprehensive LLL strategy but strategies for VET, education, training and employment that are relevant to LLL
Latvia	Participation in LLL (5%) below the EU benchmark	LLL strategy in place since 2009
Lithuania	Low LLL participation (4%)	Strategy for Ensuring Lifelong Learning and Action Plan adopted in 2008
Luxembourg	Above EU benchmark for LLL participation (13.4%)	Strategy LLL launched in May 2011. Focus on awareness raising for LLL activities
Malta	Participation (5.7%) in LLL below the EU benchmark	LLL strategy was due to be launched late 2011. Focus on women and older workers and other groups with low LLL participation
Netherlands	Above EU benchmark for LLL participation (16.5%)	LLL strategy but not contained in one document. LLL infrastructure prioritized including regional networks
Poland	Participation in LLL (5.3%) below the EU benchmark	LLL strategy was due to be adopted late 2011
Portugal	Participation in LLL (est. 8.5%) below the EU benchmark	LLL integral to education and training provision but no formal/single strategy document
Romania	Very low participation in LLL (1.3%)	LLL strategy adopted with LLL programmes under development
Slovakia	Low LLL participation (2.8%)	LLL strategy adopted in 2007
Slovenia	Participation in LLL is above the EU benchmark (16.2%)	LLL strategy adopted in 2007. Focus on pre-school and adult education
Spain	Participation in LLL (10.8%) below the EU benchmark	Action Plan for Lifelong Learning is under preparation
Sweden	High level of LLL participation amongst adults (24.5%)	No specific strategy but strongly developed LLL approach
United Kingdom	High level of LLL participation amongst adults (19.4%)	Scotland has an LLL strategy. Rest of UK adopts an approach with a strong commitment to LLL

Source: *Education and Training for a Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Europe – Analysis of the Implementation of the Strategic Framework for European Co-operation in Education and Training (ET 2020) – Country Analysis: European Commission Staff Working Document 2011 (case study countries in bold)*

Table 2.2 provides a brief update on the progress of national LLL strategies and policies taken from the European Commission's 2012 Joint Progress Report and the accompanying Commission Staffing

Working Document that provides a country by country review. From these documents it is clear that progress towards the EU benchmark for adult (25-64) participation in LLL, measured in 2010, is very varied, ranging from a low of 1.2% in Bulgaria to 32.8% in Denmark, against a target EU benchmark of 12.5% (rising to 15% in 2020). However, there is less divergence in a strong commitment to LLL across the EU27 and almost all Member States have a recognizable LLL strategy or an equivalent set of policies and approaches, or are in the process of developing strategies. There are national differences in coverage reflecting national LLL priorities and variances in progress from strategies to actions and LLL programmes. There is in many Member States a strong commitment to ongoing review, updates and monitoring and evaluation.

Whilst some of the LLL participation targets are ambitious the policy commitment to LLL is considerably stronger than was the case in the 2000-6 Programming Period or at the beginning of the current period.

Many LLL strategies have focused on formal education and training systems and not the importance and status of non-formal and informal learning. However, many countries have recognised flexible learning pathways as a priority in their strategies although the focus has varied between young people still in initial education (and pre-school/school groups in some cases) whilst others focused on adults.

The implementation of LLL strategies is a particular issue for those countries where the strategy development process was still at an early stage. Concerns such as these were reiterated in 2010 when the EC commented that *'coherent and comprehensive strategies covering the full life-course are still not the norm, with some still focusing on specific sectors or groups; hence access for adults throughout life is still not a reality'*⁶. It went on, *'Countries have started to develop outreach and effective solutions to the challenge of up-skilling, providing much effective practice and know how. The most urgent problem is that the initiatives are only touching the tip of the iceberg. Taking the qualifications of the low skilled "one step up" calls for outreach and opportunities for much larger numbers and target groups'*. Clearly, in this context ESF has a potentially significant contribution to make.

We should also appreciate that approaches to LLL not only vary geographically but also over time. There has, of course, been a major policy push at European level to encourage and stimulate the development of LLL. This has shown itself in a number of ways including the spread of mechanisms to validate prior learning⁷, and the development of lifelong guidance and counselling with all countries now having in place a national strategy⁸. The current pattern in such developments is highly varied, and the gap between countries with the most highly developed approaches and those with the least developed is still quite large.

Notwithstanding this long-term trend, we also need to take into account the major change in economic circumstances which has taken place in the early years of the current ESF round. We refer, of course, to the financial crisis and ensuing economic downturn which began in 2008. As we shall show elsewhere in this report, this appears to have had an effect on the nature of activities supported through ESF. In many

⁶ Commission Staff Working Document (2010) *Action Plan on Adult Learning: Achievements and results 2008-10*. Summary

⁷ GHK (2010) *European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning: 2010*
<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/bibliographies/18212.aspx>

⁸ p32 CEDEFOP (2010) *A bridge to the future. European policy for vocational education and training 2002-10*

countries there has been a shift of focus from longer term measures to a short-term preoccupation with getting people into work or at least equipping them with skills which will put them in the most favourable position for employment when economic conditions improve: less lifelong learning, more training for jobs in the short term.

2.3 How ESF is intended to achieve its objectives through LLL

The current ESF Regulation⁹ offers explicit support for LLL, through active and preventive labour market measures which support the economic, employment and social goals of Member States and the EU¹⁰. In this respect, ESF has scope to *contribute* towards the EU's ambition for 15% of the adult population in Europe to participate in LLL by 2020 (56 million), against a baseline of 7.1% in 2000 and 9.5% in 2008¹¹. The importance of LLL is recognised in the context of Europe's current economic difficulties and in the context of globalisation, technological changes and the skills demanded in order that Europe remains competitive. The 2010 G20 Labour and Employment Ministers' meeting placed emphasis on education, lifelong learning, job training and skills development strategies as a means of positioning Europe for the 'post-crisis economy'; and the Europe 2020 strategy also affirms LLL as a legitimate and central priority for Member States with the ESF a tool through which European level LLL ambitions can be supported.

Whilst there is an intention for ESF to fund LLL in Member States, the Regulation places no specific requirement for ESF to be used in this way. Rather, ESF is intended to support Member States' policies *'aiming to achieve full employment and quality and productivity at work, promote social inclusion, including the access of disadvantaged people to employment, and reduce national, regional and local employment disparities'*¹². Thus the types of activities funded by ESF will in practice be aligned with national level priorities and where LLL does not feature highly as a national policy priority national ESF programmes will not likely have a LLL focus.

In the light of its role in supporting and complementing the activities of Member States, ESF funded LLL is intended to promote and improve training, education, counselling and other measures as part of broader LLL policy to facilitate integration into the labour market and maintain the employability of the workforce (and ultimately increase people's working life). ESF in this context is intended to support education, training and LLL through formal education, initial and continuing vocational education and training, as well the development of support systems and structures¹³. Whilst ESF can directly facilitate the provision of basic skills for the low-skilled and early school leavers it can also support the delivery of active and preventative measures aimed at enhancing access to employment and sustainable inclusion in the labour market. This might include, for example, tailored training offered alongside job search or outplacement. As will be highlighted in the following sections of the study, ESF also has the ability to enhance flexibility within LLL provision (through supporting the development and delivery of alternative and non-traditional learning methods for example), and to improve LLL structures through supporting the development of

⁹ Regulation (EC) no 1081/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the European Social Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1784/1999.

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ European Commission (2010), *The European Social Fund: Education and Lifelong Learning*, Background Report

¹² Regulation (EC) no 1081/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the European Social Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1784/1999

¹³ European Union (2010). *The European Social Fund; Education and Lifelong Learning*, Summary Fiche.

quality standards, information systems and increasing the transparency of qualification systems. In this respect, ESF has the potential to generate training cost savings for agencies and employers where it is invested in the provision of LLL activity.

The relative focus of ESF programmes is established and set out as part of the Operational Programmes (OPs). These define the priorities over which a programme is delivered as well as particular areas of focus such as specific target groups to be assisted through the delivery of the programme. This evaluation has taken as a starting point those ESF programmes which feature LLL as focus for ESF support. This has formed the basis for assessing the various means through which ESF is supporting LLL, and the degree to which an intended focus on particular areas or target groups has achieved aligned impacts. The extent to which LLL activities feature as a focus of ESF support across Europe is considered in the next section.

Drawing on the Regulation and our review of OPs, we have constructed an intervention logic for ESF with respect to LLL (see Table 2.3). This should be regarded as a ‘meta’ intervention logic which attempts to combine the relevant EU objectives with the translation of these objectives ‘on the ground’ in Member States. It is therefore necessarily generic using the DG Budget intervention logic model. So, whilst there are both general and specific objectives, operational objectives have been replaced with measures that can be regarded as typical, the operational objectives being a matter for individual OPs. Objectives and measures derived from EU documentation are shown in normal font, and imputed typical measures in italics. This logic model provides a reference point for the analysis presented in Sections 3, 4 and 5.

Table 2.3 Generic Intervention Logic for ESF support to LLL

Global Objectives	Specific Objectives	Typical Measures to Support People*
<p>To support Member States’ policies aiming to (a) achieve full employment, quality and productivity at work; (b) to promote social inclusion including disadvantaged people’s access to employment; (c) to reduce national, regional and local employment disparities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing access to employment • Enhancing sustainable integration in the labour market • Preventing unemployment • Encouraging active ageing and longer working lives • Increasing labour market participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pathways through access to VET • <i>Development of key competences linked to employability</i> • <i>Guidance counselling</i> • <i>Individual action plans</i> • <i>Follow-up support once in employment</i> • <i>Tracking and monitoring of individuals’ progress</i>

The proposed expenditure in the current programme period on explicit LLL interventions (for instance those directly promoting and supporting LLL such as through the development of supportive systems and strategies, measures to increase participation in education and training) accounts for more than one-quarter of all ESF expenditure (28%). Of the LLL provision funded, slightly more than half is aimed at raising participation in lifelong learning more generally (16% of the total ESF) and slightly less than half is aimed at lifelong learning within firms (12% of the total ESF). Table 2.4 highlights the expenditure allocated to LLL activities in Europe under the current programming period, and provides a breakdown of expenditure across the various priority areas which make up LLL.

Table 2.4 ESF funding earmarked for lifelong learning provision 2007-2013

No.	Priority Theme	ESF Budget Allocated (€)	% of all ESF
Increasing the adaptability of workers and firms, enterprises and entrepreneurs			
62	Development of life-long learning systems and strategies in firms; training and services for employees to step up their adaptability to change; promoting entrepreneurship and innovation.	9,388,722,676	12
64	Development of specific services for employment, training and support in connection with restructuring of sectors and firms, and development of systems for anticipating economic changes and future requirements in terms of jobs and skills	2,508,975,815	3
Improving Human Capital			
72	Design, introduction and implementation of reforms in education and training systems in order to develop employability, improving the labour market relevance of initial and vocational education and training, updating skills of training personnel with a view to innovation and a knowledge based economy	8,297,442,298	11
73	Measures to increase participation in education and training throughout the lifecycle, 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	12,350,137,571	16
	Total expenditure on lifelong learning (sum of fields 62, 64, 72, 73)	32,545,278,360	42
All	Total of all ESF expenditure (including fields not included in this table)	75,952,731,148	100

Source: Overview of the ESF Operational Programmes for the Period 2007-13, EU Summary Report: ECOTEC

We can see from Table 2.4 that LLL expenditure falls across a number of ESF priority themes. The 'core' fields (development of LLL systems and strategies (62) as well as measures to increase participation in LLL (73)) are those accounting for the highest level of LLL investment and which are also most focused on delivering direct support to participants. Together, these two fields account for €22 billion of ESF allocations. However, there are a number of other fields of expenditure which are recognised as having importance in supporting and promoting LLL in the Member States (and which are considered in the case studies in order to reflect this). Such fields (including reforms to education and training systems, and services relating to sector/ firm restructuring) account for a lesser proportion of ESF (€10.7 billion across the three fields). When these fields of expenditure are considered alongside the 'core' LLL priority fields, €32.5 billion of ESF can be seen as channelled to support LLL during the current programming period, i.e. 42% of all ESF expenditure.

The 2000-2006 ESF programme involved nearly 33 million participants as part of ESF-supported education and LLL programmes, whilst under the current programme, 4.5 million people across the EU

were already participating in activities directly related to education and LLL activities as of 2008.¹⁴ Although it is difficult to find comparators against which to evaluate this scale of participation, it has been estimated that in 2004 there were 50 million enrolments in adult learning¹⁵ (both vocational and non-vocational), in the EU Member States, which illustrates the level of the contribution made by the ESF.¹⁶

There are significant variations in LLL expenditure across Member States with the highest national levels of spend seen in the United Kingdom, Germany, Portugal and Italy¹⁷. Over the 2000-2006 period, Member States are estimated to have invested €44 billion in LLL (inclusive of ESF contributions) through the OPs¹⁸. The contributions from national assistance programmes also vary between Member States. For example, for the ESF Operational Programme in England and Gibraltar, Priorities 2 and 5 (those priorities relating directly to lifelong learning), €1.1 billion of ESF funding is earmarked during the 2007-2013 programming period whilst €3.1 billion will be invested by the national government¹⁹. In other countries, for instance Poland, there exists a higher dependency on ESF as a funder of LLL activity as the Member State is not in a position to contribute such a substantial proportion of national funds to the agenda (see Table 2.5).

Table 2.5 Proportion of ESF expenditure on LLL across clusters and of that, breakdown by spend theme

Case study country	Proportion of ESF 2007-2013 allocation to direct LLL measures	LLL systems and strategies	Support for restructuring sectors and systems to anticipate future skill requirements	Education and training reform (increasing relevance of IVET, updating skills)	Increasing participation in education and training
Austria	38%	27%	-	<1%	11%
Italy	38%	9%	3%	14%	12%
Lithuania	44%	15%	5%	8%	17%
The Netherlands	59%	45%	-	14%	-
Poland	45%	8%	6%	13%	18%
Spain	29%	17%	1%	6%	5%
Sweden	30%	13%	12%	4%	-
United Kingdom	38%	28%	2%	3%	4%

¹⁴ European Commission (2010), *The European Social Fund: Education and Lifelong Learning*, Background Report, summary fiche, p. 6

¹⁵ Where adults as regarded as those over 18.

¹⁶ NIACE (2005) *Final Report for Study on Adult Education Providers*

¹⁷ European Commission (2010), *The European Social Fund: Education and Lifelong Learning*, Background Report

¹⁸ *Ex Post Evaluation of the ESF (2000-6)* LSE Enterprise et al for the European Commission (2010)

¹⁹ European Commission (2010) *The European Social Fund and Education and Lifelong Learning*

Source: *Overview of the ESF Operational Programmes for the Period 2007-13, EU Summary Report: ECOTEC*

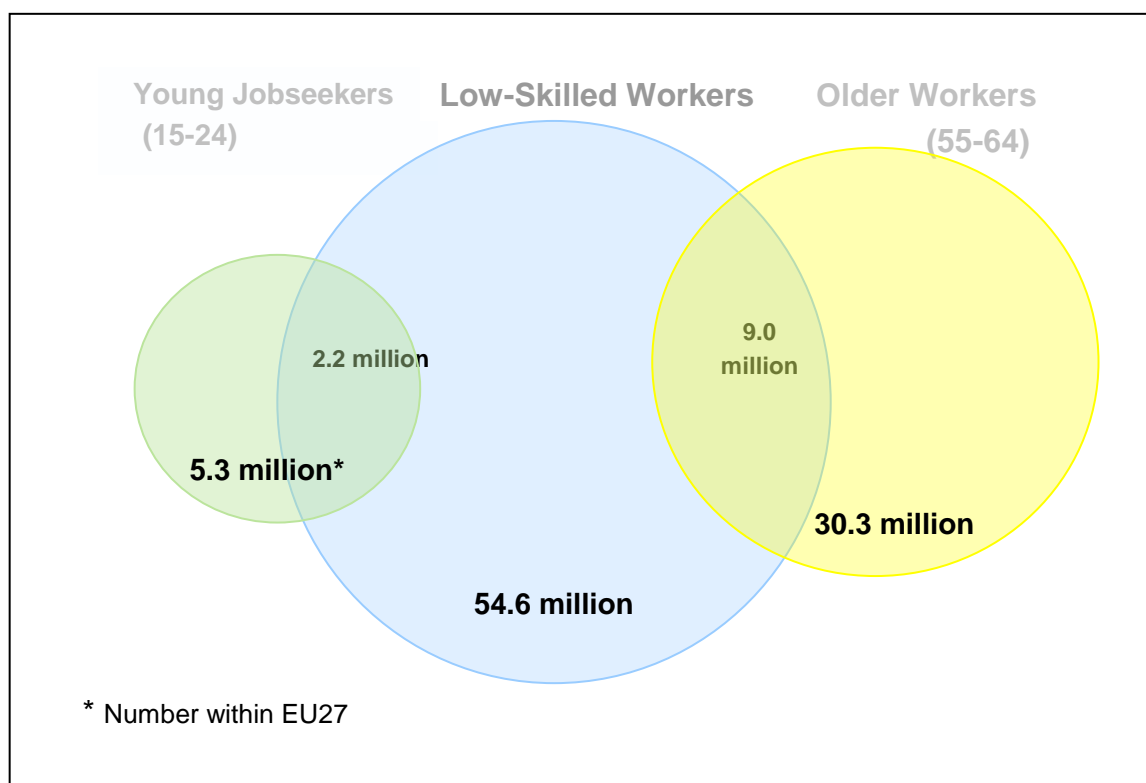
The role and extent of LLL activity is seen to vary across 2007-2013 OPs. For instance, some OPs are dedicated to the issue of LLL such as in the Czech Republic (Education for Competitiveness) and Greece (Lifelong Learning OP) whilst a significant proportion address LLL through particular Priority axes²⁰. For instance Priority Axis 2 in all regional OPs in Germany has a particular focus on LLL. As ESF expenditure reflects Member State policy priorities it also follows that the types of LLL activity supported will reflect national level circumstances, the systems and structures of the particular Member State as well as what is seen to 'work' in terms of assisting people toward employment in the national context.

2.4 Target Groups Covered by the Evaluation

The three target groups for this evaluation can be defined as follows. Young jobseekers are defined as 15-24 year olds who are unemployed (economically active but not in employment). Low-skilled workers are defined as people of working age (15-64) who are economically active (either employed or unemployed) and have at most pre-primary, primary or lower secondary education (ISCED levels 0-2). Older workers are defined as 55-64 year olds who are economically active (either employed or unemployed). According to data from Eurostat, there were approximately 5.3 million young jobseekers, 54.6 million low-skilled workers and 30.3 million older workers in the EU27 in 2010, as shown in Figure 2.1 below.

²⁰ European Commission (2010), *The European Social Fund: Education and Lifelong Learning*, Background Report p.28. The report suggests nine out of ten OPs in the current period include the topic of education and LLL.

Figure 2.1 Target Group Population Overlap



Source: Eurostat 2010 (Labour Force Survey)

This issue of overlap between the target groups has implications, especially when it comes to considering the issue of targeting and reach. For instance, a focus for the evaluation study has been the degree to which certain kinds of activities are designed and shown as effective in assisting older people towards and into sustainable employment (as considered in Sections 3 and 4 concerning 'Reach' and 'Impact'). This includes activities that are both target group specific and those where there is high level of transferability between target groups - both types were considered in the evaluation.

Prior to considering the degree to which ESF funded LLL has been successful in reaching the three target groups (Section 3), we review the main labour market issues as they relate to the three target groups. This comprises a qualitative review of the main messages from relevant literature, rather than a presentation of statistical data relating to the three groups as defined in Section 1.1.

2.4.1 Young Job Seekers

The young job seekers target group includes young people that have exited the formal education system early (at lower secondary education level), left school after completion of upper secondary education and those seeking employment following tertiary level education. This group is characterised by its recent interaction with the formal education system, having acquired skills and competences with current or recent relevance (albeit perhaps not directly applicable to the world of work).

A key labour market issue faced by young job seekers in general is the difficulty in accessing initial employment. Where difficulties are encountered at this crucial and formative stage within a young person's relationship with the labour market, a consequence can be that young people become inactive,

and unemployed, potentially on a long term basis. Over the last 25 years, the total level of youth unemployment has increased in all countries of the EU. With the exception of Germany, youth unemployment is significantly higher than overall unemployment rates in each of the Member States.²¹ The economic downturn is widely documented as having had a disproportionate impact on young people in terms of unemployment. For instance, the youth (15-24) unemployment rate within the OECD area, rose between the end of 2007 and 2009, by 6% to reach almost 19%.²² A similar rise was experienced in the EU27, with youth unemployment increasing from 15.7% in 2007 to 21.1% in 2010. As of 2010, there are around 15 million youth unemployed in the OECD area, around four million more than at the end of 2007²³. In the EU27, 5.3 million young people (15-24) were unemployed in 2010, up from 4.1 million in 2007. Whilst about one economically active youth in four is unemployed in countries such as France and Italy, Spain has a youth unemployment rate in excess of 40% (where youth unemployment has doubled from 20% to 40% over this period).²⁴ Youth unemployment rates²⁵ are extremely varied with rates ranging from 8.8% in Austria, 18.3% in the Czech Republic, 26.6% in Hungary and 32.8% in Greece. However, it is important to remember that unemployment rates for young people only paint part of the picture, since those young people who remain in education or are transitioning between education and employment (and not 'actively' seeking and employment) are not reflected in the youth unemployment rates. We also need to recognise that the base for calculating unemployment changes if young people opt to stay in education longer - as is often the case when jobs are scarce - but the numbers registered as unemployed stay the same. This results in higher levels of recorded unemployment. Nevertheless youth unemployment is a major policy concern for the EU and the Member States for social as well as economic reasons. Even before the current crisis many of the 2007-13 OPs strongly targeted young people and especially those not in education, employment or training (NEETS).

Across the young job seekers target group, LLL has the potential to increase the relevance and usefulness of programmes and qualifications to young people's labour market needs. Whilst initial vocational education and training can help young people develop technical and vocational skill sets, there is also recognition for 'softer' interventions which help to empower young people through encouraging self-led learning and personal responsibility²⁶. School leavers (both early school leavers and those exiting at upper secondary level) can be in a vulnerable position within the labour market, with 30-40% of school-leavers deemed to be an 'at risk group' by the OECD in 2010²⁷. Whilst early school leavers may be in this position on account of encountering cumulative and multiple disadvantage (in this respect regarded as part of the group referred to as 'left behind youth'), those completing upper secondary level schooling are

²¹ *Long-term Unemployment among Young people in Europe: A qualitative Comparative Study for Psychology of Work, Unemployment and Health* (IPG). Thomas Kieselbach, University of Bremen, Institute for Psychology of Work, Unemployment and Health, (IPG)1. Paper presented to the EU Cluster Workshop on "Unemployment, Work, and Welfare" DG Research of the European Commission, Brussels, 9 -11 November 2000. UWWCLUS Workshop Brussels, November 9th-11th 2000

²² *Rising youth unemployment during the crisis: how to prevent negative long-term consequences on a generation?*, OECD social, employment and migration papers no 106, 2010.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ The challenges of growth, employment and social cohesion, International Monetary Fund (IMF); International Labour Organization (ILO)

²⁵ Eurostat 2010. Unemployment rate by age group (less than 25 years).

<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tsdec460&plugin=1>

²⁶ Ad Hoc Group report on the 2010 thematic review: part 1 'policies to support youth' (EMCO reports no 5)

²⁷ *Rising youth unemployment during the crisis: how to prevent negative long-term consequences on a generation?*, OECD social, employment and migration papers no 106, 2010

likely to face barriers to finding stable employment, especially where demand for jobs in the labour market exceeds supply²⁸.

The young job seekers target group contains three sub-groups which have particular characteristics and also a particular role for LLL in assisting these groups within the labour market.

Early school leavers (those leaving education with a maximum of lower secondary education, maximum ISCED level 2) accounted for 14% of all 18 to 24 year olds in the EU in 2009²⁹ although there are wide variations in early school leaving rates across Europe. Malta, Portugal and Spain have high rates of early school leaving of over 28%, whilst a number of countries have already met the Europe 2020 target to reduce the average rate of early school leaving to < 10%³⁰ (Austria, Czech Republic, Finland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden)³¹. Despite progress in reducing the volume of early school leaving, the EC reported in 2010 that *'Second chance is more critical than ever as significant flows of early school leavers continue to join the ranks of the low skilled. While literacy and numeracy provide a foundation for new skills for jobs, developing new skills needed by adults in modern society: digital skills, economic and financial literacy, civic, cultural and environmental awareness, healthy living, etc. also merit significant attention.'*³²

A young person's decision to leave the education system early may be based on one, or a combination of factors relating to individual circumstances, socio-economic conditions and education factors, and may often reflect their disillusionment with the formal education system. Appropriate LLL approaches in this context include those which raise the profile and attractiveness of education and training relative to the perceived merits of entering employment and those which provide non-traditional or alternative learning approaches to engage young people and bring about remedial impacts. There is also a role for employment-focused training to help young people make the transition from education to employment and pre-vocational courses focused on the development of practical competences and soft skills in order to promote active citizenship amongst young people at risk of becoming NEET.

Upper Secondary (ISCED level 3) leavers may still encounter barriers to accessing initial employment opportunities, especially in labour market sectors where employment protection is high. Conditions and circumstances within the employment market will also have a strong bearing on the market demand for particular qualifications. Here LLL can play a role in strengthening pathways from vocational education and training (VET) into post-secondary education³³ and provide VET³⁴ which can help young people to

²⁸ *Rising youth unemployment during the crisis: how to prevent negative long-term consequences on a generation?*, OECD social, employment and migration papers no 106, 2010

²⁹ Eurostat 2010 http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=edat_ifse_14&lang=en

³⁰ Europe 2020: EU Wide Targets http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/targets/eu-targets/index_en.htm

³¹ European Commission: Communication [COM(2011)18] *Tackling early school leaving. A key contribution to the Europe 2020 Agenda*, 31 January 2011

³² Commission Staff Working Document (2010) *Action Plan on Adult Learning: Achievements and results 2008-10*. Summary,

³³ *Follow-up-Studie zur Evaluation des Projekts „Abschlussquote erhöhen – Berufsfähigkeit steigern“ (increasing employability)*, Berlin Center for Social Research (WZB) 2010

³⁴ *Long-term Unemployment among Young people in Europe: A qualitative Comparative Evaluation for Psychology of Work, Unemployment and Health (IPG)*. Thomas Kieselbach, University of Bremen, Institute for Psychology of Work, Unemployment and Health, (IPG)1. Paper presented to the EU Cluster Workshop on "Unemployment, Work, and

build applied competences and skill sets relevant to the employment market. There is also value in non-learning support³⁵ such as 'guidance-orientated' and counselling based interventions effective in assisting this sub-group³⁶ into employment especially where transitional support promotes the lifelong acquisition of career management skills³⁷.

The proportion of **tertiary level graduates** varies significantly across Member States. For instance, in the UK, 35.0% of 25-64 year olds have attained tertiary level qualifications, whilst in Romania this level is just 13.8%³⁸. Data relating to the younger portion of the population highlights this variation further. For instance, the proportion of the population aged 30-34 year olds having attained tertiary level qualifications ranges from 46% in Sweden to 18% in Romania³⁹. For tertiary graduates having completed a general education degree, there is a particular problem around low levels of available employment in some Member States⁴⁰. Low available levels of employment will be strongly linked to the global economic crisis in some Member States whilst in others unemployment levels may also reflect structural issues. Youth unemployment can have negative effects on lifetime earnings, especially where spells of youth unemployment are experienced upon college graduation⁴¹. Vocational education and training for graduates of general tertiary education plays an important role in improving their prospects for long-term employment stability, especially where there is a focus on up-skilling and supporting the acquisition of competences directly relevant to the labour market. Where tertiary graduates can reinforce their general education through partaking in LLL, their increased competitiveness is likely to assist them in obtaining employment appropriate to their level of skills and training.

2.4.2 Low Skilled Workers

Whilst this evaluation considers the position of low skilled workers as a particular target group, it is key to grasp the range of issues experienced by those with low skills and at different positions in relation to the labour market in order to understand the barriers that prevent this group accessing and continuing in sustained employment. The literature review has highlighted a wide variation in needs, and appropriate types of assistance, depending on whether those who are low skilled are in employment (although often occupying vulnerable jobs) or are much further from employment. For the low-skilled worker target group, the goals of employment and training support is often to raise vocational and non-vocational skill levels to increase their prospects of entering or progressing in work.

Welfare" DG Research of the European Commission, Brussels, 9 -11 November 2000. UWWCLUS Workshop Brussels, November 9th-11th 2000

³⁵ ECOTEC (2008) *Beyond the Maastricht Communiqué; Developments in the opening up of VET pathways and the role of VET in labour market integration.*

³⁶ European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

³⁷ *Guiding at-risk youth through learning to work: lessons from across Europe*, European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop)

³⁸ Eurostat 2010, Persons with tertiary education attainment <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/education/data/database>

³⁹ Eurostat 2010, Tertiary education attainment by sex.

⁴⁰ Ad Hoc Group report on the 2010 thematic review: part 1 'policies to support youth' (EMCO reports no 5). Employment Committee, DG Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion, B-1049 Brussels, Belgium

⁴¹ *The challenges of growth, employment and social cohesion*, International Monetary Fund (IMF); International Labour Organization (ILO). 2010;8.

It is recognised that those within the older as well as younger worker target groups may also have a low level of skills and in this respect, there is likely to be considerable overlap in the labour market and education/training issues across the target groups. The main labour market issue for the low skilled worker target group is that this group is more vulnerable to unemployment than those employees with higher skill levels and/or qualifications. In fact, there is growing evidence to suggest that basic skills (literacy and numeracy) predict youth unemployment (between ages 16 and 24), on the basis of a cross-country comparative evaluation which controlled for educational level⁴². This suggests that young people with low skills are more likely than other groups to be inactive within the labour market⁴³. Employment prospects and the ease of entry into the labour market can be increased for these individuals where competence-based training is supported⁴⁴.

The difficulty for those with low-skills in accessing opportunities within the labour market is compounded further in the light of an overall decline in the availability of low skilled jobs. This reflects a flattened and declining demand for low skilled occupations as highlighted in CEDEFOP's employment and skill forecast for Europe⁴⁵. Just less than 40% of the EU workforce holds positions in higher level jobs including management, professional work or related technical support, for which the demand is expected to increase by over 16 million by 2020. The share of jobs requiring tertiary-level qualifications is expected to rise from 29% in 2010 to about 35% in 2020. Conversely, the demand for low skilled workers is projected to decline: the number of jobs employing those with low qualifications in Europe is projected to fall from 20% to 15% by 2020, and those with low skills will accordingly become increasingly vulnerable to unemployment⁴⁶. Of the total employment growth of 13 million projected for Europe between 2006 and 2015, it is predicted that there will be decreases of 8.5 million jobs for those with no or few formal qualifications. This trend may be disguised to some degree by increases in jobs at the highest (ISCED 5-6) and medium (ISCED 3-4) qualification levels which, in accounting for 12.5 million jobs and 9.5 million respectively⁴⁷ act to quantitatively offset the employment losses for those with no or few qualifications.

Overall employment within the primary and manufacturing sectors is falling across the EU, and even where there has been a recovery in demand for goods, reduced production costs and increased competitiveness has in certain cases lessened the requirement for labour⁴⁸. The recession has acted to accelerate the rate at which jobs are shifting from primary and basic manufacturing to the service sector and also into high technology manufacturing, which often require individuals to have gained formal qualifications to a higher level⁴⁹. These employment sector shifts and changes to workplace organisation

⁴² Lundetrae, Kjersti; Gabrielsen, Egil; Mykletun, Reidar (2010). *Do basic skills predict youth unemployment (16- to 24-year-olds) also when controlled for accomplished upper-secondary school? A cross-country comparison.*

⁴³ Lundetrae, Kjersti; Gabrielsen, Egil; Mykletun, Reidar (2010). *Do basic skills predict youth unemployment (16- to 24-year-olds) also when controlled for accomplished upper-secondary school? A cross-country comparison.*

⁴⁴ ECOTEC (2008) *Beyond the Maastricht Communiqué: Developments in the opening up of VET pathways and the role of VET in labour market integration.*

⁴⁵ *Future Skill Needs in Europe.* Cedefop. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2008. http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/upload/information_resources/bookshop/485/4078_en.pdf

⁴⁶ CEDEFOP, 2010. Briefing Note: Jobs in Europe to become more knowledge- and skills-intensive http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/9021_en.pdf

⁴⁷ Ibid, p.59

⁴⁸ http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/9059_en.pdf. Briefing Note; *What next for skills on the European labour market?*

⁴⁹ http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/9059_en.pdf. Briefing Note; *What next for skills on the European labour market?*

mean an increase in demand for highly and medium-skilled workers⁵⁰. This study recognises that high-level jobs will not always require employees with high-level qualifications - a medium level job for instance may require high levels of qualifications.

In this context, there is a need to employ anticipation measures around future labour market needs within education and training delivery. This allows learners to update their skill sets to reflect up-to-date employment opportunities. As such the formal education system is not to be seen as distinct from the world of work, but rather it should incorporate a feedback mechanism to ensure that the skills and competences acquired within the education and training system are fit for purpose. Furthermore, it has been shown that 'to reach low-skilled adults it is essential to transform their life and work environments into places of learning; embedding learning of basic skills at the workplace is a successful approach to reaching and engaging low-skilled workers'.⁵¹ ESF funded LLL activity has the potential to help make the education and training process increasingly responsive to current circumstances and trends within the labour market. In this way ESF can contribute to rising educational attainment, thereby equipping learners for employment through increased educational and training attainment.

For the economically active low skilled, their engagement with the labour market may be discontinuous and sporadic⁵², with structural long-term unemployment⁵³ often an issue. This group is particularly vulnerable within times of economic uncertainty and encounters difficulties in securing employment with good levels of pay and working conditions. LLL can help the active low skilled establish a stronger basis for long-term and secure participation in the labour market. Studies have shown that the recognition of prior learning, the accrediting/certificating of non-and informal learning and the provision of guidance and counselling play valuable roles here⁵⁴.

2.4.3 Older Workers

The older workers target group is of importance given demographic trends which see this portion of the workforce increasing over time. Changes to pensionable age also mean that older workers might stay in the workforce longer than they might have previously. Re-skilling is a key issue amongst this group given that skills and competencies may be out of date and need upgrading. Those within this group may not have taken part in vocational education and training for many years and there may be associated difficulties in tracking and identifying those in need of support to remain in employment.

Older workers, particularly those that are low qualified, are hard to reach with lifelong learning interventions. However, it is this group that has a particular requirement for lifelong learning given that approaching 60% of the 74 million low-qualified citizens in Europe are over 45 years of age⁵⁵. This

⁵⁰ *Future Skill Needs in Europe*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2008. http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/upload/information_resources/bookshop/485/4078_en.pdf

⁵¹ Commission Staff Working Document (2010) *Action Plan on Adult Learning: Achievements and results 2008-10*. Summary.

⁵² *Statistical Discrimination and Employers' Recruitment Practices for Low-Skilled workers, Reconciliation of Work and Welfare in Europe 2010*

⁵³ *Low-qualified workers in Europe*, Eurofound 2008

⁵⁴ ECOTEC (2008) *Beyond the Maastricht Communiqué: Developments in the opening up of VET pathways and the role of VET in labour market integration*.

⁵⁵ CEDEFOP, 2011. *Learning while working: how skills development can be supported through workplace learning* <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/articles/18875.aspx>

highlights the need to engage increasing numbers of older workers in lifelong learning in order for the skills of the workforce to match the demands placed on it, especially in the context of rising qualification demands across all types of occupations⁵⁷.

The older workforce faces a variety of obstacles to their retention and participation within the labour market. People tend to participate less in lifelong learning as they get older, a trend which does not differ across different qualification levels, although it is particularly the case in countries where there is low overall participation in lifelong learning. In light of LLL participation decreasing with age⁵⁸, there is the need for vocational education and training amongst older people in order that their skill sets and competences can be refreshed and updated in line with shifting workplace technologies, requirements and cultures. The ability to upgrade, update and improve skills and competences plays a role in sustaining and improving the performance of the older workforce. It therefore features highly in older people's decisions to stay in the workforce. In the absence of this, the lack of up-to-date competences means older workers can be at high risk of both unemployment and inactivity and can become disengaged from the formal labour market.

The regulatory framework, and in particular the statutory retirement age, are commonly cited as reasons for the departure of older people from the workforce. Rather than being unemployed, older workers retire early or, if not early according to the law, at an age at which they are often physically and mentally still able to work. Although Member States recognise that many current pension schemes are financially not likely to be sustainable in relation to the increased life expectancy, few have been able to keep older people in the workforce. In fact, the average exit age from the labour market has decreased since the 1960s⁵⁹. This is reflected in a European Commission report on meeting social needs in an ageing society which indicated that the employment rate falls dramatically from 77% for the 50-54 cohort to 45% for those aged between 55 and 64⁶⁰. This trend contrasts with increased life expectancies and the improved general health that has occurred amongst the older workforce over this period, and by implication, their potential ability to remain in employment for longer has increased, especially given the rise of the pension age in some Member States. Indeed the biggest increase in participation within the labour market is projected for older workers (and particularly women) aged between 55 and 64. Women between 55 and 64 are currently underrepresented in the labour market. The higher increase of projected participation of women than men of older age in the work force is an additional issue in regards to barriers to employment. Older women are currently under represented in the labour market for various reasons, including education and training needs, lack of work experience, the gender pay gap but also their role as

⁵⁶ This takes into account both the inactive as well as active low qualified citizens and so exceeds the figures included in Figure 2.1. This figure is thought to include those older than 65 although the CEDEFOP research and cited data does not state whether or not this is so.

⁵⁷ CEDEFOP, 2011. *Learning while working: how skills development can be supported through workplace learning* <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/articles/18875.aspx>

⁵⁸ Tarja Tikkanen (2006) *Bringing lifelong learning into the field of older workers*, International Research Institute of Stavenger, http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/upload/etvnews/news/1874-att1-1-3_tikkanen_agora_12oct06.ppt#270, 8, Older workers' participation in lifelong learning.

⁵⁹ *Longer working lives through pension reforms*, European Commission 2008, pg 8.

⁶⁰ *Demography Report 2008: Meeting Social Needs in an Ageing Society*, European Commission 2008 pg 13.

informal carers⁶¹. This proves to be an obstacle to employment, especially though not exclusively to full time employment, as it requires an appropriate strategy between the employer and employee for time management and flexibility. In particular, the anticipated growth in the levels of older women participating in the workforce, means that the gender dimension is an important consideration in measuring the effectiveness of ESF support to LLL amongst older workers⁶².

While more Member States are actively seeking to retain older people in the workforce through changes in regulation, the culture of early retirement at the moment remains a barrier to employment. Retaining the older workforce would require a change in the regulatory frameworks that will incentivise retention in the labour market (for instance through pension reforms⁶³), while at the same time acting to change employer perceptions of the ability of older workers. Incentives to phase out retirement through part-time work opportunities⁶⁴ also have potential to aid older employees in making decisions to remain or exit the workforce. For older people who decide to stay in the workforce, ageism is an obstacle to the effective and continued participation within the workforce. Discrimination on the basis of age was found to be the second highest form of discrimination in the EU in 2009⁶⁵. In addition, it is not uncommon for employers to refrain from spending resources on upgrading skills and providing training for older workers⁶⁶. ESF supported LLL can potentially play a role in removing or preventing some of the barriers experienced by older workers by encouraging employers to provide training to older workers and ensuring that older workers feel able to perform their job and therefore stay in the workforce longer. Validation of prior learning has an important role to play, although 'it is not often part of the learning opportunity' and take-up tends to be low, especially amongst the low skilled and older workers⁶⁷.

2.5 Conclusions

This section has described the context in which the ESF has been operating since 2007 and the needs of the particular groups targeted by the Fund. It has shown that the development of lifelong learning has been at different stages in different EU Member States, but also that implementation of lifelong learning strategies has been an important issue whatever the stage of development in a given country. Measures like the validation of prior learning were under-developed at the start of the current round of ESF, especially for low skilled and older workers. In this context, there has clearly been significant potential for ESF to make an important contribution in relation to lifelong learning.

⁶¹ *Arrangements for workers with care responsibilities for sick or dependent relatives and Drawing on experience: Older women workers in Europe*, Eurofound, 2009

⁶² *Arrangements for workers with care responsibilities for sick or dependent relatives and Drawing on experience: Older women workers in Europe*, Eurofound, 2009

⁶³ Working and Ageing, CEDEFOP 2010, *Lifelong learning for ageing workers to sustain employability and develop personality*. P.31

⁶⁴ *Longer working lives through pension reforms*, European Commission 2008, pg 19

⁶⁵ Eurobarometer Special Survey on Employment, 2009

⁶⁶ Working and Ageing, CEDEFOP 2010, *Flexibility and security for older workers: HRM arrangements in four European countries* pg. 135

⁶⁷ Commission Staff Working Document (2010) *Action Plan on Adult Learning: Achievements and results 2008-10*. Summary,

The analysis has also highlighted the importance of judging ESF in terms of its own objectives, i.e. the contribution it has made to the development of lifelong learning that specifically supports the sustainable integration of people into employment. It has also shown that, since ESF is designed to fit with national priorities, any assessment needs to take into account the major variations that exist between different countries in the overall levels and patterns of ESF expenditure.

The three target groups that are the subject of this evaluation have different, if overlapping sets of needs. Young jobseekers have become a particularly pressing issue in the last few years due to the substantial increases in youth unemployment that have been seen across Europe. Interventions at this age have the potential to affect opportunities over someone's entire life and have therefore moved up the 'political' agenda. The low skilled target group includes not only people who are active in the labour market but also those who are inactive. Needs in relation to lifelong learning therefore vary: those who are furthest from the labour market require the most intensive interventions, although amongst both active and inactive low skilled people there tends to be a need for both basic and technical skills in some combination. Older workers are increasing in importance owing to demographic trends. In contrast to the other two target groups, older workers face additional barriers to labour market participation related to attitudes towards retirement, retirement regulations and employer perceptions.

In the subsequent Sections we focus on assessing the extent to which ESF has come to grips with the needs of these different groups, taking into account the highly different contexts within which the ESF has been implemented.

3.0 The Reach of ESF on the Target Groups

3.1 Introduction

This section presents an analysis of the 'reach' of ESF in supporting the evaluation target groups – young people, the low skilled and older workers – through LLL activity. For the purposes of the evaluation, 'reach' is defined as the success or otherwise of ESF in engaging individuals from the evaluation target groups to receive LLL related support provided through the programme. The key sources of evidence are a review of relevant literature and data sources, policymaker consultations at the EU and Member State level, and case study based primary research in a selection of Member States. The focus is on addressing EQ2: specifically, the extent to which ESF supported LLL activities reach young people, the low skilled and older workers.

For each target group covered by the evaluation, the section analyses the extent to which the groups have been reached in practice through LLL interventions, drawing on the available empirical evidence. It then considers the extent to which ESF delivery approaches and systems have enabled the three target groups to be reached by LLL activities. The influence of key explanatory factors, such as national policy, the prioritisation and targeting of the three groups and particular approaches to managing the delivery of LLL are explored here. Given that discussion of specific types of ESF *activities* that are effective in supporting reach is closely related to the impact of those activities, analysis of the second part of EQ2 – "*Is it possible to identify activities which are more successful in reaching the target groups than others?*" – is presented in Section 4. This section concludes by summarising the key findings from this analysis from the perspective of addressing EQ2.

3.2 The reach of ESF LLL support to young people

3.2.1 Extent of reach to young people

Young people form a relatively high proportion of those benefitting from LLL activities. Data compiled from OP reports in the previous 2000-2006 programming period, and presented in the Commission's *The European Social Fund: Education and Lifelong Learning* background report, allows some estimates to be made as to the specific reach of LLL activity for young people within ESF provision. This suggests that there were around 32.88 million participations⁶⁸ in ESF LLL activity across the programming period, equating to around 43% of average ESF participations.⁶⁹ On the basis of these figures there were around 20 million LLL related participations for young people.⁷⁰

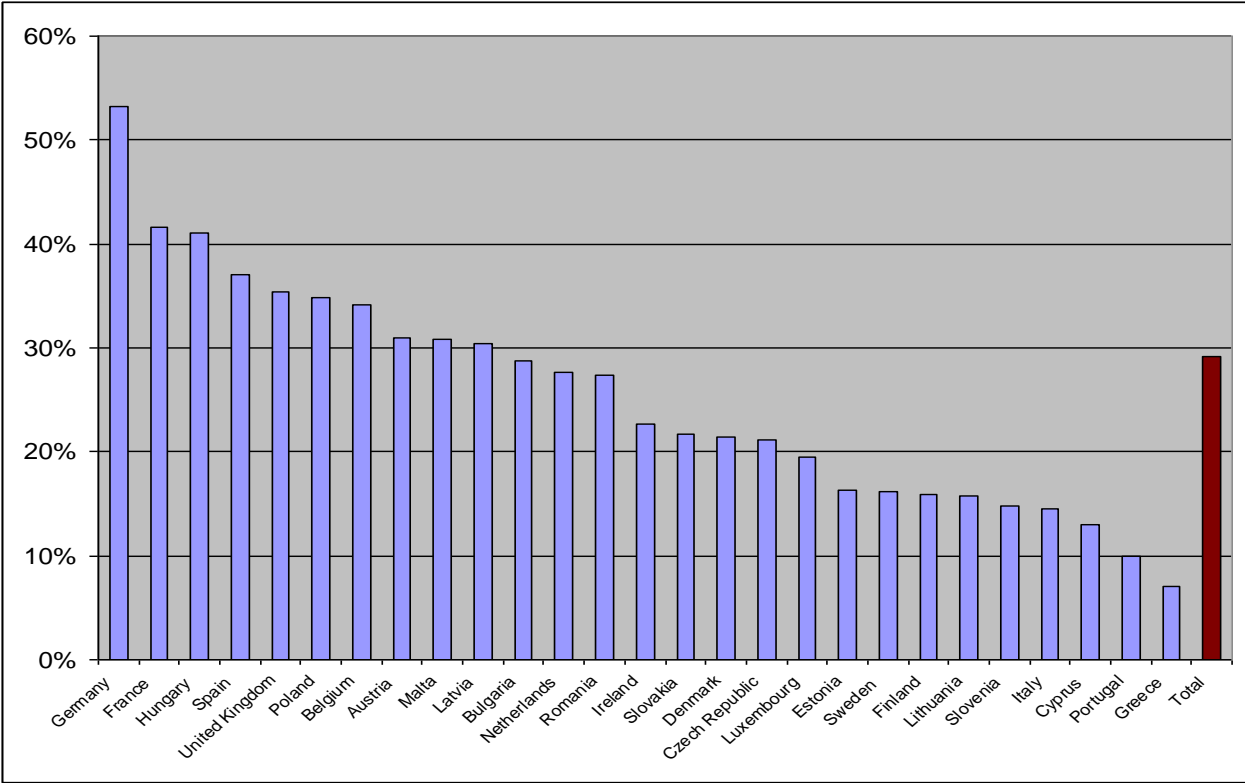
⁶⁸ The term participations relates to the number of activities. Therefore a participant undertaking two ESF activities (and LLL can consist of different activities for individual participants) would count as two participations.

⁶⁹ Average yearly participation figures are presented in *The European Social Fund: Education and Lifelong Learning, Background Report*, table 4, p. 31, European Commission (2010)

⁷⁰ European Commission (2010), *The European Social Fund: Education and Lifelong Learning*, Background Report, p.32

Looking at the current programming period available data shows a notable scale and share of young peoples' participation in ESF activity in general (as distinct from that relating to specifically LLL activity which cannot be ascertained from the SFC data). As Figure 3.1 demonstrates, SFC information covering 2007-2010 shows that participations by young people form a significant proportion of all ESF participations (29%)⁷¹.

Figure 3.1 Young people (15-24 years) participations in ESF (2007-2010) as a percentage of all participations, by Member State



Source: SFC data 2007-2010

The data suggests that participation by young people is particularly high in Germany, France and Hungary, whilst Portugal, Greece and Cyprus have significantly lower proportions of young people participations. As explored in the following sub-section on explanatory factors relating to the level of reach, there are a number of likely explanations for this variation. These include the influence of national Member State policies, the specific focus adopted by different OPs, and other contextual factors relating to the labour market position and differential qualification levels of young people across the EU.

Looking more specifically at LLL participation through ESF in the current programming period, *the European Social Fund: Education and Lifelong Learning* background report estimates that in the first two years of the current programming period (2007-2009) 35% of participants in ESF funded education and LLL activities were between 16 and 24 years old compared to the average for the proxy (young people as

⁷¹ It will be noted that when summing the percentages by country from Figures 3.1 to 3.3, some exceed 100% (because of the overlap between groups) and some are below (because additional groups are involved – e.g. people with higher skill levels in Sweden).

a percentage of all participations) in Figure 3.1.⁷² In both instances this shows that young people are proportionally over-represented in ESF provision relative to their share of the working age EU27 population, of which only 18.6% are from the 15-24 age group.⁷³

SFC data for the current period indicates that from 2007-2010 there were around 34.3 million ESF participations in total. Taking 42% as an estimate of ESF LLL participations (using the ESF spend/allocations detailed earlier in table 2.4 as a proxy for the proportion of total participations), this translates to around 14.4 million participations over the 2007-2010 period having an education and lifelong learning focus.⁷⁴ On the basis of the estimate of the proportion of young people benefitting from this type of activity being 35% as noted above, we can estimate that in the first four years of the current programme ESF LLL activity will have reached somewhere in the region of 5 million young people participations.⁷⁵

Data relating to LLL activities amongst those Member States examined through the evaluation case studies also indicates that young people are being reached to a notable extent. This is apparent in that young people form a considerable proportion of those supported through ESF (and, where data is available, that young people form a significant proportion of overall numbers benefitting from specifically educational or LLL activity). The relatively large scale of these interventions (in terms of numbers supported), and progress against targets set for engaging young people in this activity, reflect this impression of significant reach.

In terms of targets, for example, in the England and Gibraltar OP (wherein Priority 1's targeting of NEET young people has a strong LLL dimension), provision has reached 166,400 NEET participants to date against the overall lifetime programme target of 177,000 to 2015.⁷⁶ Similarly, in Sweden, participation amongst young people has exceeded the original target set for the OP of 5000 to a considerable degree, with over 18000 young people participating under Priority 2 (focused on education and training, improving relevance of initial and vocational training, and updating training skills for the unemployed) as of March 2011.⁷⁷

It is possible that these latter figures simply reflect the fact that targets have been set relatively low. Nonetheless, this can be considered good indicative evidence of the scale of the reach of ESF support to young people around activities that are explicitly LLL oriented or have a large LLL component. Stronger evidence is available from the case studies in instances where a proportional figure for young people's participation in specifically LLL activity is available. In Austria, for example, participant monitoring data

⁷² Ibid., p.32

⁷³ Source: Eurostat. Figure quoted is for 2008 to function as a comparator with the SFC 2007-2009 data.

⁷⁴ 42% based on ESF spending allocation 'fields' for the current programming period. The main fields included are development of LLL systems and strategies, measures to increase participation in LLL, reforms to education and training systems, and services relating to sector/ firm restructuring.

⁷⁵ The data measures participations rather than participants (a participant may have more than one ESF participation through involvement in different schemes).

⁷⁶ 2007-2013 England and Gibraltar ESF Programme: 2009 AIR, p.69

⁷⁷ *Socialfonden i siffror*, 2011, Swedish ESF Council

shows that 46% of participants across educational measures are aged 15-24.⁷⁸ In Spain the equivalent figure is 47%.⁷⁹

Unfortunately, in the other case study Member States, there are no equivalent figures from monitoring data or evaluations that relate to LLL activity for the young people group. Accepting this, the evidence that is available again indicates that young people as a target group have been reached to a notable extent. This is particularly clear in terms of young people being proportionally over-represented in terms of their involvement in ESF LLL activity.

3.2.2 Factors relating to reach

This sub-section builds on the empirical evidence presented in respect of young people. The aim is to highlight some explanatory factors relating to the level of reach. In doing so we explore some of the variations apparent in different national contexts in terms of the level and type of young people's engagement in LLL activity. The key factors identified and examined relate to national policy and related contextual considerations, along with the degree and type of prioritisation and targeting of young people within OPs. The text also discusses the available evidence around particular sub-groups of the overall young jobseekers target group that are being prioritised and reached by ESF LLL activity – in particular, the overlap between the low skilled and young people target groups that is apparent in many situations.

1. The influence of national and regional policy

As noted in Section 2, the overall purpose of the ESF as defined in the regulation is to “*contribute to the priorities of the Community ... by supporting Member States' policies*”⁸⁰. For that reason, the ESF has not promulgated a specific conception of LLL but instead reflects the priorities and approaches of Member States' policies, albeit with some encouragement given to the spread of innovation and best practice across national borders. Based on the evidence examined, the first factor identifiable as influencing reach thus concerns the extent to which the broader LLL policies of Member States promote LLL for young people, and the extent to which this is reflected in ESF priorities and delivery systems.

Young people are generally a high priority within the OPs. As reported by stakeholders, this reflects concerns over high youth unemployment and associated social problems, which are in turn reflected in national priorities. This factor was commonly raised in Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the UK, and influences the notable overall reach of the ESF in respect of young people described above. Across the case study countries, it is evident that the influence of national policy is a very significant factor, but also one which varies.

⁷⁸ Mario Steiner, Gabriele Pessl, Elfriede Wagner, Marc Plate (2010) *Evaluierung ESF „Beschäftigung“ im Bereich Erwachsenenbildung Zwischenbericht*.

⁷⁹ Source: SFC data

⁸⁰ Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the European Social Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1784/1999.

Sweden is widely acknowledged to have a strong LLL culture. National policy promotes learning that is lifelong and life wide⁸¹ and that extends beyond the training/education required to gain employment.

In some Member States employment subsidies have taken precedence over educational activities and work experience as a means of helping people into work. Training in the workplace has for the most part not been targeted at young people. The Swedish OP reflects these broad trends in national policy. Support for young people mostly tackles social exclusion and encourages labour market integration rather than developing skills for those in employment. Indeed, young people are specifically targeted (and well reached) under Priority Axis 2 (increased labour supply through labour market integration), but not under Priority Axis 1 (increased skills supply) under which most activities immediately identifiable as having a strong LLL dimension are funded. In line with this figures from 2011 show that 18,159 young people participated in Priority 2, exceeding significantly the original target of 5,000. Young people were not specified as a target group under Priority 1 meaning that equivalent performance against target figures are not available.

In the UK, the national policy focus (particularly in England) is on training for work and skills acquisition rather than on fostering systems that support the development of pathways for continual learning. In the current programming period, for example, the England and Gibraltar OP gives greater priority to the (short term) employability of young people, rather than promoting access to more comprehensive (and longer term) education and training opportunities. This was seen by stakeholders as representing a significant shift from the previous programming period where a focus on LLL in terms of developing pathways for continual learning was cited as more apparent. In contrast, the current OP provides LLL opportunities for a specific sub-set of young people – those aged 15-19 years who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), or who are at risk of being so. This reflects a national policy concern with reducing the numbers of NEET young people by way of promoting social inclusion and enhancing the life-chances of those in the NEET group.

The Scottish Lowlands and Uplands OP similarly provide LLL for NEETs as a means of helping the transition to work. However, in contrast to the English OP, the Lowlands and Uplands OP also promotes the skills development of younger workers in employment (through Priority Axis 3 - Improving Access to LLL). This in part reflects the Lifelong Learning Strategy for Scotland, which presents a much more explicit and well-defined concept of LLL. As the UK example demonstrates, therefore, different policy concerns influence the manner in which young people are prioritised and the relative importance of LLL within this. The OPs in different parts of the UK, responding to different policy drivers, reflect this. Despite these variations, however, in the case of both OPs examined young people have been reached to a significant extent. This is true both in terms of forming a high proportion of participants overall, and in targets set for participation being reached or exceeded (see previous sub-section for details).

In contrast to the UK, the Netherlands and Austrian case studies highlight national policies that focus more on developing a high level of competence for the existing labour force through highly structured and highly institutionalised systems. As a consequence, less emphasis is placed by national policy on LLL as a means of addressing the low employability of young people. This perhaps also reflects that the level of

⁸¹ Used by the Swedish National Agency for Education and referring to organisational and situational forms of learning namely formal, non-formal (complementing formal education) and informal learning Det livslånga och livsvida lärandet, 2000, Swedish National Agency for Education

youth unemployment in these countries is relatively low compared to other European countries (albeit rising sharply since the economic crisis of 2008). This national policy context is reflected in the Netherlands OP. LLL provision is mostly focused on helping young people gain qualifications, rather than on helping their labour market integration. Similarly, the national OP for Austria mostly focuses on addressing early-school leaving, promoting completion of secondary education, and promoting access to education for young people, rather than on providing LLL as a means of labour market integration. However, in both instances young people are well represented, both in terms of engagement in ESF in general and specifically in respect of benefitting from LLL activity.⁸²

The case study countries of Spain and Italy are characterised by high rates of early school leaving and low rates of participation in adult education. In Spain, the formal education system mostly provides VET for younger people. LLL is seen as a tool that helps to incorporate and retain workers in the labour market through retraining, gaining qualifications, and skills improvement. The ESF OPs reflect this national policy by supporting LLL as a means of labour market re-entry for young people who left the education system. This has included, for example, personalised and intensive employment training programmes (e.g. six-months training followed by an employment contract), and means that as noted earlier the proportional participation of young people in educational measures is high at 47 %.⁸³ In Italy, national policy mostly focuses on continuous training for employed and ongoing training for the long-term unemployed and those outside the labour market, though these two types of training are not generally brought together into a "lifecycle" approach to learning. This dichotomy is similarly reflected in LLL provided by ESF. As a result young people mostly benefit from LLL in the context of employability and active labour market interventions (e.g. 62% of participants in Priority Axis 2 of the Piedmont OP), rather than interventions related to adaptability of employees (e.g. 31% of participants in Priority Axis 1 of the Piedmont OP).

In Lithuania and Poland, LLL systems are in a relatively early stage of development. In practice, a strong system to support and deliver LLL is not yet in place in Lithuania and the education system lacks flexibility and capacity to respond to diverse learning needs. The OP goes some way to addressing this by making the education system more accessible to all. It does not, however, include an explicit focus on widening the access of young people to LLL, though some of the activities focused on labour market integration provide access to vocational training for disadvantaged groups (and other young people). This reflects the country's Employment Support Law which prioritises support for those looking for their first job as a group requiring special attention.

In Poland, LLL is primarily associated with increasing access to continuous education and training, rather than with introducing a 'lifecycle' approach to learning. Where LLL activities are targeted at young people, they mostly consist of vocational training, apprenticeships and traineeships as a means of tackling social exclusion (Priority Axis 1). As discussed above, data limitations mean it is difficult to assess numbers of young people engaged specifically in LLL activity. However, as Figure 3.1 presented earlier in the section shows, based on 2007-2010 SFC data Poland has high levels of young people's participation as a proportion of overall participation in ESF (35%). The focus on vocational training across the OP means that the level of young people involved in LLL activities through ESF is thus also likely to be notable.

⁸² As detailed in the preceding sub-section, in Austria 46 % of participants across ESF educational measures are aged 15-24. In the Netherlands, according to 2007-2009 SFC data 29 % of ESF participants overall are from this age group and are well represented across Priority Axes with a specific emphasis on facilitating qualifications.

⁸³ Source: SFC data

2. The impact of prioritisation and targeting

The notable level of participation by young people in ESF in general, and in ESF funded LLL activity in particular, is perhaps to be expected. Young people are often referenced across multiple OPs within Member States, across different OP Priority Axes, and at the level of ESF measures within OPs. In Spain, for example, young people are explicitly mentioned as a target group in the Adaptability and Employment Multiregional OP and in 17 of 19 regional OPs. In the England and Gibraltar OP young people are cited as a target group across all OP Priority Axes. Such prioritisation is also evident at the level of ESF measures within OPs. For example, in the current programming period 64 measures in Italy out of 272 address young people as one of their target groups.

Table 3.1 provides examples of OPs (from the case studies) that have set young people as an explicit target group and illustrates the variations in the targeting of young people (across the case study OPs), raising the question of the extent to which targeting "works" in terms of reaching large numbers of young people, or whether the focus should be on serving broad target groups in the expectation that sufficient numbers of young people will ultimately benefit anyway. In at least some cases, the evidence emerging both from the SFC data and from stakeholder interviews suggests a correlation between levels of participation amongst young people, and the degree to which OP Priority Axes or measures explicitly target young people. The extent to which particular types of measure offer support likely to be of relevance for this target group is another notable factor.

Table 3.1 Prioritisation of young jobseekers (examples from the OPs)

OP/Priority Axis	Aim/activity related to LLL for low-skilled people	Target group
Austria Priority Axis 4: Lifelong Learning, sub-objective 1, Raising compulsory school education completion rates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School-based training and continuing education measures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young people (50,000)
England and Gibraltar Priority Axis 1: Extending employment opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiatives to reform vocational routes for, and develop vocational skills among, 14 to 19 year olds; Activities tackle barriers to learning, and help access mainstream provision; Vocational training for young people at risk of becoming NEET to provide pathways to employment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People aged 14-19 years not in education, employment or training (NEET)
Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparation for the labour market, e.g. through tailor-made sector-oriented courses in cooperation with enterprises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students in secondary practical education and secondary special education (750 per year)
Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional development for individual jobseekers, including Individual Action Plans and instruments to diagnose training needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young persons entering the labour market people (aged 15-24)
Sweden Priority Axis 2: Increased Labour Supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support young people to establish themselves in the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young people (5,000)

OP/Priority Axis	Aim/activity related to LLL for low-skilled people	Target group
	labour market and prevent young people from ending up outside the labour market, e.g. by encouraging early school leavers to return to education or training	

Source: OP Documentation from case study countries

For example, Priority Axis 1 of the Swedish OP, which is focused on increasing adaptability amongst workers and businesses, has seen limited participation by young people (5.5% of total participants).⁸⁴ In part this relates to the fact that this priority targets those in work. In the context of relatively high levels of youth unemployment in Sweden, and extensive participation in further and higher education, levels of participation by young people may be lower as a result. In contrast, Priority Axis 2 of the OP around developing human capital, focused in part on LLL-related themes of training and employment-related skills development, has seen high levels of young people's participation (43% of Priority Axis 2 participants).⁸⁵ The fact that young people are explicitly cited as a target group by the OP, in the context of providing support to disadvantaged groups to facilitate labour market integration, similarly explains high participation rates in Priority Axis 2.

Interestingly, evidence from a previous evaluation⁸⁶ suggests that the existence of target groups in an OP does not necessarily mean that the different elements in the delivery system are geared to attracting and supporting them. Whilst target groups can be prioritised in different ways, the risk is that some target groups might not in practice be targeted in any real sense. Based on the evidence from the case study countries, it is clear that several approaches to prioritisation have been taken in addition to or instead of the setting of formal targets in the OP. These include referencing or prioritising certain groups at the level of the overall OP, but not including specific targets linked to particular Priority Axes. In addition, in some instances while groups are prioritised in OP documentation, activities within Priority Axes do not actually develop specific support for particular groups such as older workers, the low skilled and women. Instead, activities offer more generic support covering a number of different groups. In many cases, despite the concern noted over prioritisation not necessarily translating into actual activities designed to engage young people, these approaches have been successful in attracting young people in to ESF funded LLL provision.

In terms of these different approaches, the prioritisation of young people through developing dedicated streams or programmes of provision within broader Priority Axes was highlighted in Austria, Spain and the UK. For example, in Austria, Priority Axis 2 (combating unemployment) has included measures dedicated to supporting young people including qualification projects and assistance with apprenticeships. Young people have also been prioritised by measures within Priority Axis 4 (Lifelong Learning). Such dedicated prioritisation that translates into specific streams of activity appears to be significant in ensuring notable reach to young people.

⁸⁴ Source: *Socialfonden i siffror 2011 – projektens deltagare och nytta, 2011*, Swedish ESF Council

⁸⁵ *Socialfonden i siffror, 2011*, Swedish ESF Council

⁸⁶ *Evaluation of the capacity of the ESF delivery systems to attract and support OP target groups*; Evaluation for the European Commission Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities; Euréval, with Ecorys and Ramboll, 2011.

Secondly, in terms of prioritisation, there is some evidence that approaches to ESF contracting may affect the extent to which young people are reached by LLL provision. In particular, this relates to the use of outcome-based funding models and can be seen to work in both positive and negative ways. In Sweden, for example, this approach is reported as resulting in some projects restricting access to young people that those managing provision are confident will complete the course, hence ensuring output performance is maximised and the payments that result from this are received. In the UK such systems were reported as assisting the Managing Authority and Co-financing Organisations to ensure that ESF providers meet targets set for particular groups, including young people.⁸⁷ However, in the UK case evaluation evidence suggests that outcome-based payment systems can lead to provision being restricted when ESF providers breach the maximum participation numbers set out in their contracts.⁸⁸ While it appears that the degree of specific targeting of young people is important the way in which provision is procured and arranged from a commissioning and delivery point of view is also significant in influencing levels of 'reach'.

Third, the particular form of delivery arrangements was also highlighted by stakeholders as a significant influencing factor on effective targeting, and hence reach. The use of partnerships was reported to be especially effective in combining LLL with other services for young people. This was particularly the case in serving young people with complex and multi-faceted problems who require a broader package of support. In Sweden co-operation between various actors (primarily at the local level) including the Public Employment Service, social insurance agency and social services was noted as significant. Such an approach was cited as facilitating the effective development of multi-disciplinary teams and partnerships (including job brokers, social welfare officers, teachers, and education / employment guidance offices) in delivering support. Availability and involvement of these partners was reported as being particularly valuable to participants given their multi-faceted problems.

Fourth, certain specific *types of activities*⁸⁹ were seen as a particularly important way of attracting young people into LLL. These are discussed in Section 4 below.

3. Sub-groups within the young people target group being prioritised and reached: the low-skilled

Young people who are low-skilled are a priority for many OPs within the eight case study countries for this study and for many of the 117 OPs across the EU. Moreover, as discussed in Section 2, a low level of skills represents a very significant barrier to labour market participation and progression for large numbers of young people. This includes, for example, early school-leavers who do not complete secondary education, or for upper secondary leavers who need VET in order to build applied competencies and skill sets relevant to the employment market. Clearly, it would be expected that there is likely to be extensive overlap between the young people and low skilled target groups served by OPs in a number of instances. Indeed, in many cases the evidence reviewed suggests this is the case, with specifically low-skilled young people often being prioritised, targeted and reached. However, quantifying

⁸⁷ As well as being discussed by interviewees this effect is also reported in evaluation evidence. See *Evaluation of European Social Fund Priority 1 and Priority 4: Extending Employment Opportunities to Adults and Young People*, DWP Research Report 775, 2011

⁸⁸ *Evaluation of European Social Fund Priority 1 and Priority 4: Extending Employment Opportunities to Adults and Young People*, DWP Research Report 775, 2011

⁸⁹ In terms of, for example, particular forms of learning or activities such as the use of outdoor based activities as a mechanism to engage disadvantaged young people.

the precise extent of such an overlap is problematic given that OP management information generally does not facilitate such a calculation.

Where more general evidence is available, this shows that young people and the low skilled tend to account for high proportions of participation in measures tackling labour market disadvantage and seeking to develop skill levels to address this. For example, some 43% of participants in Priority Axis 2 of the Swedish OP were young people and 36% of participants overall were classed as having low skills.⁹⁰ In the case of Spain, the numbers of people reached are similarly high for young people (making up 47% of participants) and the low skilled (46 % of participants) across all ESF LLL activities.⁹¹ Similarly, evidence from the Netherlands OP suggests that most support for young people focuses on those with lower-skill levels, with LLL activity being used to address this through providing support to take qualifications, enrol on apprenticeships and engage in dual work opportunities.

Likewise, Priority Axis 1 (Extending employment opportunities) of the England and Gibraltar OP includes a particular focus on support for NEET young people recognising that young people with low skills are a common and distinct group facing particular labour market challenges. Given the high levels of young people reached by this Priority Axis, ESF LLL activity can be viewed as playing a very important remedial role for young people with low skill levels. Here, ESF has helped remedy the lack of skills and qualifications relevant to employment amongst parts of the young population, particularly those that left compulsory education with limited qualifications. Evidence from stakeholders interviewed in the UK context has reinforced this finding.

Each of the above examples illustrates that as well as policy drivers and the degree of targeting being important factors in the level of reach apparent, the focus on particular sub-groups of young people can also be an influencing factor on the way this group is being targeted, prioritised, and ultimately reached.

3.3 The reach of ESF LLL support to low skilled workers

3.3.1 Extent of reach to the low-skilled

As with the young people target group, data that sets out the level of participation by the low skilled in specifically LLL related activity is relatively scarce. Likewise, the data that does exist needs to be treated with some caution. The Commission's *The European Social Fund: Education and Lifelong Learning* background report suggests that, in both the 2000-2006 and current programming period, 38% of those with up to ISCED level 2 or equivalent qualifications benefited from education and LLL provision as a proportion of overall participations of this type.⁹² As noted earlier, data from the same report estimates that in the 2000-2006 programme there were 32.88 million participations in ESF LLL activity.⁹³ On the basis of the 38% participation figure for those with low skill levels, this would translate to around 12.5

⁹⁰ *Socialfonden i siffror*, 2011, Swedish ESF Council

⁹¹ Source: SFC data

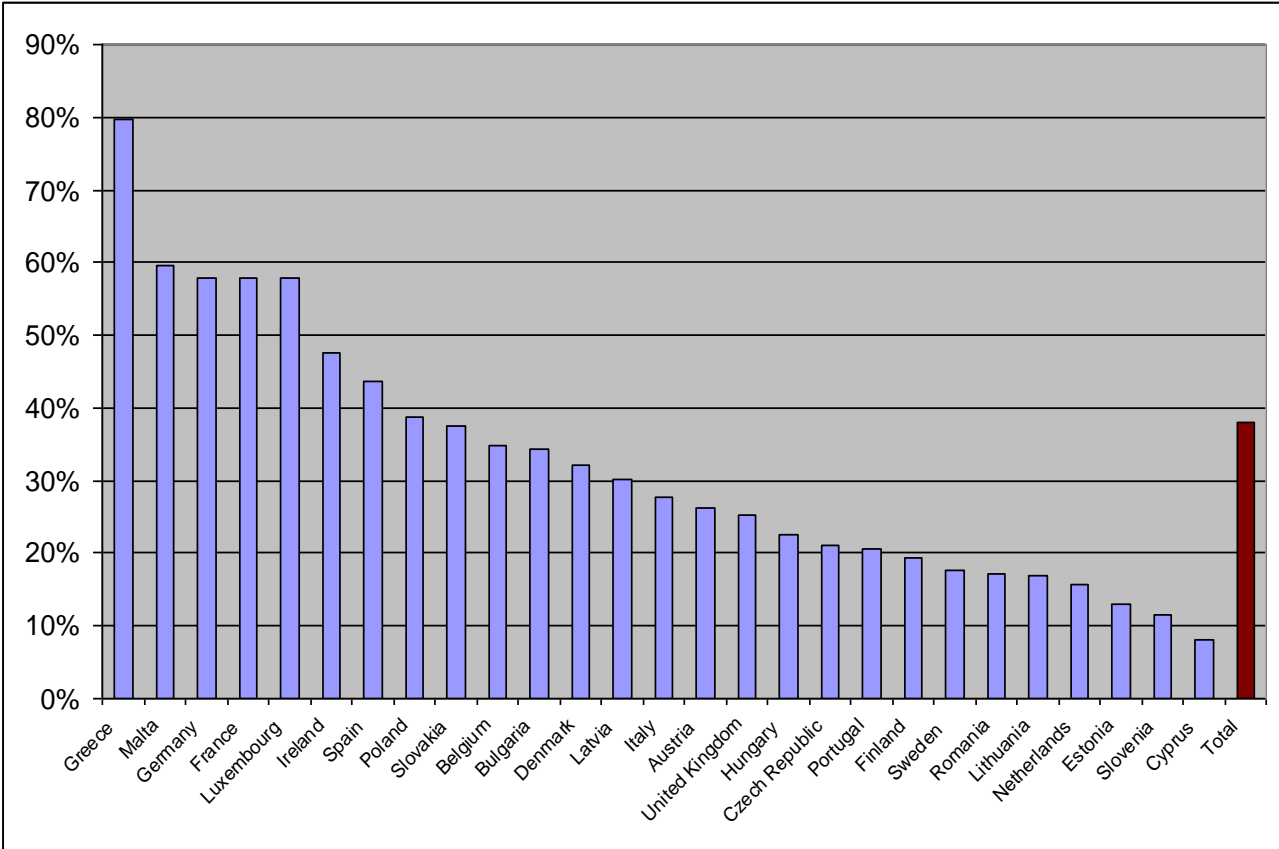
⁹² European Commission (2010), *The European Social Fund: Education and Lifelong Learning*, Background Report, p.33. Note that this estimate is based on a relatively small sample of activity and thus needs to be treated with caution. Calculations derived from this are thus likely to be subject to some degree of error.

⁹³ European Commission (2010), *The European Social Fund: Education and Lifelong Learning*, Background Report, p.31

million participations in LLL activity within the low skilled group in the previous programming period. Accepting that this can only be a broad estimate due to the limitations of the available data, this again shows the considerable scale of the reach of ESF LLL activity to the low skilled group. The data does not allow for sub-divisions of the low skilled group which ranges from those in employment to those that are distant from the labour market and require high levels of focused and tailored support to improve their employability.

For the current programming period, SFC data is available to show the reach of ESF in general (not specifically provision related to LLL) to the low skilled group. Figure 3.2 below shows ESF participations in the 2007-2010 period and illustrates notable variations between Member States with a majority of ESF participations in Greece, France, Germany, Malta and Luxembourg relating to those with low skills. Conversely, relatively small proportions of ESF participations are evident in the cases of Estonia, Slovenia and Cyprus as regards those with low skills. Similar to the young people target group, explanatory factors for such variation are likely to relate to variations in skill levels amongst the general population in different Member States, allied to the different focus of the OPs concerned and the influence of national policies and priorities. Such factors influencing reach are discussed in section 3.4.2 below.

Figure 3.2 Participations by low-skilled people (ISCED 1 and 2) in ESF (2007-2010) as a percentage of all participations, by Member State



Source: SFC data 2007-2010

As the data also illustrates, as with the young people target group there appears to be a close correlation between the low skilled as a proportion of overall ESF participations in general (38%), and estimates of this group's percentage share of education and LLL activity (also 38%) for the current period.

Again, similar to the young people target group, the available data on the current period indicates a notable share of ESF supported LLL activity helping the low skilled group. As per the calculation made in section 3.2.1, if we take 42% as an estimate of ESF *LLL participations* as a proportion of total ESF participations (translating to around 14.4 million participations in the 2007-2010 period), on the basis of the 38% low skilled participation rate quoted we can estimate that over the first four years of the current programme around 5.5 million participations have occurred amongst the low skilled group.

As with the caveats presented in respect of the data on young people, it is important to note that this calculation can only offer a broad estimate of the scale of reach in the current programming period. However, when allied to the close correlation between low skilled participation in ESF in general and the level of participation in LLL-specific activity, it does suggest notable and broadly effective 'reach' on the part of that provision to the low skilled group.

Beyond the SFC data discussed above, the development of the Member State case studies revealed relatively little additional or reliable quantitative data relating to the low skilled target group. In particular there is little additional evidence relating specifically to LLL type activity. However, it is worth noting that both SFC data and Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs) provide some indication of the *scale* of reach in terms of overall numbers participating in ESF. As with the young people target group, in some instances such levels of participation are considerable. In Poland, for example, the implementation report issued at the end of 2010 shows that there have been 1.2 million low-skilled (ISCED 0-2) participations to date. In Spain over just under 3 million participations by those with low skills were recorded to the end of 2010, while in Italy the equivalent figure is just under 1 million.⁹⁴

3.3.2 Factors relating to reach

1. *The influence of national and regional policy*

As outlined above whilst the engagement of the low skilled workers group forms a significant proportion of overall ESF participations, the degree of reach varies notably between Member States. Similar to young people the influence of national policy and related contextual factors such as existing skill levels evident in different country populations, form very significant factors in terms of influencing the reach of ESF LLL activity.

In Sweden national policy since the late 1980s has increasingly emphasised the role of LLL in creating growth and employment, placing less emphasis on the value of 'learning for the sake of learning' and broader societal benefits. Reflecting this, the OP supports skills development for employed people in Priority Axis 1, without placing any particular emphasis on supporting low-skilled people or on creating learning pathways. It must be said, however, that this is in the context of high levels of educational attainment and low drop-out from mainstream education. Indeed 99% of young people start upper secondary education and 41% continue to higher education, as well as there being a long tradition of free adult education provision. It might be argued therefore that the wider national context of Sweden means that ESF is not required to target large numbers of low-skilled people, since overall skill levels are high compared to the EU average. Likewise the necessity of creating learning pathways through ESF might be

⁹⁴ Source: SFC data

lessened, since these exist within the mainstream system. The comparatively low proportion of low-skilled people participating in Sweden illustrated in Figure 3.2 in the previous sub-section is reflective of this.

In the UK early school-leaving is problematic and weaknesses in IVET systems mean that much LLL consists of training within companies. The influence of the national context and of national policy is very clearly reflected in the targeting of low-skilled people in the England and Gibraltar OP. Most notably, Priority Axis 2 (developing a skilled and adaptable workforce) prioritises support for the low-skilled. The target is to serve 776,000 people without Level 3 qualifications (92% of all participants in this Priority Axis)⁹⁵. Priority Axis 1, through focusing on the inactive and unemployed populations in general, likewise significantly targets those with low skill levels on the basis of the assumption that many individuals in this group will be lower skilled. In light of this the proportion of low skilled participants in ESF provision overall might be expected to be higher than the 25% detailed in Figure 3.2 (based on 2007-2010 SFC data). Stakeholder interviews indicate that this seemingly low figure may reflect under-reporting of the numbers with low skills amongst those engaged. This was seen as relating to the way data is captured and management information processed, with those having low skills not always being counted if they fit into one of the other ESF 'target groups'.

As we have noted, the Austrian and Netherlands case study countries feature low unemployment and highly structured and institutionalised systems. These systems focus more on developing a high level of competence for the existing labour force, rather than using LLL as a means of addressing the low employability of disadvantaged groups. Reflecting this, the Netherlands OP prioritises formal education and (to a lesser extent) the validation of informal and non-formal training for low-skilled employees in Priority Axis 3.1 (Improving the labour market position of employees with low skills levels). The low-skilled are not explicitly referred to as a target group in the national Austrian OP. They are indirectly targeted, however, through measures focusing on second chance education for adults to repeat school certificates, training in basic skills, and the development of 'softer' life skills. While both the Netherlands and Austria show significant participation by the low skilled in terms of numbers of individuals engaged, as the previous sub-section section shows the proportion of low skilled individuals participating is below the average across Member States (see Figure 3.2). As with the UK and Sweden, comparatively higher proportions of the overall population with above Level 2 qualifications is a likely explanatory factor here, as is the only partial focus of the OPs on the low skilled.

Both Spain and Italy feature weaknesses in their education and training systems which result in high rates of early school-leaving and low rates of participation in adult education. In Spain, while most of the regional OPs in the current programming period have one or more Priority Axes oriented around education, training and LLL, only 4 of the 19 regional OPs appear to explicitly prioritise and target the low skilled. In Italy, whilst the two case study OPs have not explicitly targeted low-skilled people, the refocusing of ESF on newly-unemployed people has led to more low-skilled people being served than might otherwise have been the case. Stakeholders report this as being due to the prevalence of those with low skills becoming unemployed in the OPs examined. In both instances, however, despite the lack of explicit prioritisation, significant proportions of lower skilled people have been supported by ESF. Such a scenario suggests that the significant overall populations with lower skills, and their concentration in unemployed groups, are factors influencing relatively high participation by the lower skilled in ESF. It also

⁹⁵ More specifically, the targets are 337,000 (41%) without basic skills, 338,000 (41%) without level 2 qualifications and 101,000 (12%) with level 2 but without level 3 qualifications.

appears that there is an implicit assumption that many of those engaged will have lower skills, irrespective of whether they are explicitly mentioned as target groups in OPs. This factor is examined further below in respect of prioritisation and targeting.

A similar scenario is evident in respect of Poland and Lithuania where, as noted, the development of LLL is also in its early stages. For example, the Polish OP assumes that a large proportion of unemployed people are also low skilled. It therefore provides broader active labour market policy support (which may include short term training) for the unemployed, rather than instituting more thorough-going or pathway-based LLL activity. Similarly, the Lithuanian OP does not explicitly target low-skilled people. However, it also provides vocational training and non-formal education for people that are unemployed, or at risk of unemployment, within the context of broader active labour market initiatives. In both countries, the OPs give limited explicit emphasis on raising the skill levels of low-skilled people in work. Nonetheless, as the empirical data examined above shows, in the Polish case well over a third of ESF participants possess only lower level skills (17% in the case of Lithuania).

2. The impact of prioritisation and targeting

Relative to young people, there is more variation in the degree to which the low-skilled are stated as explicit target groups for LLL support across OPs in the case study countries. This is illustrated by the examples in Table 3.2 below. In some instances, the low skilled are explicitly identified as a target group requiring LLL support. In many cases, however, the degree of prioritisation of this group is either more limited or less explicit. While prioritising the low skilled as a group to receive ESF support in general appears relatively common, the degree to which this relates specifically to LLL is also often unclear. In much of the OP documentation reviewed, the support to be provided to the low skilled as a result of their prioritisation is likewise not well-defined.

Table 3.2: Examples of targeting of low-skilled workers (from the case study OPs)

OP/Priority Axis	Aim/activity related to LLL for low-skilled people	Target group
Catalonia Priority Axis 1.3:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the insertion into the labour market of people who have dropped-out of compulsory secondary education; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Male participants: 6,300 Female participants: 4,000
England and Gibraltar Priority Axis 2: Develop a skilled and adaptable workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reducing the number of workers without basic skills Increasing the number of workers qualified to level 2 and, where justified, to level 3; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants with basic skills needs Participants without level 2 qualifications Participants with level 2 but without level 3 qualifications
Lithuania Priority Axis 1: Quality Employment and Social Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve adaptability of workers and enterprises to the needs of labour market; Promote employment and participation in the labour market; and Enhance social inclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No specific targeting of low-skilled people by the OP
Netherlands Priority Axis 3: Promoting adaptability and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Projects focused on improving the labour market position of low- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low-skilled workers Workers without a starting qualification

investing in human capital	skilled workers or workers without a starting qualification	
Sweden Priority Axis 1: Skills supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide employed women and men with the skills needed in the labour market. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No specific targeting of low-skilled people by the OP

Source: OP Documentation from case study countries

As with young people, it is clear that LLL activity frequently forms a large part of ESF support targeted at low-skilled people, either explicitly or implicitly – for example, through support for groups (such as unemployed people) that are likely to be low-skilled. Again, there are several different approaches to prioritisation that have proved successful in attracting the low skilled to ESF-funded LLL provision, including the following:

Firstly, OPs or Priority Axes which explicitly target LLL-type activity at those with low skill levels. For example, the Austrian OP focuses specifically on 'people with low qualifications' and specifies access to qualifications and LLL as a key measure. Priority Axis 3 in the current Netherlands OP focuses on investment in LLL activity to improve the labour market position of low skilled workers.

Second, through broader support intended to promote full employment and social inclusion (given that low-skilled people are likely constitute a large proportion of those requiring such support). In some cases, OPs have provided LLL to disadvantaged groups in general (notably unemployed and inactive people), rather than explicitly targeting low-skilled people. Indeed, in the context of an economic downturn there appears to be greater focus on engaging and reaching disadvantaged groups from the perspective of enhancing their employability, rather than supporting them on a longer-term path towards employment through LLL provision. For example, as noted, whilst most Spanish regional OP Priority Axes include significant provision related to education, training and LLL, only four explicitly target and prioritise the low-skilled.

Third, programmes which target the low skilled explicitly at the level of the overall OP but where provision within Priority Axes itself is targeted more generally at a range of groups that may or may not include the low skilled. For example, the England and Gibraltar OP prioritises the low skilled within the programme, and references the group in Priority Axes, but develops support and activities that focus more widely than on the low skilled alone and encompass all unemployed or inactive target groups. As with the previous approach, it appears that such approaches are successful in engaging those with low skills irrespective of their not necessarily being targeted through the development of specific 'low skills' provision.

Finally, there is evidence that the ESF delivery system has an effect on the extent to which low-skilled people are reached. For example, the 3rd Evaluation of ESF Co-financing within the 2000-2006 programme in England provides evidence that the approach taken to implementation (notably the use of co-financing mechanisms) was successful in targeting hard-to-reach groups, such as those with basic skills needs.⁹⁶ Other case studies highlight the importance of effective partnership in developing a supporting infrastructure for targeting and reaching the low-skilled. Specific examples included the use of

⁹⁶ *Third Evaluation of ESF Co-financing in England*, DWP Research Report No. 359, 2006

social partners such as trade unions to manage and lead ESF provision, as is the case in Sweden,⁹⁷ and the way in which such organisations could draw on existing links with firms and training providers to develop an effective delivery infrastructure. In these instances, it is not so much the explicit targeting of low-skilled people that has been effective, but the design of delivery systems that has enabled them to be prioritised and thus also reached.

When discussing the reach of ESF (LLL) activities to the low-skilled, the significant overall level of participation evident indicates that ESF is likely to effectively reach those with low skills despite (or irrespective of) variations in prioritisation or targeting. This is not to suggest that particular approaches or activities developed for the low skilled are irrelevant in supporting effective engagement and positive outcomes for individuals (examples of specific activities in this context are discussed in the following section). However, the nature of the target groups ESF tends to focus on (including the unemployed and others facing labour market disadvantage) means that the low skilled form a notable proportion of those engaged overall. While the level of reach varies between Member States according to policy drivers, contextual factors and levels of prioritisation, taken at the level of the overall programme ESF provision is clearly engaging significant numbers of those with low skills.

3.4 The reach of ESF LLL support to older workers

3.4.1 Extent of reach to older workers

The data that is available indicates that the reach of specifically LLL activity is limited in respect of older workers and especially in comparison to the other target groups considered. As the ex-post evaluation of the ESF 2000-2006 notes, while 17% of the EU25 working age population were aged 55-64, 7% of ESF participants in lifelong learning or ICT measures were over 55 years of age in the period covered by the analysis.⁹⁸ The same report also details how project managers agreed that the elderly are underrepresented in ESF measures targeting lifelong learning and the information society.⁹⁹ In a separate analysis, the Commission's *The European Social Fund: Education and Lifelong Learning* background report similarly suggests that in the 2000-2006 and current programming period the proportion of older workers participating in LLL activities was low at 4%.¹⁰⁰ Data from the same report shows that participations in education and LLL activity for this period totalled 32.88 million, suggesting that older worker participations for the period were around 1.32 million. As noted previously, the limitations in this data are acknowledged in the report in question and so should be treated as indicative only.

When data relating to the participation of older workers in the current ESF programme in general (not specific to LLL) is considered, as Figure 3.3 below shows it is immediately apparent that the level of participation for older workers is lower than in respect of the other two target groups examined. Just under 5% of participants in ESF amongst Member States overall are drawn from the 55-64 age group

⁹⁷ Such projects supporting the lower skilled include *KSY Mellersta Norrland* and *KY Hoga Kusten* which were led by a trade union IF Metall engaging Small and Medium Enterprises in skills development activities.

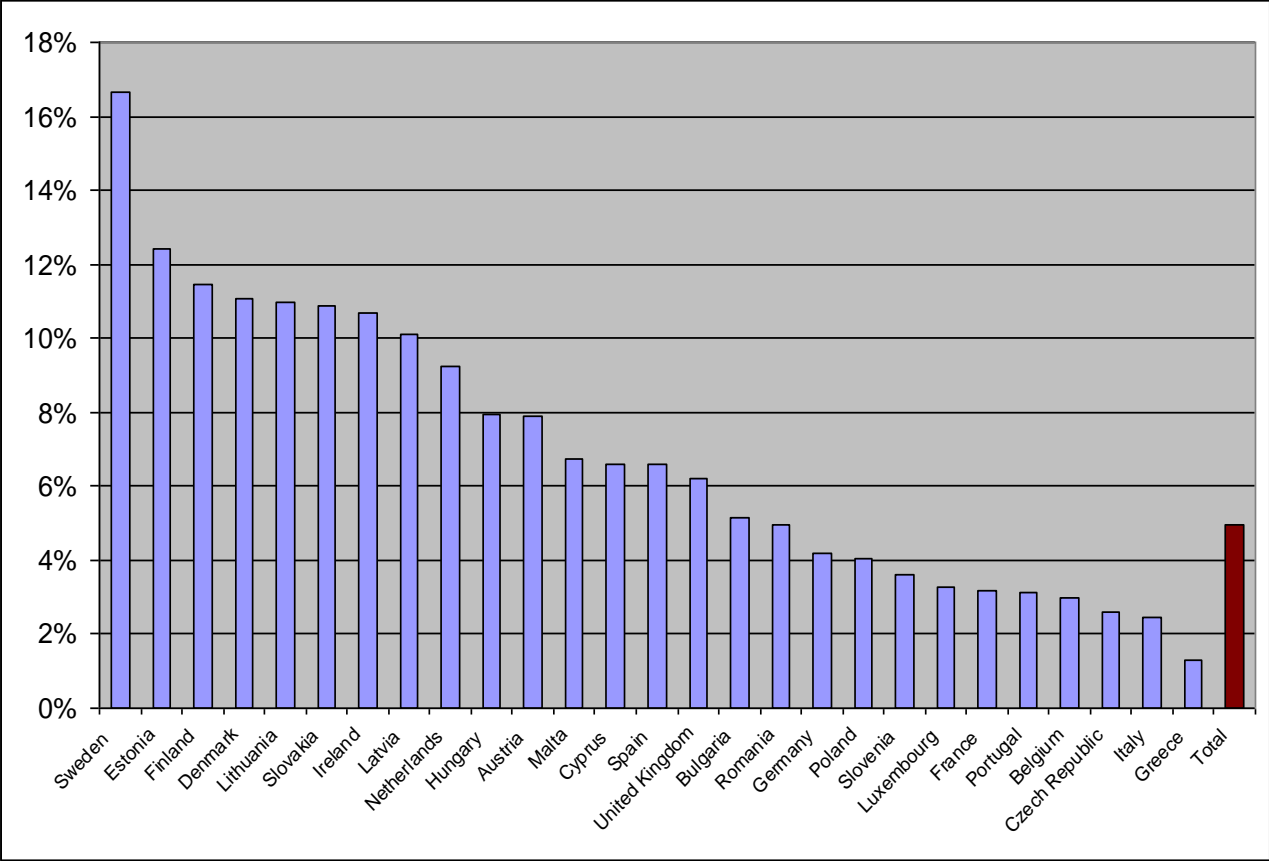
⁹⁸ *The Ex Post Evaluation of the ESF (2000-2006) – Final Report* (2010) LSE Enterprise Ltd

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.100

¹⁰⁰ European Commission (2010), *The European Social Fund: Education and Lifelong Learning*, Background Report, p.32

according to SFC data for the 2007-2010. Participation is particularly low in the Czech Republic, Italy and Greece. Conversely, Sweden, Estonia and Finland show the highest levels of participations amongst the older worker group. As with the previous target groups examined, explanatory factors for such variation are covered in the sub-section below.

Figure 3.3 Participations by older people (55-64 years) in ESF (2007-2010) as a percentage of all participations, by Member State



Source: SFC data 2007-2010

As per the calculation made in section 3.2.1, if we take 42% as an estimate of ESF LLL participations as a proportion of total ESF participations (translating to around 14.4 million participations between 2007-2010), on the basis of the 4% older worker participation rate quoted we can estimate that over the first four years of the current programme around 576,000 participations have occurred amongst the older worker group.

The influence of statutory retirement ages in different Member States as part of national policy does not appear to be a significant factor in the differential participation rates across countries illustrated in Figure 3.3. However, there is some evidence of a weak correlation between actual average exit ages from the labour force and levels of older worker participation. Member States with high levels of participation as illustrated in Figure 3.3 tend to be those with average labour market exit ages above the EU27 average. Based on 2008 data this is the case for Sweden, Estonia, Finland and Denmark for example.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ European Commission (2010) *GREEN PAPER towards adequate, sustainable and safe European pension systems*, see table on p.30

The picture is more varied for countries with the lowest levels of older worker participation. Using the same data, whilst Greece, Portugal and Belgium have average exit rates or higher than the EU27 average, the Czech Republic, Italy and France are lower. It should also be noted that the variation in exit ages is relatively small, with average exit ages in most Member States being between 61 and 63. It would be problematic therefore to draw any strong conclusions as to retirement ages being a key influencing factor on participation levels. In addition, the issue of retirement ages having an influence on reach did not emerge as a theme in the stakeholder consultations undertaken as part of the case studies.

While the data reported above suggests a low level of 'reach' for LLL activities in respect of older workers, this finding needs to be balanced against the fact that participations for this age group in ESF as a whole are similar to the figures for LLL specific activity. Whilst older workers may be under-represented in terms of education, training and LLL relative to other target groups, the same can be said for their participation in ESF provision in general. In other words it is more accurate to suggest that levels of older worker participation in ESF in general are low, rather than simply older workers have a low participation rate in ESF LLL activity. This is clear if we consider that the 55-64 age group as a proportion of the working age population across the EU27 was 17.5% in 2008.¹⁰² Relative to the population in general, therefore, older workers are under-represented in terms of receiving ESF support.

3.4.2 Factors relating to reach

In light of the under-representation of older workers in ESF revealed above (given their share of the workforce), this sub-section explores the various factors that have caused this under-representation.

1. The influence of national and regional policy

As with the other two target groups, national policy is a key influencing factor. In Sweden, the strong LLL culture and long tradition of free adult education provision means that rates of LLL participation amongst those aged 55-64 years consistently exceed the EU average. For example, the rate in 2009 was 16.6%.¹⁰³ Participation in training at work among older workers appears to be largely in line with their share of employment amongst the working age population. Older workers account for some 18% of those participating in training whilst at work, and nearly 19% of those of working age in employment.¹⁰⁴ At the same time, Sweden also has the highest level of employment among older workers in the EU. This positive national context suggests that targeting of older workers at the level of the OP would not necessarily be seen as a high priority, and indeed the OP does not include them as an explicit target group. Nonetheless, as of March 2011 older workers have accounted for 19.3% of participants in Priority Axis 1,¹⁰⁵ which aims to provide employed women and men with the skills needed in the labour market. This demonstrates that where a tradition of LLL and in-work training exists, the use of ESF to support LLL

¹⁰² Source: Eurostat. Figure quoted is for 2008 to function as a comparator with the SFC 2007-2009 data.

¹⁰³ EUROSTAT – Labour Force Survey; Life-long learning here refers to persons aged 25 to 64 who stated that they received education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey (numerator). The denominator consists of the total population of the same age group, excluding those who did not answer to the question 'participation to education and training'. The information collected relates to all education or training whether or not relevant to the respondent's current or possible future job.

¹⁰⁴ Statistics Sweden – *Yearbook of Education Statistics 2011* and Labour Force Survey

¹⁰⁵ Source: *Socialfonden i siffror 2011 – projektens deltagare och nytta*, 2011, Swedish ESF Council

in the context of employed individuals is likely by definition to be effective in terms of its reach. The lower proportional participation of older workers in Priority Axis 2 (6.6%)¹⁰⁶, mainly focused on the unemployed, is similarly likely to reflect the low levels of unemployment found amongst this age group. Again, therefore, contextual factors emerge as a key influence on levels of reach.

In the UK, the policy focus in recent years has been on improving compulsory and post-compulsory education to raise skill levels. The assumption has been that this will consequently enhance economic development, productivity and competitiveness. Within this context, public funding of LLL is predominantly invested in those aged below 25 years rather than on those aged over 50 years, whether within or outside the labour market.¹⁰⁷ However, there is also a growing policy focus on older workers in the context of demographic change. The England and Gibraltar OP thus places a notable emphasis on older workers, and all relevant Priority Axes include targets for the participation of older workers as a percentage of all participants. Indeed, these targets far exceed the EU average for the participation of older workers (albeit covering a slightly wider age group - i.e. those aged over 50 years rather than 55-64 years). Most notably, the target for Priority Axis 2 (Developing a skilled and adaptable workforce) is that 20% of participants will be aged 50 years or over. Moreover, 2009 AIR data confirms that the current programme is broadly on target to ensure that 18% of participants over the programme lifetime are from the older workers group.¹⁰⁸ However, it should be noted that LLL provision within Priority Axis 2 and the programme as a whole (for participants of all ages) mostly reflects the broader national policy priority of providing training for work and skills acquisition. There is much less focus on developing learning pathways for individuals.

In Austria national policy is strongly oriented towards training to high initial levels of competence, and its adult learning system is not as developed as in other countries. As a consequence, the retraining of older workers has traditionally been a lower priority than, for example, training provided through the apprenticeship system. This is reflected in the implementation of the national OP. While older workers feature as an explicit target group, stakeholders have reported that far greater emphasis has been placed on reaching young people and low-skilled people. Accepting this, available SFC data does show that older worker participation in ESF is above the EU average at 8% (see Figure 3.3 above). This again suggests that in many instances some level of prioritisation is likely to enhance reach to the older workers target group, as is the case for the other groups examined.

In the Netherlands, learning beyond the formal education system is generally considered to be the responsibility of employees and employers themselves. LLL is mostly provided by the sector-based 140 Opleiden en Ontwikkelen Fonds (Training and Development Funds). These funds are financed by mandatory contributions from employers, as defined in collective labour agreements covering 85% of employees. The funds typically target employees on a sectoral basis, with little if any specific provision for older workers as a cross-sectoral group. The Netherlands OP reflects this broader national context. Older people are explicitly listed as a target group in Priority Axis 1, which serves unemployed people. Priority Axis 3, the main Priority Axis concerned with skills development for employees with low skills, has no specific focus on those aged over 55 years.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ The England and Gibraltar OP and UK policy generally defines older workers as those aged 50-64 years.

¹⁰⁸ 2007-2013 England and Gibraltar OP: 2009 AIR, p. 70.

The very high rates of early school-leaving and the over-supply of new graduates in both Spain and Italy has meant that the focus of national policy has mostly been on addressing systemic weaknesses in education and training systems. For example, in Spain, the National Reform Programme 2011 highlights three policy priorities, none of which particularly relate to older workers (the priorities are reducing early school-leaving, increasing the number of young people who continue studying beyond compulsory education, and promoting vocational education and training for young people entering the labour market). As a result, the provision of LLL for older workers in Italy and Spain has not been a priority for policymakers. Rates of participation in LLL have remained low at, for example, just 1.7% in Italy amongst those aged 55-64years.¹⁰⁹

The ESF programmes in Italy have generally not specifically targeted older workers. In Italy, older workers are not clearly identifiable as a target group across the different Priority Axes, and their participation has been very low – 2% of all participants across the Italian OPs.¹¹⁰ Some of the regional Spanish OPs have given more emphasis to older workers, with eight mentioning older workers as a target group and including actions to serve them. As a result, the proportion of ESF participants which are older workers has been, at around 7%. However, this is still lower than in many other EU countries, and represents only around a third of the share of this age group within the EU working age population as a whole (17.5% as detailed above).

In Poland and Lithuania the development of LLL is in its early stages, and the education system often lacks flexibility and capacity to respond to diverse learning needs such as those of older workers. At the same time, it must be noted that in Poland national policy recognises the very significant challenge represented by the low activity rate of those aged 55-64 years (which was only 34.5% in 2010 against the EU average of 49%). For example, the 2005 Strategy for Education Development lists older workers as one of its priority groups for LLL as a means of labour market integration. The Polish OP reflects this national policy priority and highlights the need to reactivate older workers. In particular the focus is on older workers who have been encouraged into early retirement by passive labour market policies, as well as those that lack qualifications relevant to current labour market needs. A range of LLL provision is therefore targeted at older workers across several Priority Axes. Despite this, SFC data illustrates that older worker participation as a proportion of overall participations remains low at 4%.¹¹¹ This may reflect that, while older workers are recognised and prioritised, this has yet to translate into effective engagement for this group. In turn this demonstrates that in some instances prioritisation alone may not be sufficient to ensure effective reach.

In Lithuania, addressing the lack of flexibility in the education system is seen as a national policy priority. This is reflected in the focus of much of the OP on reform of the education system, rather than specifically addressing the low participation of older workers. Moreover, and in contrast to Poland, the activity rate amongst those aged 55-64 years in Lithuania at 57.6% in 2010 far exceeds the EU average (49.1%). Reflecting this, the OP does not list older workers as an explicit target group under any Priority Axis, though notably there are instances of projects that specifically support them. Across the OP, most LLL provision for older workers has been in the form of vocational training and non-formal education in the context of general services of employment assistance. In measures directly identifiable as involving LLL

¹⁰⁹ Source: Eurostat – Labour Force Survey (2010)

¹¹⁰ Source: SFC data (2010)

¹¹¹ Source: SFC data, 2007-2009.

activity older workers form around 10% of all participants according to national level management information, while as Figure 3.3 above (based on 2007-2010 SFC data) shows, overall participation in ESF is high for this target group at 11%. This again may suggest that while groups such as older workers may not be prioritised as an actual target group to any great extent, they can nonetheless be effectively reached.

2. The impact of prioritisation and targeting

In contrast to the previous two target groups, the evidence indicates that older workers are under-represented from the perspective of LLL activity provided through ESF. In part this relates to a relative lack of prioritisation or targeting of this group, though as noted above this varies significantly between OPs. Moreover, as the discussion in the previous sub-section illustrates, the picture regarding the influence of prioritisation on levels of reach is often complex. What is clear is that in many instances prioritisation and targeting for older workers is limited. In the case of Italy in particular, older workers are targeted by a limited number of measures (15 out of 272). Stakeholder interviews likewise suggested that targeting specifically LLL provision at this group is not considered a priority. In such instances the low level of older worker participation is unsurprising.

This limited targeting with respect to LLL across the case study countries should not be taken to suggest that older people are not an important target group for ESF in all instances. For example, older workers are stated as an explicit target group for Austria, the Netherlands and the UK on the basis of the importance of responding to demographic change, and supporting older workers as a key part of a competitive workforce. As noted above, this can result in ESF reaching the older worker group to a greater extent than is the average across the EU, though such levels of reach still tend to be low compared to older workers' overall share of the EU working age population.

Having noted these variations, it appears that even where older workers are prioritised or targeted for support involving LLL activity, this is generally to a lesser degree than is the case for young people and the low-skilled. As noted above, moreover, some degree of prioritisation or what might be termed 'high level' targeting does not necessarily translate into specific projects or activities aimed at older workers at the level of delivery. An interesting example here is the case of Austria, where the OP for employment has a specific focus on older workers through its 'Active Ageing' strategic principle. Within this access to qualifications and advice around career stabilisation and improvement are specified as activities. However, even in this instance, stakeholders gave varying views on the degree to which older workers have been prioritised in practice by LLL support, along with the effectiveness of such provision in meeting the needs of this group.

It follows that as older workers are generally listed below young people and low skilled workers as priority groups they are generally given less prioritisation at all levels of the delivery system. In cases such as Poland, whilst older workers are listed as a target group, the OP in fact includes no specific formal measures to provide LLL dedicated to their needs. Similarly, in the UK, while older workers are prioritised as a main target group at the OP level, this does not necessarily translate into specific activities being targeted at them. Thus, for example, in the England and Gibraltar programme there is very limited provision that is targeted specifically at older workers. Rather, the majority of ESF projects engage older workers as one of a range of target groups for whom support needs are then assessed on an individual basis, rather than on the basis of their being part of a particular target group.

This impression of limited or unclear prioritisation of older workers, and the low levels of reach that appear to result, may reflect a common finding in the literature that LLL activity has historically not been prioritised for this group.¹¹² Previous discussions of older people and LLL activity suggest that such activity has 'traditionally' not been targeted at older workers, and that participation rates in LLL activities are also lower amongst this group.¹¹³ Other research on the ESF posits that disadvantaged or older people do not participate in training because employers and older people themselves do not trust in the return on the investment.¹¹⁴ It is thus perhaps unsurprising that the reach of ESF LLL activity to older workers appears less in terms of overall volume, and proportionally, relative to other target groups.

Given the limited explicit targeting of older workers by OPs, this group has perhaps more often been served by LLL provision that is targeted at the workforce or at unemployed people in general. For example, in Sweden older workers are not explicitly targeted by the OP but nonetheless have engaged in LLL activity along with other target groups. Indeed, under measures relevant to skills development and LLL activity, levels of participation in ESF for older workers in Sweden are relatively high compared to the other cases considered (older workers make up 19% of participants under the Swedish Priority Axis 1 which targets skills development for employed workers for example). In the Swedish case, this scenario of older workers being reached but not explicitly targeted is seen as resulting from the focus of provision on certain sectors and parts of industry where older workers are well represented in general. Again this serves to illustrate that, as with low-skilled people, ESF LLL activity often reaches particular groups such as older workers irrespective of targeting, with other factors such as their relative prevalence in the overall population being addressed by ESF also being relevant.

3.5 Conclusions

On the basis of the preceding analysis it is possible to highlight some key findings relating to reach. These also relate specifically to the focus of EQ2 concerning the extent to which the three evaluation target groups have been reached by ESF supported LLL activities. The findings can be summarised as follows:

- There is a correlation between the extent of engagement amongst the three target groups in ESF provision in general and LLL provision in particular. However, relative to the overall EU27 population young people are proportionally over-represented in ESF and ESF LLL activity, and conversely older workers are proportionally under-represented.
- The level of reach of ESF in relation to young people and the low skilled appears greater than is the case for older workers. There is at least a partial correlation explaining this between the degree to which young people are specifically prioritised in OPs, and engaged through targeted activity, relative to older workers. The latter group are generally targeted less and have less specific activity developed for them.
- The situation concerning reach in respect of the low skilled in particular is more complex. While this group is prioritised and targeted to some degree, there are notable variations in the extent of this.

¹¹² See, for example, CEDEFOP, *Working and Ageing: Emerging Theories and Empirical Perspectives*, 2010

¹¹³ CEDEFOP (2010), *Working and Ageing: Emerging Theories and Empirical Perspectives*,

¹¹⁴ European Commission (2010) *Study on the Return of ESF investment in Human Capital*, p.116

However, the scale of reach to this group is considerable, which could suggest that the low skilled are being engaged in many instances despite not being specifically targeted. This may relate to the fact that the low skilled are proportionally over-represented amongst the unemployed and inactive populations that much ESF provision targets. Such contextual factors are also important in explaining levels of reach to young people and older workers in many instances.

- Evidence suggests that the nature of the ESF infrastructure, delivery systems and mechanisms within Member States can have a bearing on effective targeting for each of the evaluation target groups. This relates both to the development of effective delivery partnerships to support ESF implementation, and to systems and structures in place (such as co-financing) which facilitate effective targeting and development of provision suited to particular target groups.

4.0 The Impact of ESF on the Target Groups

4.1 Introduction

This section sets out the impact of ESF on the participants from the three target groups, looking at how young jobseekers, low skilled and older workers have benefited from ESF supported provision. Where possible we have focused for the low skilled on those who are in employment or actively seeking work. It is not always possible to distinguish this group from those who are low skilled but somewhat distant from the labour market, both from data and reports, but also on the ground LLL provision.

It deals with the impact of ESF on the three groups individually and also considers whether and how provision has been designed and 'shaped' to consider the needs of the groups. It then goes on to present the 'critical success factors' in terms of stimulating an increased emphasis on a LLL approach in ESF more broadly, factors of success in the design and delivery of ESF projects that support the three groups as well as recommending specific intervention types that are important to consider for ESF programmes that wish to specifically support the three target groups.

The findings of this section have been drawn from both primary and secondary research. Although both sources provide data and evidence on the positive effects and benefits of ESF, there is a relatively limited amount of hard evidence on the impact of the fund in the longer term. Where impact information is available, there is less data specific to the three target groups which this study is interested in. Where projects have undertaken surveys of participants they often tend not to analyse nor present whether people gaining a job or qualification, their age or whether they were particularly low skilled. This evidence gap is particularly true for older workers where there are overlaps with the low skilled and as a result specific impact data for this target group has been difficult to identify. Nevertheless, the cohort and participants surveys of the UK and Poland were often seen as being strong sources of evidence. This explains why a relatively large number of quantitative evidence is drawn from these two case studies.

4.2 Young Jobseekers

4.2.1 Designing and 'shaping' of provision to support young jobseekers

The design of provision for young people and how this is shaped can be considered at two main levels: firstly, at a higher level in terms of the broad guidance given in OP and related documentation which then translates into specifications that guide the development of provision for particular target groups; and, secondly, at the more detailed level of project delivery in terms of how particular activities themselves are shaped when being delivered 'on the ground'. In considering the design and shaping of provision the section that follows addresses the second part of EQ2 *'is it possible to identify activities that are more successful in reaching the target group than others?'* This is repeated for low skills and older workers in later sections of this section. Importantly, these sections consider success factors that support effective practice in reaching the target groups, rather than identifying specific types of activities that work better than others.

In terms of the broad design of provision, the evidence shows that while there is variation in the nature of LLL activity aimed at young people there are also some common aspects and themes to the design of approaches taken. Such themes include:

- a focus on enhancing access to and engagement with learning targeted at young people in general and disadvantaged groups in particular;
- use of vocational training often tied to particular economic sectors to offer pathways to employment including, for example, access to apprenticeships and work placements as part of this;
- use of coaching, mentoring and other forms of guidance and support as part of overall LLL provision for young people;
- forms of action planning which lay the basis for documenting progress in learning – i.e. recording formal achievements but also looking to capture and validate informal learning; and,
- a focus on motivating young people and demonstrating the value of learning, often from the perspective of offering learning opportunities to those who have become disaffected as a result of earlier experiences at school.

The evidence gathered and reviewed also illustrates how some of the specific LLL activities delivered through ESF LLL provision are being 'shaped' or tailored to the specific needs of the young jobseekers target group at the level of project delivery. In respect of NEET provision in the England and Gibraltar OP, for example, activities such as 'outdoor pursuits' including sailing and rock climbing have been used to re-engage disaffected young people, and demonstrate that learning can be undertaken in ways different from standard and more formal education and training. In Austria, the Spacelab project provided support to young people in very informal settings where young people could drop in and see project staff rather than having to make (and often miss) a meeting. This was seen as important by stakeholder interviewees involved in delivering such projects in that, through such activities, individuals are not only re-engaged but often particular personal issues likely to represent barriers to engaging in learning and employment are revealed which can then be addressed. Given the nature of these barriers, the need to work with young people at a suitable pace and to respect them as individuals was also noted, so as to maintain their engagement and avoid the disaffection that they may have felt in earlier, more formal, learning settings.

Building on this, individual action planning has been used to identify issues and barriers along with developing potential progression routes to which young people can be steered once their initial barriers to engagement are addressed. In such a way the provision aimed at 'harder to reach' or 'harder to engage' elements within the young people target group is being tailored to offer a route to re-engage individuals in learning, and effectively act as a pre-vocational or pre-formal learning mechanism. Particular success factors cited in terms of the design of such provision thus included:

- Developing activities specifically designed to be engaging and of interest to young people
- Looking to address (often non-learning related) barriers to engagement in education and training at a pace suited to those disengaged from, or previously disaffected by, mainstream provision
- Providing personalised and tailored packages of support with clear pathways to further training and employment support options.

The activity undertaken from the perspective of supporting young people in the UK context also includes LLL related developments that are intended to develop new and more suitable ways of engaging and targeting this group. Under Priority 3 'Access to Lifelong Learning' provision in the Lowlands and Uplands

OP, for example, a focus of the projects commissioned has been the design of LLL materials and activities themselves to support the delivery of education and training to young jobseekers. For stakeholders involved in such projects, the view is that ESF has been important here in facilitating the design of particular lesson/training plans, and new approaches to the assessment of learning through practical activities including games based learning. Initial responses of the young jobseekers exposed to the materials and approaches developed are reported as having been very positive.

Other evidence relating to success factors emerging from the case studies illustrates the potential importance of intensive support to retain the engagement of young jobseekers, and ongoing assistance to help address issues beyond those relating to learning itself. This emerges as particularly significant for young people who have become disengaged from, or disenchanted with, learning. As was cited by interviewees in the Dutch context, for example, lack of effective support systems, including in home environments, and limited confidence and motivation require more attention, encouragement and steering on the part of those delivering activities than might be the case with less disengaged learners. Delivery in the context of small groups was also noted as significant from this perspective.

4.2.2 Impacts on young jobseekers

ESF has been used extensively across Europe to support young people and as the previous section states, out of the three groups this study is interested in, young people have been a particular focus of ESF funded LLL provision. In overall terms the desk research and case study work shows that ESF has been particularly important in relation to supporting unemployed young people as opposed to helping those under 25 who are already in work. In fact, there is relatively little evidence of ESF provision being specifically focused on helping young people presently in work who are either in low paid, poor quality or at risk jobs. Almost all stakeholders explained the focus on young people who are out (rather than in) work by pointing to the high unemployment figures found in their Member States for those aged under 25 years. With high levels of youth unemployment across the focus on the immediate need of getting them into work seems to be affecting how ESF is being used for this group. However, it is interesting to note that even when youth unemployment was less of an issue (in the previous programming period where rates were approximately a third lower), stakeholders still viewed ESF as a mechanism to tackle youth unemployment as opposed to issues linked to the progression of young people already in the labour force.

Table 4.1 sets out the key impacts of ESF on young people for each of the eight case study countries. It is not intended to provide detail as these are found in the case study reports themselves but rather aims to highlight the salient issues that have been identified as part of the research.

Table 4.1 Key impacts in the case study countries - young jobseekers

	Key Impacts
Austria	<p>The main impact of ESF on young people in Austria was around helping this group progress from school to work as well as higher education to further education. While the longer term impact may be employment, many ESF measures in Austria specifically aimed at young people have targeted the harder to reach within this group and therefore measured impact in terms of motivation levels, engagement and confidence, as well as ‘pre-entry level’ or ‘pre-vocational’ softer skills among those furthest from the learning and the labour market (issues which stakeholders admitted were not always easy to measure).</p>
Italy	<p>Gaining employment was a key impact of ESF for young people in Italy – although this greatly varied across OP and region. In convergence regions 22.3% of young participants indicate that they were in employment 12 months after taking part in ESF interventions and 23% entered education. In competitiveness regions this figure rose up to 67.3% young participants entered employment and 14.9% entered education. In total it is estimated that around 120,000 young participants entered employment and around 50,000 gained a qualification in the two OPs studied as part of the work.</p> <p>In competitiveness regions ESF focused on job-oriented support and as a result was more successful in supporting people entering employment, while in convergence regions bigger impact is observed in supporting further education. It is also driven by the situation in the labour market. In the “productive” North (including most Competitiveness Regions), enterprises are leading the labour demand, whilst in the South (where most of Convergence Regions are located) this role is typically played by “education-driven” organisations such as Universities and public organisations.</p>
Lithuania	<p>A key challenge for young people identified by stakeholders was a lack of experience and lack of skills corresponding to the needs of the labour market. Work experience provided through ESF (in the form of job placements and internships) were therefore seen to provide high levels of impact in relation to helping young people gain a job.</p> <p>Helping young people find work and prepare for work (in the form of CV preparation and job search skills) was also seen as a key aspect of the impact on this group as was improved motivation and self- confidence.</p>
Netherlands	<p>The progression of young people (into work but particularly further learning) was identified as the key impact of ESF on this target group. Of the young participants who had finished the projects 35% continued into vocational education and 18% continued into a dual-learning track programme. Furthermore, approximately 30% obtained employment or became self-employed. It was noted by stakeholders that these young participants were often far removed from the labour market and that employment in the short terms was not a viable option.</p> <p>The key measurable impacts of ESF support on these groups has been:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 in 5 participants of projects supporting youth in custodial institutes remained employed 6 months after the programme • Approximately 1 in 3 youth with disabilities found employment immediately after the support
Poland	<p>The evaluation work for the ESF programme covering the <i>malopolskie voivodship</i> provides an insight on the impact of ESF interventions for young people. A particular impact has been on giving young people work experience, a point highlighted in the evaluation reports with apprenticeship and traineeship activities proving to be particularly helpful in relation to helping participants gain employment (figures</p>

	Key Impacts
	specifically for young people are not available). However, over 60% of all participants identified that their participation in the project helped them to enter employment.
Spain	<p>Stakeholders stated that young people have particularly benefited from work experience placements, either in the form of subsidised internships or traineeships. These work experience projects often gave the young people the first 'tastes' of work but also strengthened their CV to make them more attractive to local employers.</p> <p>ESF has also been used effectively in schools- particularly as a way of promoting entrepreneurship (through the development of a media pack and teaching materials). A number of training schemes for unemployed young people was also seen to impact young people greatly which was generally sector specific in areas seen as growth sectors for the local economy, particularly the renewable energy sector.</p>
Sweden	<p>A key impact on young people in Sweden have included support into employment and education and improved opportunities for gaining employment/studying (through strengthened confidence, improved cooperation between support agencies and job matching). Stakeholder interviews highlighted that ESF-LLL activities have helped to bring about structure in the lives of young people who have been outside of the labour market for a long time.</p> <p>Under the 2000-2006 programme 18% of young participants in ESF projects were supported into employment after 90 days, 55% including subsidised employment, against a target of 60%. 10% participants in employability/ entrepreneurship were supported into employment after 90 days, or 34% if subsidised employment included.</p> <p>Project specific impacts include '<i>Navigatörcentrum</i>' where 43% participants supported into employment, '<i>Nuevo</i>'; where 27% participants entered employment and 24% started studying and '<i>KomPaRe</i>' where 56% participants supported into employment or education. 92% participants surveyed felt that they had gained improved knowledge about themselves and the functioning of the labour market.</p>
United Kingdom	<p>Skills development among the young people of the England and Gibraltar OP was a particular impact of ESF in this Member State. As the 2005 beneficiary survey from the England 2000-2006 programme demonstrates, 87 per cent of 18-24 year olds felt that they had gained work related skills as a result of participating in ESF provision. The response rate to the survey regarding specific skills include practical skills related to a particular job (72%), study skills (e.g. essay, report writing, using libraries) (51%) and improved ICT skills (48%).</p> <p>Helping young people gain a qualification was another key impact of ESF in the UK. The survey of participants in the current period of England OP namely Wave 2 cohort survey for the current programme demonstrates, 69 per cent of Priority 2 participants and 68 per cent of Priority 5 participants gained a full qualification as part of their involvement in ESF. Within this, 77 per cent of 16-19 year olds and 80 per cent of 20-24 year olds gained qualifications under Priority 2, demonstrating that effects in supporting participants to gain qualifications are even more marked in respect of younger workers and serving to illustrate how ESF is being used to support progression in work through LLL activity. 55% of participants said that, since participation, they had improved their job security.</p> <p>The impact on entering employment after taking part in ESF projects is reported by surveys in England and Scotland. Often data is not aggregated by target group or not only refers to LLL activity.</p>

Source: Case study reports

4.2.3 Helping young jobseekers gain a job

The evaluation has found that there is a large variety of success rates across the various ESF programmes and projects in the EU in helping young people access work. However, the evaluation reports reviewed as part of this study seem to show that between 20-30% of young people taking part in ESF funded projects found a job after being supported¹¹⁵. Although there are many methodological reasons for not comparing success rates of ESF projects in getting young people into work (linked to levels of investment, characteristics of target groups, types of projects etc) it is still an interesting proxy to use when assessing the overall impact of the fund on this target group. The project example below shows an example of a project that has been successful in helping young people into work.

Title: Production schools, Austria

This ESF supported project targets particularly disadvantaged young people, aiming to offer "a real chance of professional and social integration" by means of "education through socially useful work" with a fairly structured daily routine. While the main principles are the same, the schools differ in their relative emphasis on social, practical, educational and vocational aspects, but all seek to increase motivation for learning and work and support young people who have dropped out of school or not found a training place. The project has sought to join together schools, vocational schools, workshops and companies. Since 2007 14 new *Produktionsschule* have opened across Austria, supported by ESF Priority Axis 3b 'Support for people remote from the labour market', adding to the 2 existing ones. The number of participants varies between 16 and 460, with an average of 55, the vast majority are 15 to 19. While 16% participate for up to 1 month, only 24% participate for longer than 6 months.

The success rate of the measure clearly varies according to the skills level of participants before they took part. "The better the qualification, the higher the chance of integration into employment. Among students who already had a qualification level higher than compulsory schooling, after participation in the *Produktionsschule*, 37% went into employment and only 26% were unemployed. Meanwhile among participants who had not completed compulsory schooling, only 10% went on to regular employment while 37% were unemployed. The difficult employment situation of young people who have not completed compulsory schooling is again evident here. However, it has been shown that with more time it is possible to make up for this disadvantage."¹¹⁶

In the year after participation, former participants show increasing success in finding regular employment, with the proportion almost doubling from 17% to 33%, while the proportion of unemployed almost halves from 29% to 15%. For those project participants with an ISCED 2 qualification or lower just 11% were unemployed three months after participation (against an average for this group of 22%) although the variances narrowed over a full year.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Drawn from evaluation reports from case study Member States.

¹¹⁶ Nadja Bergmann / Susanne Schelepa (2011) *Bestandsaufnahme der österreichischen Produktionsschulen*, L&R Sozialforschung on behalf of BMASK

¹¹⁷ Further details and charted data are included in the Austria Case Study.

There was some disagreement among those consulted on whether a success rate of generally up to 30%, in getting young people into work was high or low although generally more stated that it was good considering the target group (including those with low skills, early school leavers etc.). Given the strong inter-relationship between ESF and national provision comparators of employment rates need to be treated with caution. However, in the UK case study non-ESF programmes such as New Deal were typically achieving a 30% success rate (i.e. comparable for young NEETs). Many of those young people supported by ESF lacked qualifications, had little work experience and also suffered from personal issues linked to self confidence and self esteem - meaning it was often unrealistic to expect a large proportion of young people supported by ESF to enter work soon after being helped. In Sweden, project managers of ESF projects were realistic about the goals of their projects by saying that the participants that they support are 'no way near' the jobs market yet. First and foremost, many ESF projects were focused on helping young people deal with and overcome these initial barriers to employment entry whilst job creation was seen only as a longer term objective.

This meant that many ESF projects specifically aimed at young people were focused on progression towards employment rather than employment itself. Many of the primary objectives of projects that directly supported young people were around increased skills levels, further learning or better qualifications- issues that improved the employability of the young person but did not directly lead to finding a job in the shorter term. Many of the target output figures in terms of jobs created are also relatively low which again shows that creating jobs was often not an immediate priority for many ESF projects supporting young people.

4.2.4 Supporting young jobseekers to undertake further learning

A key impact of ESF on young people has been around helping them move from formal education (usually pre-16) to further education and learning. ESF has often been used to support young people to remain in a learning environment and stop them either becoming unemployed or helping them 'remain in the system' (i.e. avoid them not being in some form of education, employment or training). Encouraging young people to carry on learning was seen as a key impact in most of the case study research, particularly in the Netherlands, UK, Poland and Austria.

The impact of ESF on young people in terms of encouraging them to further learn was identified in particular the Ex Post Evaluation of ESF (2000-2006)¹¹⁸. This report highlights one of the key impacts of ESF was around teaching participants the benefits of learning and encouraging them to go onto further learning through showing them the positive outcomes which stem from participating in some form of learning and skills development. Although the aforementioned report does not state this was particularly true for the young persons target group, other pieces of evidence suggest this 'motivation to learn' and stimulating further learning through ESF is particularly strong among this group. The cohort survey for the England and Gibraltar OP states that 31% of participants had taken part in additional and follow on vocational training since their engagement with ESF support¹¹⁹. Although the survey does not ask participants whether they engaged in further provision because of their ESF support, it does suggest that such a link is likely given the relatively high proportion of participants who have engaged in further training post their ESF support. Perhaps even more persuasive evidence relating to the effects around motivating

¹¹⁸ *The Ex Post Evaluation of the ESF (2000-2006) –Final report*, LSE Enterprise Ltd., 2010.

¹¹⁹ *European Social Fund Cohort Study: Wave 2*, DWP Research Report 709, 2010, p.86

people to learn is available through the same survey which reveals that 73% of participants said that they were very likely or fairly likely to undertake further training in the future upon completing their ESF support¹²⁰. This motivational effect to carry on learning was particularly pronounced amongst younger people with 81% of those aged 16 to 19 saying they were 'very' or 'fairly' likely to engage in training in the future compared to an equivalent figure of 49% for the over 50 group¹²¹. Evidence from the Poland beneficiary survey¹²² underlines the impact of ESF stimulating further learning and shows that 35% of participants went on to take up further learning after the completion of their ESF project. This is an important point to consider in a study focused on LLL as it suggests ESF has had a beneficial impact around instilling a LLL 'ethos' among individuals- teaching them the benefits and virtues of a prolonged and on-going approach to learning.

At the project level the Space!ab project in Austria is a good example of how ESF projects stimulate young people to carry on learning post 16. The project example below provides further details:

Title: Space!ab, Austria

This flagship project works with young people who either have dropped out of formal and mainstream education or who are very unlikely to go onto further education or 'learning' once they have finished school. Research and evaluation work undertaken by this project states that 'welcoming access and innovative provision [for young people] are often not enough and the project pays special account of participants' motivation levels¹²³. The evaluation of the Space!ab project highlights a specific focus on getting young people motivated- using one on one and group work that is solely about promoting the need, benefits and impact (in relation to higher wages) of learning post mainstream education. These sessions (done through informal drop in session with staff through to more formal but interactive sessions) often occur before the young people receive the training sessions on, for example, ICT or engineering. The impact of this side of the project was particularly prevalent among the 16-18 year olds who were at the transition point between lower and higher education or between school and work.

The longer terms impacts of ESF stimulating more young people to learn was often expressed in terms of reducing the amount of young people becoming unemployed and in turn a saving on benefits entitlements. Although many stakeholders had little evidence on the level of actual saving created by encouraging more young people to continue with their education a handful of ESF project level evaluations have covered this issue. For example, the *Navigatorcentrum* project in Sweden estimated that for every young person supported who did not become unemployed there was a net saving of €20,000, which represented in excess of €450,000 per annum (for the project that had 43 participants)¹²⁴.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p.88

¹²¹ Ibid., p.88

¹²² *Research of outputs of indicators of the regional component of the Human Resources Operational Programme*, PAG Uniconsult, 2010

¹²³ http://erwachsenenbildung.at/aktuell/nachrichten_details.php?nid=3673

¹²⁴ *Unga som är utanför arbetsmarknaden: en socioekonomisk diskussion*, 2010, Ingvar Nilsson (Temagruppern Unga i arbetslivet)

4.2.5 Helping young jobseekers with personal 'softer' skills

Another impact of ESF on the young persons target group is around helping them with 'softer' issues linked with confidence and self esteem as a way of helping them overcome a key barrier to taking up employment support provision. Although there is little quantitative information around impact on confidence and self esteem, perceptions held by stakeholders show that a key impact of ESF has been on these more personal softer skills. Literature on the subject of ESF and its impact on young people in relation to confidence and self esteem also provide qualitative case study evidence on this subject. For instance, *ESF Interventions and Achievements for Young People*¹²⁵ describe a Hungarian ESF project for early school leavers that used motorcycle racing as a way of improving young jobseekers' motivation to learn. Empirical evidence from the 2005 beneficiary survey for the Scotland 2000-2006 Objective 3 programme similarly illustrates that impacts such as self confidence around working accrue from ESF support for the 18-24 age group, with 85% citing such improved confidence as the main 'impact' of their ESF provision¹²⁶. Importantly, this improved self confidence then eventually led onto a gaining of a qualification which can also be shown by reference to the same survey, again indicating the role ESF can play in engaging young people in LLL by way of improving employability and progression. Of those surveyed, 80% of those in the 18-24 age group gained a qualification as a result of their participation in the 2000-2006 programme¹²⁷. The project example below provides details of a Polish project that has helped young people develop softer skills and stimulated higher levels of self confidence and esteem.

Title: Training – Practice – Employment – Development”, Poland

The fourth edition of this project is being implemented from April 2011 to November 2011 by Voluntary Labour Corps. The project has a key focus on helping young unemployed people (aged between 15-24) who are in 'danger of social exclusion' and who suffer from low confidence (to learn). This project is nationwide with ESF providing 21.5 million PLN and has supported 2,750 people (split into two groups). The first group contains people aged 15-17 who are either school leavers or in danger of dropping out of schools early (1,250 participants). The second group covers people aged 18-24 that are neither studying nor working (1,500 participants). The participation in the project is free of charge with each young person receiving travel costs reimbursements and free meals.

The main long term goal of the project is to encourage more young people to become economically active with the 'end goal' being that more participants find a job (through progression onto further education and through gaining higher skills levels. A very important aspect of the project is that all participants receive professional counselling and psychological support. For the younger group these include courses on how to be less aggressive and violent, the benefits of staying on at school, sex education as well as group exercises to increase young peoples general self esteem. For older group there are individual consultations with professional counsellors as well as further group work to deal with low levels of confidence around learning. All beneficiaries can also participate in cultural activities and visits which again are aimed at making participants become more positive and outward looking – these activities include attendance at the cinema, theatres, museums or sport activities. At the end of their support, 750 participants from the older group are sent for two-weeks on a paid professional training course in different

¹²⁵ *ESF Interventions and Achievements for Young People*, European Commission, 2010

¹²⁶ *European Social Fund: The 2005 Beneficiaries Survey*, Scottish Executive, 2006, p.39

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.48

firms which was partly to increase their levels of work experience but also to help them 'believe in themselves' as individuals and show that they are able to cope in a work environment.

Since the project is still being implemented there are no evaluation studies undertaken. The stakeholders from Voluntary Labour Corps claim however, that in former editions of the programme about 98% of participants finished the entire cycle of courses and trainings. This appears to be a really good result taking into account that the target group is a very difficult one to both reach and support. About 20% of participants found employment after the project although approximately 10% maintain it after six months. This was still deemed a good result and impact because the project was only partially about job creation and was often seen as a key tool to use to motivate and encourage more self confidence among its young participants.

Linked to this issue was a key impact of ESF giving 'structure' to young peoples lives - the project example above providing some context in how this was done. Here an evaluation of the Youth Employment Centre stated that many of the young people had very unstructured lives and were often early school leavers who had problems linked to drug addition and crime¹²⁸. These groups were often seen as leading 'complex' lives that traditional and more formal provision linked to mainstream funding and pre-16 education were felt to not provide. In Spain, ESF has also helped to 'formalise' young people's lives through supporting projects that promoted learning abroad. This project along with its benefits is explained below.

Title: IVEX SECTOR, Spain

The project¹²⁹ (which is run by the Employment and Training Service of the Valencia Community) gave structured sessions to disadvantaged young people abroad who often had complex issues back home- the time away outside of their 'normal' lives was seen as its key impact and brought about significant benefits in raising their self esteem and self belief.

IVEX SECTOR is a Training programme for young unemployed people, which lasts 18 months. It includes 12 months of practical and theoretical training in Joint Sectoral and Technological Institutions of Valencia, and another 6-month internship abroad. Its aim is to give a specialised training to young people, directed to the enhancement of the internationalisation of young Valencian economic sectors. In 2010 this scholarship was awarded to 15 young people and when interviewed about the impact and benefits of the project – 'improving self confidence and providing a structured environment' was identified as key by all but one of the participants. The fact that many of the participants talked about their personal and psychological problems as a key barrier to their progression helped the project managers to design a programme of support activities (especially those abroad) that 'hand held' them through a structured but interesting set of sessions. 'Taking' the participants away from their problems (and peers) was seen as a key aspect of why the project worked.

¹²⁸ L. O. Neverauskiene, J. Moskvina (2008), *The Needs of Socially Vulnerable Youth Seeking to Integrate into Labour Market*. Socialinis Darbas 2008 No. 7(3).

¹²⁹ www.docv.gva.es/datos/2010/03/16/pdf/2010_2923.pdf

4.2.6 Helping young jobseekers to develop vocational skills

The final key impact of ESF on young people is the development of skills and qualifications as a way to support them into work. Although many projects spoken to as part of this study stated the main impacts as being 'softer' benefits such as confidence and motivation, they also added harder impacts linked to young people gaining qualifications and additional skills. Although gaining a qualification is more of an output of the project rather than an impact, project stakeholders still stated that the improvement in qualifications and skills was an important benefit of ESF when it came to this target group mainly because low qualification levels and a lack of skills was such a key barrier to employment for young people. For this impact, it seems that a large majority (often above 70% of young participants according to the reports studied) saw a benefit in terms of gaining a qualification through ESF. For example, in Poland 90% of participants overall declared that the ESF funded provision had improved their qualifications and skills levels in some way¹³⁰ whilst in the UK 72% of participants said that ESF funded projects had improved their skills levels¹³¹. Interestingly, there seems to have been a focus on skills development of young people through a wide variety of work experience— whether in relation to internships, placements or more traditional work experience. The types of ESF projects including work experience for young people seemed to vary enormously in duration, scale and scope- from a weeks work experience place in the Netherlands to a several months in Spain.

Title: Labour market inclusion for youth with disabilities, Netherlands

This training project was aimed at unemployed 15-24 year olds who also had a disability. The project was delivered around an active network of the trainers, coaches and support team with in the activities to support this target group¹³². This network of support staff targeted the people, trained people, helped people access employment opportunities and even supported once they had gained a job. Without this pathway of support the project was, according to stakeholders likely to fail.¹³³

While the main training activities provided were often short-term courses and internships; at the end of the programme it is the connections of the support team to employers that allowed the young people to access new job opportunities. Approximately a third of participants found employment immediately after the training and after a year this was reduced to approximately a quarter of the participants. It was also noted that although not all found work immediately after the training, 16% of the participants were in work a year after the project had finished. A further third of those who did not go into the labour market found a place within an education programme at ISCED level 3 or 4.¹³⁴

Having practical training (with machinery, software etc) that would be used in a real work place significantly motivated participants and increased their likelihood of staying on the training course¹³⁵. Similar to the above impact, participants who obtain a qualification increase in self-confidence and were

¹³⁰ Impact of the different implemented support forms on the situation of project participants 3,6 and 12 months since they finished support within the Priorities VI IX of the Operational Programme Human Capital in the Malopolskie Voivodship.

¹³¹ *European Social Fund Objective 3: The 2005 Beneficiary Survey for England*, DWP Research Report No.376,2006, p3.

¹³² *CBS Wie worden bereikt via het ESF?*

¹³³ *Mid-term evaluation of Action B and C*

¹³⁴ *CBS Wie worden bereikt via het ESF?*

¹³⁵ *Mid-term evaluation of Action B and C*

more active in trying to find a place in the labour market¹³⁶. Project leaders indicated that ensuring the training and guidance is sector-specific, allowed the student to prepare for the labour market from the beginning of the training and helped them become more certain about what they wanted to do when they left school and college¹³⁷.

4.3 Low Skilled Workers

4.3.1 Designing and 'shaping' of provision to support low skilled workers

In terms of how activities are actually designed and shaped to meet the specific needs of low skilled workers (particularly focused on those actively seeking a job), relatively little in the way of specific examples is provided in the literature reviewed and case study work. On the basis of what is available, and through the case study research, the use of initial skills assessments as part of broader introductory sessions for those engaging in ESF provision appears common. The intention behind this is to ensure that individuals can be referred to activities and elements of provision that match their skills development needs, rather than more generic basic skill provision for example.

In terms of activities to support employability amongst the unemployed or economically inactive, discussion with stakeholders delivering activity at the 'project level' also indicated the prevalence of intensive one – to –one support, even if delivered in wider class settings, aimed at building the confidence of those with basic skills needs in particular. This was seen as an important precursor to opening up other learning opportunities for individuals including, for example, qualifications intended to assist people to enter particular job roles. In such a way development of 'life skills', including those relating to confidence or communication skills, is seen as an important aspect to tailoring provision alongside the development of skills relating to literacy, numeracy or sector specific qualifications.

Support to the low skilled in employment appears to be shaped very much by the context in which it occurs. Generally, activities in this area appear to be more targeted at enhancing job-related skills or qualification levels, whether through funding training in the workplace or external training leading to accreditations and awards. The sort of design features or aspects of shaping noted above, such as including confidence building as an integral part of activities, would thus appear to be less prevalent than in the case of support activities for general employability (though in practice this will, of course, depend on the type of training courses and the mode adopted for their delivery).

4.3.2 Impact on low skilled workers

Identifying impacts of ESF specifically on the low skilled actively seeking work has been a challenge - partly because data from beneficiary and participant surveys do not tend to disaggregate data down to skills levels and secondly because this group are often seen as a sub-group of other groups (i.e. young low skilled, old low skilled, males/ females who have low skills or educational attainment). Nevertheless, this sub section provides evidence about the impact of ESF on the low skilled drawn from the research where it is specific to the low skilled target group that are actively seeking work.

¹³⁶ *Eind-evaluatie Jeugdcorporaties 2004*

¹³⁷ *Mid-term evaluation of Action B and C*

Table 4.2 summarises the main impacts of ESF on the low skilled drawing from the detail set out in the case study reports.

Table 4.2 Key impacts in the case study countries - low skilled workers

	Key impact
Austria	<p>A key impact of ESF on the low skilled in Austria has been around supporting the group to gain relevant and strong work experience in sectors that either of interest to them or are deemed as being high growth (it was noted that these were often not always the same sectors). An evaluation of the Viennese Employment Promotion Fund project promotes the integration of social welfare recipients and PES customers into the labour market with the strap line Learn- Experience- Work. An evaluation shows that in 2007-08, of the 77 people who took part in a social enterprise project called h/k/e, almost four out of five had a maximum ISCED level 2, and more than half had insignificant employment experience, among whom 47% went onto other measures, and two found employment. Of 125 people taking part in an employment project called TRAIN, 57% were low skilled and the training and work experience placement in the 'first' or 'second' labour market resulted in a job for 18% of project clients. Meanwhile of 125 participants in a work experience, coaching and further education project called JE_TZT, 57% were low skilled, and 49% who spent at least a month with the project found a job in the 'first labour market'. Specific impacts include improved motivation, confidence and engagement and readiness to learn and apply for jobs. Qualitative evidence comes mainly from stakeholder interviews and project reports describing individual examples from the projects visited.</p>
Italy	<p>In convergence regions 8.6% of low skilled participants indicate that they gained employment 12 months after taking part in ESF interventions and 4.7% took part in further education or learning. In competitiveness regions 55% low skilled participants entered employment and 12.8% entered education. The data above shows that competitiveness OPs are more successful in supporting low skilled to enter employment or education. It can be estimated that around 10,000 low skilled who took part in ESF interventions entered employment and around 2,500 entered education.</p>
Lithuania	<p>The largest impact of ESF on the low skilled was seen as giving them good quality work experience that would provide them with knowledge and skills that would make them more employable. This experience was often temporary and within public sector 'partners' (a sector seen as growing in Lithuania).</p> <p>The other key impact was in relation to giving the low skilled better vocational training which gave them the qualifications they needed to become more employable and to access higher paid jobs. There are no statistics on either of these two main impacts as data is not collected for this specific target group.</p>
Netherlands	<p>Key impacts of the low skilled in the Netherlands has been around helping this group to develop both their basic skills and also skills specific to the sector in which they already work. Much of the skills development was around 'up-dating' their skills as opposed to developing completely new skills in completely new areas. Measured impacts on the low skilled in the Netherlands have been:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 96% of participants in training for qualification projects have remained in employment six months after completing the courses during the current programme • Two-thirds of employees became more aware of the use of lifelong learning and indicated their willingness and interest to continue to participate in training

	Key impact
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Half of the employers became more aware of the use of lifelong learning and confirmed they would continue to invest in the training of their employees
Poland	<p>As a high proportion of the low skilled were thought to be young then the main impacts from the young people target group are likely to be similar to those of the low skilled. Key impacts on the low skilled identified by stakeholders included the development of more robust and up to date skills sets – particularly those who have traditionally been in sectors that are either declining or a 'fast changing'. There has been some work to train the low skilled unemployed with the skills needed for higher growth sectors – although the impacts of this and the relative successes are not yet known. Finally, the low skilled in Poland have also seen benefits in relation to teaching the benefits of learning – promoting 'why' the low skilled need to develop their education and skills in order to keep up with Poland's economic base.</p>
Spain	<p>The key impact of ESF in Spain on the low skilled has been in relation to 'modernising' their skills- particularly for those who currently or previously worked in sectors where low skill levels are an issue. There has been a particular push in relation to the agricultural sector where ESF has helped to support the low skilled (mainly young) who have previously worked in this sector but who could use their skills in similar sectors that are predicted to grow or which have higher wages (engineering, manufacturing etc). Helping the low skilled participants to update and renew their skills was therefore seen as a key impact and benefit of ESF.</p>
Sweden	<p>The impacts of ESF on the low skilled in Sweden are harder to ascertain as this group has not been specifically targeted in this Member State. However, young people account for half of the low skilled participants in PA2 (Improving human capital) activities and the impacts on young people (mentioned above) largely reflect the impacts on the low skilled.</p> <p>A key impact on this group therefore revolves around helping the low skilled to improve their skills that will be used to improve their employability and increase their chances of progression in the workplace. Strengthening their self esteem was also seen as a key impact on this group – particularly in relation to giving them the confidence to learn again- often after a long period of time away from any formal/ informal training.</p>
United Kingdom	<p>On the basis that a significant proportion of participants in both England and Gibraltar and the Scottish OP face barriers around low skill levels, the finding of the 2005 beneficiary survey is a helpful source to look at. For the England OP 84 per cent of participants felt that ESF had helped them to improve their work related skills. This same survey also demonstrates that the low skilled gained a range of skills – both job specific and more generic as a consequence of being supported by ESF.</p> <p>On the grounds that ESF support delivered to those in work through Priorities 2 and 5 in the England OP was significantly targeted at those with below level 2 qualification levels, the finding of the wave 2 cohort survey is also a helpful source to use. In the current programme 69 per cent of Priority 2 participants and 68 per cent of Priority 5 participants gained a full qualification as part of engaging with ESF. A significant proportion of participants also stated that their job security had increased as a consequence of being supported by ESF.</p>

Source: Case study reports

4.3.3 Gaining employment

In terms of ESF impacting on getting the low skilled into work, the picture in quantitative terms suggests that approximately 25-35% of low skilled participants gained employment after ESF support but figures vary considerably because of the range of low skilled participations and their level of experience and their proximity or otherwise to employment (it was common for ESF providers in the case studies to state that for some participants employment was a distant goal – those participants with no skills or work experience).

In Italy 31% of low skilled¹³⁸ ESF participants were in employment 12 months after ESF support¹³⁹ whilst in Lithuania 34% of ESF participants with a maximum ICSED level 2 gained employment after being supported by ESF. From the case studies the evidence suggests that projects have found it hard to support the lower skilled into work. In Austria, an ESF project called h/k/e focused almost exclusively with the low skilled with four out of five having a maximum ISCED level of 2. Of the 77 participants supported through this project, only 2 found employment. Also in Austria, the TRAIN project which helped 125 people (57% of whom were low skilled) only 18% of whom gained employment. For the Austrian examples and the statistical information from Lithuania and Italy there was no identification of whether the low skilled supported by the projects were active or inactive in terms of looking for a job.

4.3.4 Improving skills

The most direct and largest impact that ESF has had on the low skilled is around providing them with better qualifications and improved 'work related skills'. ESF has funded an array of projects which this target group have taken up to enhance participants skills and qualifications, with the overall goal of either helping them to enter into employment or progressing them in their current job for those already in work.

In terms of ESF helping this group to gain a qualification, the UK Cohort Survey shows that 67% of those participants with no prior qualifications (the closest proxy for the low skilled) achieved a qualification through their participation¹⁴⁰. As well as providing participants with formal qualifications ESF has also impacted on this group by raising their skills levels in general. For instance, figures from the 2005 beneficiary survey for the Lowlands and Uplands OP (UK) showed that all of those surveyed with no qualifications felt that ESF support had helped them with the skills needed at work while 95% of those classed as having low basic skills felt the same¹⁴¹. The project example below provides details of a Swedish project that had beneficial impacts for participants and their employers.

Title: IF Metal, Sweden

IF Metall (a merger between the Swedish Industrial Workers' and the Swedish Metalworkers' Union) was responsible for five PA1 projects, engaging 35 SMEs and their staff in skills development activities. The project worked to develop personal action plans for employees and employers to ensure that they had clear pathways and that their future progression (and personal journey) was mapped out. The project also used a variety of existing training programmes to 'procure' the most relevant training for each individual

¹³⁸ Individuals with primary/ lower secondary education

¹³⁹ ISFOL- South (2006), North East (2010)

¹⁴⁰ *European Social Fund Cohort Survey: Wave 2, DWP, Research Report 709, 2010*

¹⁴¹ *European Social Fund: The 2005 Beneficiaries Survey, Scottish Executive, 2006, p.36*

and ensured they were receiving the exact skills that were needed by both the employee and their employer. 82% of participants felt they gained new skills and 37% of them felt that their progression routes were improved. 50% felt that the skills they had gained will strengthen the growth prospects of their employer.

4.3.5 Improving job security

In addition to helping the low skilled who are out of work, ESF has also assisted those who are already in a job to progress and also improve their job security. This impact is illustrated through evidence from the same beneficiary research for the Lowlands and Uplands OP survey mentioned above, although these figures are not specifically broken down by low skilled. As the survey demonstrates, 55% of participants said that, since participation in a skills related ESF project, they had improved their job security¹⁴². Impact of ESF provision was also reported through participants taking on higher skilled work either for an existing employer (34%) or for another employer (7%) because of ESF funded support. 87% of those who had taken on work for an existing employer, and 69% of those doing higher skilled work for another employer, acknowledging that ESF support had helped them to do this through providing them with better work related skills¹⁴³. In Poland, 21% of participants in work had seen a salary increase because of the higher level of skills acquired through ESF support meaning participants were also directly benefitting with largest wages because of the skills being enhanced¹⁴⁴.

The impact of improving job security among the low skilled was, according to stakeholders, particularly pertinent with the current economic crisis that was making much larger numbers of people 'at risk' of redundancy. The project example below explains how ESF is supporting this in Italy.

Title: “Project Crisis”, Italy

An ESF supported project called Project Crisis was reported as being extremely successful in experimenting with new forms of support to those (mainly low skilled) at risk of losing their jobs as a consequence of the global crisis. This project, started in 2009 was a quick response to the emerging crisis and involved over 1,000 workers who were likely to lose their job and who were deemed as having low skills and who would struggle to find employment.

Each participant received intensive training averaging approximately 60 hours with vouchers being provided to allow participants to select the courses they felt were most appropriate. In addition, €1,000 was provided to each person who completed the course as an incentive and to help them as and when redundancy happened. In Piedmont, the Crisis Project was dedicated to employees benefitting from social schemes (the so-called “*cassa integrazione*”¹⁴⁵) and offered training in languages, ICT skills, further professional skills.

¹⁴² Ibid., p.114

¹⁴³ Ibid., p.114/115

¹⁴⁴ *Research of outputs of indicators of the regional component of the Human Resources Operational Programme*, PAG Uniconsult, 2010

In terms of impacts, two out of three participants reported that they felt the training was “very positive” in relation to it improving their skills levels and reducing the level of risk in terms of redundancy. In addition, apart from general “soft” skills (i.e. linguistic capability), tailored courses in support to job retention have also been provided. 91% stated that the participation to the project helped them to better cope with the crisis and improved their likelihood of staying in their job or finding another job if they were made redundant. 65% of those interviewed specifically stated that the course helped them to better search for new job opportunities.

4.3.6 Improving softer skills

As with the young people target group, ESF has also benefited the low skilled in relation to 'softer' skills linked to personal development. Projects have been directed towards those actively seeking employment and those further way from employment but it is often the same projects. Survey evidence from the Scotland 2000-2006 Objective 3 programme also highlights the effect of provision on those with low skills in increasing their self confidence around working. 97% of those surveyed with no qualifications felt that engagement with ESF had this effect, while the equivalent figure for those classed as having low skills was 95%¹⁴⁶. The role of ESF in supporting progression through the gaining of qualifications for those with low skills or no prior qualifications reported in this survey is also notable. 77% of those with no prior qualifications were supported to achieve an accredited award whilst the equivalent for those with low skills was 73%. Again, this can be taken to indicate that ESF can play an effective role in engaging and supporting participants with low skills in LLL activity.

In terms of what skills participants actually gained- the evidence does not allow any finer gained analysis. 'Basic skills' was often a key answer to this question given by stakeholders and was seen as much more prevalent than 'occupational' skills. Support on basic literacy and numeracy skills was seen as a key objective and impact for this target group along with ICT skills.

Title: Women's College, Austria

The ESF supported Frauen College project offers courses specifically targeting immigrant women who have very little or no school education but who do already have European level A2 in German. Covering the content of the Austrian school curriculum, the courses are free and also offer free childcare and excursions for example to museums. It thus fills a gap, forming a bridge from existing provisions such as courses in German as a foreign language towards lasting integration into mainstream education and employment. The course is closely linked into WAFF, which offers a careers advice programme for women returners and those new to the labour market as a next step, on completion of Frauen College.¹⁴⁷

According to the project manager, the main impact for women included increased self-esteem, improved learning strategies and giving the confidence to learn. It uses family learning methods to attract women with a focus on being able to accompany their children's homework and progress in schools. The structure is based on the successful experience of a linked project "*Mama lernt Deutsch*" with three hour sessions twice a week continuously over nine months, covering 150 units in small steps with lesson free days, which is reported to work effectively with target groups who are remote from education. Participants' questionnaires provide evidence of learners' success.

¹⁴⁶ *European Social Fund: The 2005 Beneficiaries Survey*, Scottish Executive, 2006, p.39

¹⁴⁷ For description in English see <http://www.waff.at/en/projects-for-the-labour-market/for-immigrants/womens-college/>

The 2010 Annual Report contains a case study of a second generation Turkish woman who broke off her education in Austria to go to Turkey and marry young and could not imagine working outside the home due to her lack of confidence. It shows how she gained motivation and skills through this course and progressed through the WAFF measure to train in childcare and aims to become self employed. This evidence is supported by the Viennese City Councillor for Integration, Sandra Frauenberger, who commented in 2010 that the project had "opened up new perspectives for women with low levels of school education, supporting them to enter the labour market".¹⁴⁸

4.4 Older Workers

4.4.1 Designing and 'shaping' of provision to support older workers

There is limited detailed evidence around how ESF LLL activities are specifically designed and shaped to meet the needs of older workers. It may be that this reflects the point made in Section 3 that, relative to the other two target groups, there appears to be a lesser focus on developing specifically LLL related support for older workers. In addition, the impression that in a number of OP contexts while older workers are prioritised this does not necessarily translate into LLL specific activities and provision aimed at the target group is perhaps significant here.

Where evidence on the specific shaping of LLL provision for the older worker group is available, project stakeholders interviewed did note some interesting ways in which provision has been specifically shaped for older workers. For example, in projects aimed at engaging older workers who are unemployed or economically inactive, the potential importance of developing a group camaraderie or social element to the support offered alongside more specific LLL provision was noted. This was seen as key in engaging and encouraging unemployed older people who may have become isolated in their everyday lives. One project, for example, arranged a weekly social gathering for participants in an informal setting, encouraging group discussions and engagement between participants as well as with project staff. The same project also arranged walks for older people who were reported as key in allowing the time and space to discuss wider issues and barriers that participants may face in (re)engaging with learning and the labour market.

Beyond this, the significance of offering ongoing support as part of the learning in which participants were engaged in was cited, specifically from the point of view that older people may have lost confidence as a result of being out of the labour market for periods of time. Likewise, the importance of a flexible and varied network of referral options for further and more vocationally specific training was also noted, given that older workers often have a skills base but require specific and more up-to-date training and up-skilling in particular work related areas. The range of these needs was seen as meaning that a widespread menu of provision options needed to be available and accessible to those being supported. Thus, an important aspect to design was seen as not simply shaping singular provision but ensuring that provision itself had a variety of learning options within it.

¹⁴⁸ Jahresbericht 2010 Interface Wien p4 http://www.interface-wien.at/system/attachs/56/original/InterfaceWien_Jahresbericht2010_web.pdf?1306930036

In contrast, where stakeholders discussed provision aimed at older workers already in the workforce, it was noted that little specific shaping or differentiation of provision occurs for the older worker group. This was reported as reflecting the fact that most training and support funding through Priority 2 of the OPs considered was aimed at up-skilling workers to gain additional skills relating to the occupation they were already in. The need to specifically shape this to either older or younger workers was not necessarily recognised therefore, given that the rationale for and focus of the activities were the same irrespective of the group into which participants 'fitted'.

4.4.2 Impact on older workers

The table below provides a summary of the main impacts of ESF on older workers according to the case study reports. The reports themselves provide further detail and explanation of the points set out in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Key impacts in the case study countries - older workers

	Older Workers
Austria	<p>The key impact of ESF in relation to older workers were a move into employment, progress towards a new job and progression within employment.</p> <p>Measures under Priority Axes 1 secured and improved jobs for employees, and under Priority Axis 2 qualifications were reported to have a very positive effect. Measures targeting companies have a positive impact on maintaining employment, as they lead firms to make changes, for example, creating “Older people friendly workplaces”. For example, the “Flexibility Advice for Companies” worked with a company that runs old people’s homes, employing 800 people, mainly women, almost half of whom were aged over 55 themselves. The measure supported training being offered to employees with caring responsibilities for seriously ill relatives for example with Alzheimer’s. An impact found more often among older people, and the low skilled, is progression within employment to retain a job or gain promotion.</p>
Italy	<p>Stakeholders stated that the largest impact of ESF in Italy has been around helping older workers to remain in employment. There was a perception that this target group would tend to be the ones that were made redundant first, mainly because they lacked the skills required in a more 'modern' economy linked to ICT, new production methods and completely new sectors. ESF has helped them develop and expand their skills sets so that they become more 'attractive' to their present employers. In convergence regions 11.8% of older participants (over 45) indicate that they were in employment 12 months after taking part in ESF interventions. In competitiveness regions 53.2% older participants (over 45) entered employment. Most of the ESF provision which was taken up by this target group was done 'on the job'.</p>
Lithuania	<p>Much of the ESF in Lithuania has impacted on younger participants and there are only a few examples of projects that specifically targeted and have impacted on older workers. Nevertheless, stakeholders saw that ESF had indirectly helped those older workers to improve their employability through taking part in a range of training and educational projects – that were mainly sector specific (rather than basic skills). This has had a positive affect on progression within their workplace – helping them to earn higher wages and get promoted because they had applied the new skills and abilities gained through taking part in various ESF supported project.</p>

	Older Workers
Netherlands	Because ESF has not specifically targeted the older workers with the Netherlands the perception among stakeholders was that the impact on this group would be relatively low. Between 2007 and 2009, only 6% of 55-64 year olds who were unemployed who completed an ESF training course gained employment, which was both below other participants in these activities as well as below target (80% of those who did find employment were still employed after six months). Some stakeholders felt that older workers had benefitted from projects linked to retraining and up-skilling but there was little evidence of the scale of impact in this area.
Poland	The key impact of ESF on older workers in Poland was around improving their skills base and the development of 'new' skills linked to emerging sectors as well as sectors where a larger proportion of older workers are found. Here the skills development was around sector specific skills required to update their skills in new production methods, new products and new emerging markets. Little impact was identified around basic skills although training on ICT was built into the ESF provision that this target group accessed.
Spain	Very little evidence of impact on older workers was found in Spain. Stakeholders perceived that older workers had benefitted from a 'new found confidence' to learn and develop their skills and experience which in turn helped the reintegrate with the learning environment even though they were coming to the end of their working lives. The impact of helping older workers at risk of redundancy was also identified by stakeholders by ESF helping to make them more skilled, educated and therefore employable at a time where businesses were stating to make cuts in their labour forces.
Sweden	<p>Older workers have tended not to be targeted and supported by ESF in Sweden meaning the impact specifically on this group is harder to judge. However, impacts identified by stakeholders relating to this target group often related to an increased motivation to learn. Many of the older workers taking part in ESF projects in Sweden were seen to have been out of the learning environment for some time and projects tried hard to motivate them to develop their work and personal related skills to ensure that they 1) reduced the risk of losing their jobs, 2) helped them to progress or 3) help them to find new employment which was deemed as being higher quality.</p> <p>Various project evaluations which tend to target the older workers tend to show that about 3 in 4 participants in the projects think they have strengthened their position in the workplace and 4 in 5 participants feel empowered by having gained more knowledge and skills, 4 out of 5 participants feel that they have improved their opportunities for continued employment with current employer and 3 out of 5 think the knowledge/ skills gained will strengthen the growth prospects of their employer.</p>
United Kingdom	Participation in ESF projects contributes to gaining work related skills and qualifications which subsequently leads to job security and progression. However, the proportion of older people gaining qualifications is lower for other groups relevant to the study especially young people. Improving self confidence was also reported as a key impact of stakeholders which in turn motivated them to take up additional learning and employment support.

Source: Case study reports

The following part of this sub-section provides a more detailed analysis of the main impacts of ESF on this target group.

4.4.3 Helping older people to gain employment

Out of the three target groups, the evidence suggests that a lower proportion of older workers have entered into employment as a consequence of ESF supported provision. So in Poland 40% of 15-24 year olds found a job within 6 months of being supported by ESF compared to 35% for 50-64 year olds. In the UK, the employment rate of those aged over 50 benefiting from Priority 1 provision rose by ten percentage points from the week before engagement to the time of the Wave 2 interview, compared to 21 percentage points for younger people¹⁴⁹. In the Netherlands, between 2007 and 2009 only 6% of 55-64 year olds who were unemployed and who completed training gained employment, which was below the average for all participants of 13%¹⁵⁰. In Italy, 11.8% participants aged over 45 years indicated that they were in employment 12 months after being supported by ESF which again is a relatively low number when compared to all participants.

When questioned why older workers were less successful at accessing employment compared to other target groups stakeholders often suggested that provision which was specifically targeted at older people related more to participants already in work rather than those who were currently unemployed. This is partly explained, according to stakeholders, by the fact that unemployment rates amongst older groups are lower (particularly compared to the younger age group) meaning attention tended to be focused on those older workers who were already in work. Stakeholders often said that although unemployment rates are growing among this target group, there was still an emphasis on helping older workers develop their skills and helping them progress in their jobs as opposed to funding provision that tackled worklessness among this target group.

One element that relates to supporting older people into work involves encouraging more entrepreneurship among this target group- particularly in terms of helping them to start their own business. Here ESF has been used to help older people create their own employment opportunities as a way of helping them into the labour force. Self employment was seen as a viable alternative to dependent work for this target group, partly because it was felt that many older workers were more experienced and relatively highly skilled (compared to their younger counterparts) but also because self employment gave some flexibility to older workers in terms of fitting in with their lives (often being a carer for an elder relative/ partner, potentially not wanting to work full time, suffering from poorer health which restricts the amount of time they can work). It is difficult to say with the evidence available that ESF has over proportionately helped this target group in terms of stimulating self employment but stakeholders highlighted projects linked to entrepreneurialism among this target group much more than in the cases of low skilled and younger unemployed. The box below provides a typical example of an ESF project that has focused on raising self employment levels among older workers in Poland.

Title: “A mature entrepreneur”, Poland

The project was carried out from 1 January 2009 to 31 December 2010 by the Gdańsk District Employment Office. It was implemented under the Measure 6.2 OP Human Capital and received from the ESF 1.6 million PLN. The project was awarded the title “The best investment in people” in the “ESF Best Practices 2010” competition and also gained second place in European Entrepreneurship Awards competition run by the European Commission.

¹⁴⁹ *The European Social Fund Cohort Survey: Wave 2*, DWP Research Report 709, 2010

¹⁵⁰ *Mid-term evaluation of Action A and D (2000-2006 Dutch ESF Programme)*.

Unemployed senior citizens and pensioners as well as working people aged 50-64 located in Gdańsk and who were interested in self-employed were invited to participate in the project. 120 candidates applied to enrol on the project which included a five minute 'pitch' to a panel on their business idea. As well as taking account of the idea itself the panel (consisting of employment office staff) looked at the innovativeness and creativity of the candidate, their experience and qualifications connected with the planned business and their levels of motivation. The 60 participants that got through the first round were invited to a 150-hours multi-module course run by the Gdańsk Enterprise Foundation which had the overall aim of teaching them on how to start but also run and sustain a successful business. The fact that the training was also attended by people already in work (who were not willing to 'risk' finishing their job to start a new business resulted in diverse set of training schedules (they could participate during weekends or in the afternoons/ evenings). The course included eight units: computer trainings, psychological workshops, first steps of an entrepreneur, legal issues, insurance, accountancy and finance, marketing and promotion, and business planning.

Two experienced consultants provided individual assistance for the development of professional business plans. During four hours assigned to each beneficiary the consultants answered questions on a range of issues from financial forecasting to grants and loans). All people who completed the training (participation in at least 80% of classes was the condition) and took advantage of the consultants' assistance could apply for one-time investment subsidy. At the end 50 people used the opportunity.

The business plans were assessed by the committee of experts who represented employers' organizations of the region. 26 authors of the best business plans received financial support which comprised of a one-time investment subsidy (up to 40 000 PLN) and a bridge support (1250 PLN paid monthly for six months to cover current expenses of running the business). Participants could also continue consultations with business advisers for up to 12 hours per month for 6 months after their business has started. In 11 well-grounded cases bridge supports of 500 PLN per month for next six months of their businesses operation were provided (assistance in achieving or sustaining financial liquidity).

It is worth noting that a series of 12 TV programmes was created as part of a large enterprise promotion campaign among older people in the area. The main idea was to present the beneficiaries' profiles and their experiences in the project as a way of encouraging other older people to consider self-employed and to break clichés that you had to be young to become an entrepreneur.

4.4.4 Gaining work related skills

Compared to the other two groups, older workers have been more supported by ESF in relation to skills development and less so in terms of gaining qualifications. To some extent this is to be expected as firstly older workers are identified as those who are most likely to have 'outdated' skills¹⁵¹ and secondly because their actual levels of qualifications are comparatively high. For instance, in the Scottish context the 2005 beneficiary survey reveals that 96% of the over 50 age group reported participation in an ESF project led to work related skills being improved. In Sweden, 1 in 5 older workers supported by the programme stated 'skills development' as the main impact of their participation. In terms of qualifications gained in the

¹⁵¹ *The European Social Fund and Older Workers*, European Commission, 2010

UK, only 59% of older workers gained a qualification from being involved in ESF compared to 80% for young people (18-24).

More qualitative evidence from stakeholders confirmed that ESF had particularly helped older workers to 'update' their skills. In the Spanish, UK, Italian and Polish case studies ESF Stakeholders at the OP level all stated that ESF had helped the lower skilled by helping either those who use to or are still presently working in sectors including agriculture, coal mining and heavy manufacturing. Here, many stakeholders spoke about ESF giving new skills to older workers linked to new processes and new ICT requirements. Interestingly, many stated that ESF had not necessarily completely 'retrained' older workers so that they are able to access new jobs in new sectors, rather it had usually helped them readjust to changing technologies and processes found in their present job or profession. There were no project level examples picked up in the study to show where ESF had completely changed an older workers skills set or helped them move from a declining to a high growth sector for instance.

In terms of skills development, the following project level example explains the benefits and impact of ESF to older workers.

Title: Training for the over 50's on the improvement of accommodation, Lithuania

The project provided training on home improvements, partly to support older workers improve their own houses but with the overall goal of helping them find employment (or self employment) in a range of trades linked to housing building (e.g. brick work, carpentry, roofing etc). Much of the housing in Lithuania (including the majority that older people tended to live in) was in need of renovation, especially in relation to energy efficiency. The project helped motivate and prepare older people to undertake such responsibilities themselves but also to upskill them in trades where skills shortages had been identified. Actually undertaking the training in or near to their home meant the training was easy to access and had flexible working hours. In addition, the older people taking part in the training were trusted more by their neighbours meaning it was relatively easy to gain further work. Any travel costs were reimbursed by the project and a one off 'participation fee' was made to each of the older people taking part (of 78 euros). The project attracted high number of participants and 511 people completed the training. Initially it was expected that as a result of the project around 100 people would enter employment. However, the interviews shown that the number of people entering employment is likely to be lower. The major challenge for older people in entering employment is related to pension regulations. Older people are often financially worst off when they enter employment because their pensions are generally reduced.

In terms of the outcome of this focus on skills development among older workers, stakeholder perception and some empirical evidence shows that it has brought benefits in two key areas. Firstly older workers have found stronger security within their existing job and secondly they have been able to progress at a greater rate because of their new skills. In Poland, 50% of older workers (50-64) who had been supported by ESF reported that participation had decreased the likelihood of them losing their job. The same survey showed that 22% of this age group had seen progression and importantly a rise in their wages because of taking part in ESF funded provision¹⁵².

¹⁵² *Research of outputs of indicators of the regional component of the Human Resources Operational Programme*, PAG Uniconsult, 2010

4.4.5 Confidence Raising

Like the other two groups, ESF has also had an impact on confidence raising among older workers. A key barrier for progression for older workers was often identified by stakeholders as a lack of confidence and self esteem around 'learning'- either in terms of acquiring new skills or new qualifications for work. Anecdotal evidence from the case studies suggested that it was relatively difficult to encourage older worker to learn new skills- partly because they were coming to the end of their careers but also because they had been out of a learning environment and lacked the confidence to 'try something new'.

In the Lowlands and Uplands OP (UK), 91% of older workers reported that they felt an increase in their confidence as a consequence of participating in an ESF funded project which is 6% higher than the 18-24 age group. Evidence from the stakeholder interviews undertaken show that confidence raising among older workers has been a key ambition and impact of ESF. Stakeholders cited the importance of taking a sensitive approach with this group, acknowledging that they may already have relatively good skills and qualification levels and may not necessarily be out of work. Confidence around learning new skills (attached to IT for example) was often the key issue to focus upon for ESF projects consulted as part of the work. Interesting, ESF was seen by project level stakeholders as being a beneficial way of supporting older workers at a pace which is appropriate to them. The flexibility of ESF (compared to mainstream provision) was highlighted as one of its key strengths- allowing 'space' for provision to work at a pace that best fits their needs.

4.4.6 Supporting employers

Another impact of ESF on older workers has been around helping their employers to grow and become 'more competitive'. Interestingly, it was only under the older workers target group that benefits to employers were clearly identified by stakeholders as an impact of ESF- for the other two target groups, the impacts were only focused on the individual. This is partly explained because many of the older workers supported were in work meaning an improvement in their skills levels, qualifications and self esteem for instance not only benefited them but also led onto a more productive and improved workforce for employers. None of the ESF projects that were looked at as part of this study had undertaken any assessment of the economic value of skills development on employers themselves.

The project example below provides details of an Austrian project that worked with employers to encourage them to support their older workforce.

Title: "Flexibility Advice for Companies", Austria

The Project works with companies directly as well as jobseekers, and has a successful programme called "Flexibility Advice for Companies". The project receives 46% funding from ESF, with the objective of enabling older people to stay longer in the workplace and helping their employers become more competitive and benefit economically. This measure promotes training for HR/ personnel managers, analysis of the staff age structure, promoting occupational health, restructuring companies and finding new ways of working (to take account of the needs of older workers). Take up in Vienna has been high and the project now has a contract from 1 January 2011 to 31 December 2013, and the programme is to be mainstreamed nationally across Austrian federal states. In the regional state of Upper Austria this ESF supported AMS instrument focusing on organisational aspects was further piloted and evaluated with 77

companies, complimenting "work management coaching" funded by the regional government, which focused on individual capacities with 901 coaching conversations.

Companies receive up to 15 days of advice including three steps: an initial advice day to establish what advice is needed, followed by a "Flexcheck" (up to 5 days) outlining which 1-3 of the seven action areas in the programme are most appropriate for the company. Some 91 companies have explicitly opted to focus on "Productive Ageing". "Productive Ageing" was already an action area in the previous "Flexibility Advice for Companies" contract, but has now become a stronger focus in the current contract, which the Austrian social partners wanted to include, along with Diversity and Work-Life balance.

Previously most companies opted for actions relating to organisation and compressed working hours especially for mothers. Examples of actions include maps of 'older people friendly' workplaces, training plans for employees and a special support day for women. A key success factor is that the PES advisors have strong links with the companies, working directly with employee works councils, which helps to successfully embed the messages in the advice, compared to an approach that only engaged managers.

The output of the measures has been as follows: between 2007 and 2010 almost 1300 companies with over 50 employees took part in the first stage of advice under Flexibility Advice for Companies, with more than 577 companies having more intensive advice, while in March 2011 4700 companies had taken up the similar "Qualification Advice for Companies" aimed at those with less than 50 employees. Some 1600 companies rated their satisfaction with the measures as very high.

An example of the impact can be seen in a company that runs old people's homes, employing 800 people, mainly women, almost half of whom were aged over 45 themselves. Advice on the results of an employee questionnaire led to measures that reduced the amount of illness and incapacity, through rewriting task descriptions with age in mind, management of returns to work after sickness and training being offered to employees with caring responsibilities for seriously ill relatives for example with Alzheimer's. An additional achievement was for employees to receive an extra week's holiday from the age of 50. These changes were also seen as increasing job security.

Meanwhile "Flexibility Advice for Companies" advised firms on the temporary introduction of shortened working weeks, to minimise job losses during the economic crisis in 2008-10, which was very well received even by EU critics. The measure achieved a very high participant satisfaction rating of 1.6,¹⁵³ and was very significant for employees and employers, and successfully maintained employment as very few companies had to make redundancies¹⁵⁴.

Although the above issue is positive, stakeholder perception was that employers were apprehensive about 'investing' in their older workforce because the return on investment was limited. This was mainly because, according to stakeholders, employers perceived older workers as coming to the end of their working lives and that investment in skills and training would only bring benefits to the employer for a short period of time- often only a few years. Alternatively, employers saw investing in the skills and qualifications of their younger workers as seen as a longer term benefit to their competitiveness and which is why they were less apprehensive in terms of putting them forward for ESF supported provision.

¹⁵³ AMS Annual Report, and *evaluation of "Flexibility Advice for Companies"*

¹⁵⁴ http://www.esf.at/esf/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/ESF_InSight_1_2011.pdf

This issue was picked up in an overall assessment of older workers and ESF¹⁵⁵ which highlighted it as a possible barrier for a greater number of older workers being supported and benefitting from ESF.

4.5 Critical Success Factors

This section explains the critical success factors related to impact and looks at the vital 'ingredients' required to ensure that the three target groups benefit from ESF. The success factors have been developed at three levels. The first set deals with success factors for developing and encouraging LLL in ESF more broadly, looking at what can be done to stimulate ESF programmes and projects to adopt a LLL approach in the future. The second focuses on success factors relating to the design and delivery of ESF projects supporting the three groups more generally (recognising that while there are differences between the three groups projects there are also similar factors that encourage the success of projects aimed at the young, low skilled and old). The third looks at critical success factors that are specific to supporting the young, old and low skilled back into employment- highlighting intervention types that are important to include in any ESF programme wanting to specifically support these three groups.

4.5.1 Critical success factors in LLL

The following factors have been developed with a particular focus on LLL (a central theme of this study) as opposed to more general 'what works' in employment provision or training per se. The factors provide a series of characteristics that ESF programmes and projects should consider if they wish to adopt a more LLL approach and therefore promote a more on-going, pathways orientated package of support linked to a true LLL approach. We present the main factors below:

- **Managing and tracking progression of participants between ESF activities:** stakeholders have stated that it is often hard to understand the true extent of LLL among ESF participants. It may be that certain participants do move along a pathway supported by ESF but there is often no way of knowing whether this is the case as monitoring data is generally not used to track progression of individuals from one ESF project to another. ESF programmes and projects do not often track or record participant data but instead focus on a single point in time in a participant's journey. It is not beyond possibility for projects and programmes overall to link participant data together to better understand the true extent of progression and whether participants drop out of the system or only partly complete their employment journey.
- **Referral systems within OPs and between projects:** in order to truly have a LLL approach and develop a 'pathways' mentality then strong referral systems between providers is critical. Work in the case studies tended to show that referral networks are, at best, limited. ESF projects are often internally focused on helping a participant along a particular section of their journey into employment and have limited understanding (or interest) in making sure their participants progress onto the next step- whether in terms of further learning, further employment support or additional support around motivation or confidence. The signposting and referral systems are therefore critical within each OP and those at a programme level need to encourage projects to build this element into their design.

¹⁵⁵ *The European Social Fund and Older Workers*, European Commission, 2010

- **Output/ performance targets linked to LLL:** following on from the above issue are a lack of ESF outputs that are specifically linked to LLL. Many output targets relate to supporting a participant to gain a qualification, to complete a training course or to secure employment. Of course these are highly relevant targets but do not necessarily stimulate or encourage a LLL approach linked to continuous and on-going support. If targets also included, for example, the proportion of learners going on to further learning or the proportion of participants taking up additional employment advice then a true LLL approach among projects would be encouraged. If ESF providers 'had' to refer participants on (as stipulated in their ESF contracts and targets) or were encouraged to include output targets that were linked to LLL then a pathway approach would become much easier to adopt in practice.
- **An LLL culture among participants and employers:** Work from the case studies suggests that more emphasis should be put on the participant as well as employers to develop a LLL culture and ethos. It is partly up the ESF projects to encourage a LLL approach but if participants understood the benefits or effects of LLL (i.e. not to stop training once you had gained employment, to continue education beyond 18 or 21 for instance) then the levels of LLL within a Member State would increase significantly. Likewise, employers should be encouraged to adopt a LLL ethos among their staff and also support staff development and progression as much as possible. A key factor of success is therefore a bottom up approach to LLL rather than a top down.

4.5.2 Critical success factors in the delivery of projects

The findings of the research show that the many of the factors which make an ESF LLL project 'successful' can often be generic and are not specific to the target groups which the project is actually trying to support. Although there are nuances around the three groups the principle of using, for example, interesting and innovative techniques that are attractive to a certain group holds true no matter what the target group is. Project stakeholders during the case study work often stated that regardless of whether the individual is young or old they still tended to suffer from the same barriers to employment including a lack of motivation, low or inappropriate skills levels or poor educational attainment. To say that a young person needs more support, for instance, on issues connected to self-esteem or a low skilled person needs more help in relation to educational attainment is oversimplifying the issues that they all suffer from. The section therefore provides success factors that are relevant across the target groups with a particular focus on issues linked to the design and delivery of ESF projects. The critical success factors have been identified by those project level stakeholders currently delivering support to the three groups and are as follows:

- **Life skills alongside employment related skills:** a key 'impact' of ESF more widely was its ability to promote life skills including building up self confidence, helping people reengage with learning and tackling psychological problems such as depression. As this study has shown, many of those participants supported through ESF were furthest from the labour market – partly because they were suffering from an array of other personal issues that were having a direct bearing on their ability to enter work. Many providers stated that these life issues have to be tackled alongside the delivery of employment provision if participants were to be truly supported by ESF. Projects that were solely about 'training' for instance were deemed to be less successful than those that encompassed additional support on life skills. Although there is limited qualitative information to back this perception

up, project level stakeholders consulted as part of this study tended to highlight this as an important factor of success.

- **Formal versus informal provision:** there was often a debate among practitioners on whether the formality or informality of provision was a factor for success. Some stated that a more formal and structured set of provision was particularly effective- especially in relation to the younger age group who needed a relatively planned and ordered support programme linked to, for instance, training or further education. However, the majority of project level stakeholders stated that more informal and flexible provision that was delivered at the right pace and level and in a non traditional environment was a key success factor. Some projects spoke of more 'spontaneous' support to young people in particular where support was more likely to be 'provided on bean bags rather than behind a college desk'.
- **Control and choice for participants:** a key area highlighted by stakeholders as a success factor was giving the participant a number of options and choices on the type of provision they could access. Voucher schemes in particular that provided a 'menu' for participants to select from ensured that control was put in the hands of the individual rather than the provider- if they chose their own support they were more likely to attend the provision and be more motivated to complete the support. Giving participants options also allowed provision to be more tailored to their needs and stopped a 'one size fits all' approach being adopted and also ensured the support provided was demand rather than supply led. Even where voucher projects did not exist (they seemed relatively uncommon), simply having a large variety of provision available to participants helped them choose the most appropriate support for their needs.
- **Combined LLL activities:** another critical success factor of ESF provision linked to supporting the three target groups was around combining activities together and taking a 'one-stop-shop' approach to employment advice. ESF practitioners suggested that individual projects should try and provide more 'complete' services to participants so that a single project would help them with their life skills (see above), provide them with training or education, help them either onto further support or to find work and then also support them (if required) in their first few months in a new job. All these different types of support would be provided by one single project or group of providers working as a single consortium as opposed to several individual projects working independently. This combination of activities 'under one roof' was said to ensure that participants did not fall through the 'gaps' (between projects) and made it harder for them to fall 'out of the system'. This success factor, according to practitioners, lends itself to a smaller number of bigger ESF projects that some referred to as 'super projects'. Some stakeholders described it as a key factor to ensure LLL – as each project would take the participant further along their journey than would have been the case if there were a larger number of projects that each provided a narrower set of interventions.
- **Long term planning with participants:** similar to the success factor for LLL mentioned above, the final critical success factor relating to the design of ESF projects is to have a clear set of actions which provide participants with a well defined pathway. Practitioners often stated that participants only had short term plans linked to for example, attending a six week training course or taking part in a mentoring programme lasting four months without necessarily understanding what to do next and how this fitted into a longer term plan to help them into a job. Where projects included personal action

plans for participants that set out a complete route into employment and which mapped out a series of projects then participants and ESF projects were more able to understand their progression route and less likely to fall through the gaps or get lost in the system.

4.5.3 Learning from the analysis of costs and benefits of active and passive measures

The research presently being undertaken for the Commission on the costs and benefits of active and passive employment measure also provides a number of learning points for this study to consider¹⁵⁶. Although this research does not present information or recommendations down to target group level and does not focus on ESF specifically there are some broader and more generic issues that act as critical success factors for this study to consider and which add to the ones so far highlighted in this sub-section. The studies relevant findings show:

- Only eight Member States in the EU have specific training measures aimed at facilitating the occupational mobility of unemployed job seekers. This indicates that most countries are focusing training provision on improving the qualifications of targeted groups already in the labour force. This is a consideration for the low skilled and older workers in particular and suggests that mobility in the workplace is a key issue to consider rather than simply helping those who are presently out of work.
- Only four Member States support training of employees at risk of losing their job with the aim of keeping them in employment. This slightly disagrees with the findings of this study that suggests that the focus and impact of ESF on the low skilled and older workers in particular has been around helping them to become more secure in their current job.
- There is still a focus from Member States to support those furthest from the labour market despite a growing number of unemployed being relatively skilled and educated. Training (ESF and non ESF) has therefore been particularly focussed on the very low skilled and NEET groups - often helping them 'in their first steps' onto the jobs market through issues such as confidence building and re-engagement with learning.
- The report also mentions about the benefits of targeting but states that much of the provision is more generic and responds to wider groups such as the unemployed or employed as opposed to the young, old or low skilled. Those target groups linked to women and disabilities is highlighted in the report as being key target groups with little mention of the groups which this report is interested in.
- The study also focuses on approaches that Member States are taking to respond to the economic crisis. It states that the economic downturn may affect the way Member States approach training provision in particular and asks the question about whether Member States should be focussing their attention on demand led interventions that help create job opportunities. There was little mention by stakeholders on this issue in the case studies – with a firm focus on interventions linked to the three target groups being linked to the supply of labour.

¹⁵⁶ *Analysis of costs and benefits of active and passive measures* (15 December 2011)- Working DRAFT Final Report.

4.6 Intervention types aimed at target groups

This sub-section builds on the critical success factors mentioned above linked to promoting more of a LLL approach in ESF as well as factors that help in the design and delivery of ESF projects more broadly. It provides guidance on types of interventions that have been used by OPs to assist young people, the low skilled and older workers back into employment. The aim of this sub-section is not to present detailed project examples that OPs should 'copy' (highlighted throughout the previous sub-section) but rather provide those who are developing ESF provision specifically aimed at these target groups with the broader intervention types that have been used to help the young, low skilled and older worker ESF participants back into the labour market. These intervention types have grouped particular projects together under key employment themes rather than attempting to deal with factors that are important at project level. During the case study work the research came across approximately 25 different project approaches linked to the three groups including projects which:

- Supported internships
- Funded scholarships
- Subsidised job placements,
- Provided training vouchers
- Provided intensive career guidance
- Provided mentors for those out of work
- Helped the unemployed prepare for job interviews
- Stimulated the unemployed to set up their own business
- Provided on a job training in specific growth sectors
- Provided grants for travel and work related clothing

It is not possible or feasible to analyse the effectiveness of all of the above different project areas that have been supported by the ESF as each one would require a more detailed analysis of the evidence across a number of different Member States to ensure the results to be robust. Many of the above projects have also not been evaluated- particularly in relation to their specific impact on the target groups. This sub-section therefore sets out the common types of ESF interventions that have been used in the case studies researched as part of this study- grouping projects together into types of support that have been funded by OPs. The table below provides a summary of those important intervention types that are effective in supporting the three groups.

Table 4.4 Effective project types for target groups

Target Group	Effective Intervention Types
Young	Promoting Work Experience Promoting progression into higher education Career Guidance
Low skilled	Job search advice and guidance Individual Learning Accounts Up-skilling in specific sectors
Old	Re-engagement with learning Projects that motivate older workers to learn Re-skilling older workers.

4.6.1 Young Jobseekers

The case study evidence has highlighted three main intervention types that are deemed important elements for those ESF practitioners looking to support young people.

Promoting Work Experience: a critical issue identified by many as a key driver behind young people struggling to enter the labour market was around a lack of work experience to help them in their early quest for work. In seven out of the eight case studies (excluding Italy) ESF has been used to support young people to gain valuable experience of work, with projects being focused on a range of measures linked to internships, traineeships and other forms of direct work experience. In many instances, ESF has often given young participants a 'taster' of work (sometimes lasting as short as two weeks as in the case of Lithuania) that provides them with some first hand experience that will be useful in relation to them finding employment. The Production Schools example mentioned earlier in Austria provided 460 young people with practical experience of the 'world of work' through setting them up with temporary positions in local businesses lasting for between 2 and 8 months. Approximately a third of the young people gained a job with the employer who provided the work experience after the placement had finished but project stakeholders also stated that they were confident that virtually all of the participants had improved their employability as a consequence of the project.

Critical success factors that were linked to this intervention type were expressed in two main ways. The first was that the employer and the young person were both well supported throughout the work experience so that they had help in relation to the start up and on-going relationship between the young person and employer. Subsidising the employer was also seen as important in order to encourage them to take on a young person who, as was normally the case, had little work experience previously and who therefore often required a relatively large amount of support. Some employers did pass this subsidy back to the young person in the way of a wage but this was not deemed as being a critical factor in the success of this type of intervention.

Promoting progression into higher education: Although projects helping young people gain practical experience of work was seen as a vital ingredient to an ESF programme that wished to support this group there was also a strong focus on using ESF to reduce the early school drop out rates throughout Member States. The basic concept here was that the earlier young people drop out of school or finish their education the higher their chances of becoming and remaining unemployed. In all eight of the case study areas, OPs have supported projects that try and prolong a young person's involvement with the mainstream education system within the Member State. Many of those projects spoken to in the case studies tended to feel that mainstream education provision was not focused enough at encouraging and helping young people 'progress' into further education and that ESF had been used effectively on projects that have achieved this objective. The Space!ab project (Austria) mentioned earlier provides details of a specific project example that has been effective under this intervention type.

Critical success factors for projects under this intervention type were identified as twofold. The first was that projects should give those in higher education a 'taster' of what further education was like. Here pupils that spent some of their time in the colleges/ universities etc where they could eventually end up learning if they progressed was seen as a positive way in helping understand what further education was really like. The second factor that increased success was that those in danger of 'dropping out' of education were mentored by those in further education. This 'peer' mentoring (i.e. young person to young

person) was often done in an informal way but which helped to communicate the benefits and lifestyle attached to going to college or university in a way that a teacher or marketing material could never do.

Career guidance: the third intervention type that was deemed as an important element for programmes that wish to specifically support young people was around the provision of career guidance. A key focus of ESF projects aimed at young people in five out of the eight case studies (UK, Lithuania, Spain, Italy and Sweden) related to helping them to understand the options available to them and assisting them to understand the requirements (skills and educational levels) needed to enter or progress towards a certain career. Project Managers working on initiatives supporting young people often said that a high proportion of this target group had little idea of the career directions and options available to them and that ESF had successfully supported activities that have helped them choose a particular career path. Critical success factors within this intervention type were twofold. The first factor of success related to ensuring that there was sufficient information on what employers were looking for in the particular sector that the young person was interested in entering or progressing towards. Thus, information around skills, education attainment, experience and personal attributes were all required so that the young person had a clear idea of exactly what they needed to achieve by way of education, training and experience levels. The second factor of success linked to this intervention type was around having access to a careers advisor who supported the young person throughout higher education rather than supporting them right at the end of their schools lives.

4.6.2 Low skilled workers

The case studies have highlighted three main intervention types that are deemed important elements for those ESF practitioners looking to support the low skilled actively seeking to enter the labour market.

Job search advice and guidance: Advice and guidance in terms of job searching was often seen as a key need for the active low skilled. Four of the eight case studies (Spain, Italy, UK and Poland) included projects that helped this target group access information about job opportunities available in them that fitted their skills, education and experience levels. Projects falling under this intervention type included mentors to help the low skilled with job search activities, projects to help the low skilled with CV preparation/ job interview preparation and projects to help with the costs associated with attending interviews including travel expenses and clothing allowances. Critical success factors with this intervention type included a strong matching up process between the low skilled participant and the job itself to ensure that both were compatible with one another and that only the most relevant were put forward for the participant. The actual advice that was provided to the low skilled was delivered in a range of different ways including face to face, over the phone and on-line- with the later method being the one that was generating more interest in recent years amount those who were developing job search projects aimed at this target group (in the UK for instance a project had been funded to pilot an on-line advice project that matched participants to certain jobs – although this had not been evaluated as yet in order to understand its effectiveness).

Individual Learning Accounts: this type of intervention related to a number of individual projects that empowered the ESF participant to choose or 'purchase' the training that best suited their needs. Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) were a popular intervention type for the low skilled in five of the case study areas (Poland, Spain, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Spain). Much of the support revolved around voucher schemes that learners could redeem on a training course that they felt was most appropriate to

their needs. This had the obvious advantage of ensuring that the low skilled could make their own choice around the training they accessed and thus ensured that the training was led by the needs and demands of the participants rather than the supply of training available. The vouchers schemes funded by ESF that were focused on the low skilled were often accompanied by a training manual or inventory which helped to educate participants on the range and availability of training which they could access.

There was little information available about the effectiveness of ILAs more broadly that were specifically aimed at the low skilled who were actively seeking work. However, the main factors of success according to those who took part in the case studies was around ensuring that participants received guidance on what types of training would be helpful rather than simply assuming that individuals were able to make an informed choice from the often large selection of courses and training courses available to them. The other success factor related to linking the ILA intervention type to effective careers guidance so that the participant was again helped to choose training courses that specifically helped them enter or progress in the career that they were interested in.

Up-skilling in specific sectors: Stakeholders within seven out of the eight case studies stated that they had supported projects that helped to up-skill those with lower level skills levels through various projects linked to the overall training intervention type. Most of the projects that were included in this intervention theme had the overall aim of providing sector specific (rather than generic) skills development projects linked to those career areas which the active low skilled wanted to access. Sector specific training highlighted in the case studies were focused on a broad range of industrial sectors including agriculture, car manufacturing, health, sport and culture and electronics- interestingly not always seen as 'growth' sectors but sectors that would be relevant for the participants with the lower levels of skills to access). These gave specific skills sets to ESF participants and helped them to align themselves to the needs of local employers. In all of the case study areas ESF also supported basic skills provision (although this was not always specifically linked to the low skilled target group). Here ESF has helped participants to acquire the 'basic building blocks' required for employment that any employer would require, regardless of the sector that they belonged to. This element of the intervention type was seen as being particularly relevant to the younger low skilled who were seen as leaving education with a lack of skills linked to numeracy and literacy.

4.6.3 Older workers

The case studies have highlighted three main intervention types that are deemed important elements for those ESF practitioners looking to support older workers into the labour market to consider.

Re-engagement with learning: Six out of the eight case studies (Lithuania, Netherlands, Sweden, UK, Spain and Italy) all supported projects that helped this group re-engage with learning. There was recognition that many of the older workers had not undertaken any formal education or training for some time and that they needed support and encouragement to help them re-engage with the learning 'process'. A critical success factor here was in relation to recognising that older workers were not always confident with more modern learning techniques that were often delivered through the use of ICT. The project manager for the Lithuanian older persons project mentioned earlier in this section (Training for the over 50's on the improvement of accommodation) mentioned that older participants were sometimes put off by having to produce their course work using a computer rather than writing it by hand. Another factor of success linked to this intervention type related to older workers being taught together rather than

mixing them up with younger learners in particular. Again, many older workers were put off with the idea of having to learn with participants much younger than themselves who they deemed as being more capable, quicker learners and more familiar with the learning environment in general. The 'mature entrepreneur' project in Poland mentioned earlier in this section ensured that when older people pitched their project ideas they did it with other older people rather than with their younger counterparts who were felt to be a lot more confident and ambitious.

Projects to that motivate older workers to learn: the next main intervention type highlighted in five of the eight case studies (Austria, UK, Italy, Lithuania and Sweden) as being important elements to include in ESF programmes aimed at supporting older workers are those which teach them the 'benefits of learning and progression'. Project stakeholders consulted within the case studies stated it was important for older workers to understand 'why' it was beneficial for them to develop their skills further even though many were either already in employment or were sometimes coming towards the end of their working lives (so saw little point in investing time in developing a new skills set). Projects which helped encourage the benefits of retraining or career progression centred on working with employers as well as employees to help them take up existing training provision (some of which was ESF funded but much of which was not). Here the main objective of these projects was to educate older workers on the availability of existing training courses rather than to actually fund the training courses themselves thus increasing the take up of this provision by this target group. This included working with larger employers to ensure they promoted the availability of training courses to their workforce, but with a particular focus on those who had traditionally not taken up training opportunities who were predominately the older part of the workforce.

Re-skilling older workers: a key intervention type required for supporting older workers highlighted in five of the case studies (UK, Poland, Italy, Spain and Austria) was around re-skilling them and helping them to 'update' their skills. Six of the eight case studies that were studied as part of this work highlighted a focus on projects that helped older workers to expand their skills in order to make them more employable. The main focus of these intervention types was around helping older workers to react to new production methods with the 'training for the over 50's on the improvement of accommodation' project in Lithuania mentioned earlier providing a good example of this type of ESF intervention. Much of this intervention type for this target group was done 'on the job' and related to work based training as opposed to being delivered within a college environment. Basic skills training was not deemed as a critical element of this intervention type for this group although there was mention of a need to ensure ICT training was built into all of the training that was delivered. All of the examples of the intervention types mentioned in the case studies focused on re-skilling older workers within the sector which they already worked in rather than re-skilling them so that they could move into a completely new sector. According to project stakeholders consulted as part of the research, because older workers were generally coming towards the end of their working lives it was felt inefficient to attempt to retrain them in a completely new sector that had no link to the area which they originally worked with. This view was also held (according to project stakeholders) by the older workers themselves.

4.7 Importance of external influences attached to critical success factors

Throughout the consultations undertaken within each case study area it became clear that the critical success factors of the ESF projects supporting the three groups were only partly linked to the content,

design and delivery of the actual project itself. Although 'what' the project did and 'how' it was delivered played a part in its success, there were also other more external issues linked to the project that were equally, and in many cases, deemed more important to its success. Thus a voucher project that worked in, for instance, one part of Poland, would not necessarily work in Italy nor in-fact in another part of Poland- mainly because the economic circumstances (in terms of the supply of jobs for instance) were different and the likelihood of participants gaining employment at the end of the project were obviously affected. This means that many of the projects highlighted in this section are, to some extent, context specific and that factors external to the project were key drivers in its success.

The economic situation was often highlighted as the key driver of success that was external to the project. Although it was difficult for stakeholders to be specific in relation to how much the economic situation had affected the success of their project there was little doubt that the economic downturn was judged to make things more difficult in relation to helping the target groups into work as well as helping participants already in work to progress. Italy in particular highlighted this factor well with the percentages of ESF participants in the north and south who gained a job after being supported by the programme being significantly different despite their approaches being relatively similar. Those OPs in Northern regions of this Member State had levels of success (in relation to people moving into jobs, educational attainment etc) being between 2 and eight times higher than OPs in the South. 'Who' the project actually targeted was another obvious but key factor in terms of the success of the interventions aimed at the target groups- particularly in relation to the skills, educational attainment and levels of work experience the participants had. If the project was aimed at NEET groups who had learning difficulties and perhaps mental health issues then the success rates and value for money was obviously seen as being lower compared to an easier to reach target group.

4.8 Conclusions

In concluding this section there are a number of key points to consider:

This section has provided information on the benefits of ESF on the three target groups. It has also set out the factors which stimulate better LLL approaches in ESF more generally, success factors that help in relation to designing projects to support the three target groups as well as important intervention types that should be considered by those OPs who wish to specifically support these three groups.

In summary, the main findings of this section are as follows:

- Young jobseekers have benefited significantly from ESF in the past. This is mainly because the needs of this target group are generally perceived to be the greatest out of the three groups which this study is interested in, particularly in the context of the high levels of youth unemployment. The main impacts and benefits linked to this group are in relation to helping young people gain employment (where approximately 20-30% of participants accessed work soon after being supported), supporting young people to undertake further learning (so that they remain in the education system for longer) as well as helping young people with softer skills linked to issues such as self confidence.

- With the low skilled, ESF has also helped this group access employment with about 25-35% of the low skilled gaining employment soon after being supported by ESF. Not surprisingly, ESF has also helped this group improve their skills base particularly in relation to sector specific skills rather than generic skills linked to basic skills. ESF has also helped this target group in relation to improving their job security as well as helping them to progress in their present job. Again, ESF has also helped this second target group with softer skills linked to raising self esteem and self confidence.
- A lower proportion of older workers have moved into employment because of ESF compared to the other two target groups. The emphasis of impact for this group has seemed to be around helping them develop their skills and updating their skills in line with new and changing requirements of their employers.
- The critical success factors to promote a more LLL approach to ESF can be grouped as follows:
 - 1) the development of stronger systems to track progression of participants between ESF activities. This improves understanding of the extent to which participants progress through the system and/ or 'drop between the gaps' of projects;
 - 2) better referral systems between projects are critical to allow projects 'work together' to help participants along a pathway of support that is supported by a series of interconnected project activities;
 - 3) incorporating LLL targets and performance measures linked to the progression of a participant is important to stimulate a LLL approach;
 - 4) and finally a focus on personalised action plans to help participants plan for their long term needs and pathway has proved effective where such plans have been used.
- The study has also found certain intervention types that are deemed as important elements to include in programmes which specifically want to support the three target groups. They provide insight into the types of projects that are helpful in supporting the three groups although do not provide a detailed assessment of the effectiveness of each of them mainly due to the lack of evidence- particularly specifically around the three target groups. For young people intervention types that were seen as key were linked to promoting work experience, promoting progression into higher education and career guidance. For the low skilled job search advice and guidance, individual learning accounts and up-skilling in specific sectors were seen as being important intervention types to include. For the older worker then interventions linked to re-engaging them with learning, projects to motivate older workers to learn and projects linked to re-skilling this target group were seen as critical elements to support these groups.

5.0 Conclusions and recommendations

To conclude the analysis, we summarise our findings and recommendations in the form of answers to the four evaluation questions considered by the study as well as some concluding remarks that are pertinent as the Commission, in partnership with the Member States, prepare a new political framework and consider a new set of Operational Programmes for ESF in the 2014-2020 period.¹⁵⁷

Table 5.1 Summary Findings – Reach, Impact, Success Factors

	Reach	Impact	Success factors
Young Job Seekers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young people represent a high proportion of those benefitting from LLL activities, as well as ESF activities in general across 2000-2006 and 2007-2013 programme periods. Over one-third of participants in ESF LLL activities in the first part of the current programme period were between 16-24 (broadly comparable with ESF participation as a whole for this age group). Young people are proportionally over-represented in ESF LLL provision relative to their share of the working age EU27 population. In the first three years of the current programme ESF LLL activity will have reached somewhere in the region of 5 million young people participations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young jobseekers have benefitted significantly from ESF in the past which reflects a high level of prioritisation and perceived need in the context of high youth unemployment. The main impacts for this group relate to helping young people gain employment (where approximately 20-30% of participants accessed work soon after being supported), supporting young people to undertake further learning as well as helping young people with softer skills linked to issues such as self confidence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It cannot be discounted that success in reaching this target group may reflect relatively low target setting. Young people are generally a high priority and explicit focus within national level OPs, and Member State policies (responding to high youth unemployment) have therefore informed the focus on this target group, and ultimately effective reach. The national context and stages of LLL system development have influenced the nature of ESF LLL activity that has reached young people. There is evidence that a priority expressed at OP level has translated to actual activity which is appropriate and targeted at young people (dedicated streams of support in several MS).

¹⁵⁷ Since EQ1 relates to recommendations for the future rather than to conclusions, we present our response to that question after our responses to the other EQs.

	Reach	Impact	Success factors
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progress in meeting targets for provision with respect to young people indicates a good scale of reach for this target group (also highlighted by monitoring data). 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The form of ESF delivery arrangements is a significant influencing factor on effective targeting, and hence reach. Certain types of LLL support incorporating engagement approaches are found as an important way of attracting young people into LLL.
Low-skilled workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under the 2000-2006 programme over one third of participations were by the low-skilled. The reach of ESF to low-skilled workers varies hugely between Member States - with this group accounting for between 7% and 80% of participations in the early part of the 2007-2013 programme. This reflects a variation in skill levels and the influence of national policy priorities over OPs. There is a close correlation between the low skilled as a proportion of overall ESF participations in general (38%), and estimates of this group's percentage share of education and LLL activity (also 38%) for the current period. Relative to young people, there is more variation in the degree to which the low-skilled are stated as explicit target groups for LLL support across OPs in the case study countries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ESF has helped this group access employment with about 25-35% of the low skilled gaining employment soon after being supported by LLL interventions. ESF has helped this group improve their skills base particularly in relation job security, and in relation to sector specific skills rather than generic basic skills linked to basic skills. ESF has also helped this second target group with softer skills linked to raising self esteem and self confidence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although some approaches are clearly effective in reaching the low-skilled, the overall level of participation has apparently been irrespective of variations in prioritisation or targeting. The low-skilled group has been reached by ESF LLL often through a focus on providing employability support to disadvantaged groups in a recession, rather than a distinct focus on the low-skilled.

	Reach	Impact	Success factors
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritising the low skilled as a group to receive ESF support in general is relatively common, the degree to which this relates to LLL is also often unclear within OPs and wider research/evaluations. 		
Older workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proportion of older workers participating in LLL activities has been low for the 2000-2006 programme and the current period. • A low level of 'reach' of older workers with LLL activities is apparent but it is important to highlight that participation for this age group is low for ESF overall and not specifically for LLL activity. • In some cases, the low participation of older workers simply reflects the low levels of unemployment amongst this age group. • National policy priorities have often not supported ESF LLL investment in the older generation as a common focus is on improving compulsory and post-compulsory education to raise skill levels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lower proportion of older workers have moved into employment because of ESF compared to the other two target groups although this is partly because provision aimed at this group have tended to target those already in work. • The impact for this group has mainly related to the development and updating of skills in line with new and changing employer requirements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In some Member States where older workers have been encouraged into early retirement by passive labour market policies, a range of LLL provision is targeted specifically at 'reactivating' at older workers. • Even where older workers are recognised and prioritised, in many cases this has yet to translate into effective engagement for this group. Prioritisation alone is often not sufficient to ensure effective reach of this group and factors determining success in reaching older workers are not easily identifiable.

5.1 The extent of reach

The current ESF Regulation¹⁵⁸ offers explicit support for LLL, through active and preventive labour market measures which support the economic, employment and social goals of Member States' and the EU¹⁵⁹. Member States have taken advantage of the opportunity offered by ESF to devote large sums of money to LLL in the current period: nearly €32.5bn is earmarked to expenditure categories related to LLL,¹⁶⁰ representing 42% of the ESF budget for 2007-13. **As a consequence, ESF-supported LLL activities form a crucial part of the current programmes and have reached large numbers of individuals.** As chapter 3 illustrates, an estimated 5 million young people, 5.5 million individuals with low skills, and 576,000 older people benefitted from ESF supported LLL activity across the EU27 between 2007 and 2010. There will be some overlap between these figures, however, in that some young people will also be low skilled and likewise some older workers will be low skilled. This follows an estimated 33 million participations in ESF-supported LLL activities in the 2000-06 period.¹⁶¹

Within the current period, the extent to which ESF-supported LLL activities have reached the three target groups for this study reflects the reach of ESF in general. Young people account for around 35% of participations in ESF-supported LLL activities and for 29% of participations of ESF activities in general. Low-skilled people account for 38% of participations both in ESF-supported LLL activities (i.e. around 5.2m) and in ESF activities in general. Similarly, older workers account for less than 5% of participations in ESF-supported LLL activities and in ESF activities in general. Additional priorities have been employed in the OPs including women and people with disabilities and many of these are also either young people, low skilled or older workers.

These figures demonstrate that young people are over-represented amongst participants in ESF-supported LLL (and in ESF generally), whilst older workers are under-represented. Young people (aged 15-24 years) account for around the same proportion of the working age population and of the active population as do older workers (aged 55-64 years).¹⁶² Yet ESF supported LLL activities (and ESF activities in general) reach around six or seven times as many young people as older workers. This bias towards young people rather than older workers reflects national policy which places a very high priority on tackling youth unemployment and the problems associated with it. Whilst the retraining of older workers is becoming increasingly important to policymakers, it remains a lower priority than ensuring access to learning and a high initial level of competence for young people.

However, **the picture varies widely across the Member States reflecting differing national priorities.** Young people account for more than 40% of all ESF participations in Germany, Hungary and France (2007-10) and 30% or more in Spain, the UK, Poland, Malta, Belgium and Latvia. In contrast, young people account for only 10% of participations in Portugal and less than 10% in Greece. Older

¹⁵⁸ Regulation (EC) no 1081/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the European Social Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1784/1999.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid

¹⁶⁰ Categories numbered 62,64,72, 73 as defined in Annex IV of Council Regulation (EC) no 1083/2006

¹⁶¹ European Commission (2010), *The European Social Fund: Education and Lifelong Learning*, Background Report, summary fiche, p. 6

¹⁶² People aged 15-24 years account for 18.6% of the working age population and 11.7% of the active population, whilst those aged 55-64 years account for 17.5% of the working age population and 11.9% of the active population.

workers account for 12% or more of participations in Estonia and Sweden but less than 2% in Greece. The low-skilled account for 80% of ESF participations in Greece and more than 50% of participations in France, Germany, Luxembourg and Malta and Spain but fewer than 20% in Estonia, Finland, Netherlands, Lithuania, Romania, Cyprus, Sweden and Slovenia.

Moreover, the extent of reach does not reflect the severity of the skills or employment problems faced by each Member State. For example Poland features high levels of youth educational attainment as well as high youth participation in ESF. They also have relatively few people with low-skills, yet are reaching many low-skilled people through ESF. Spain suffers low youth educational attainment and a large number of low-skilled people but is proving successful in reaching young people and low-skilled people. In contrast, Italy features both low youth educational attainment and low youth participation in ESF. It also features a large number of people with low-skills, yet its reach amongst low-skilled people is below the EU average. In contrast Lithuania for example has relatively few low skilled workers and ESF has been successful in reaching them.

There are also regional variations in some of those countries that have multiple OPs:

- The regional Italian OPs follow a **common structure**, e.g. Priority Axis 1 is "Adaptability", Priority Axis 2 is "Employability", Priority Axis 3 is "Social Inclusion", etc. Similarly, the German regional OPs have a common structure, as do the regional Spanish OPs.
- In terms of **targeting**, the Italian regional OPs tend to state the same target groups in the text of the OP document: nearly all of them state that young people are a target group, and most state that older workers and low-skilled workers are. In terms of **activities**, all the Italian regional OPs include a strong focus on education, training and lifelong learning. Most of the regional OPs also include a broad spread of LLL activity and all of them support reforms in education and training systems and validation of competences, acquired skills and informal learning.
- In Spain, most regional OPs **target** young people but older people and people with low skill levels are only targeted by a minority of OPs. There appears to be considerable variation in the types of LLL **activities** mentioned in the OPs: only four mention VET, only two mention non-formal and informal learning, only around half mention HE, initial education or access to education.
- The German OPs all **target** young people and low-skilled workers but not older workers. Most OPs prioritise the following LLL **activities**: Vocational education and training; Learning and training for enterprises; Adult education; Initial education and Improved awareness and access to learning and training.

An interesting issue to consider is the differences in the level of success that ESF has had in reaching particular target groups across different Member States that face apparently similar contextual constraints and challenges. A case in point is provided by Italy and Spain. Each faces particular and well documented challenges in terms of high levels of youth unemployment, relative to other Member States. However, the degree of success that ESF has had in reaching young workers is greater in Spain. The study findings point to the targeting approach as key, as the focus on young people is a more explicit focus within the Spanish OPs. Furthermore, there is greater evidence certainly on the basis of OP review, that specific interventions were designed with young people in mind (for instance tailored training, vocational training aimed at young people and initiatives aimed at reducing early school leaving). As

such, Spain's success in reaching a greater proportion of young people through ESF lifelong learning support reflects both an initial aim to target this group, but also the design and delivery of interventions in line with this aim.

5.2 Successful targeting activities

A first determining factor in the extent of reach is **the nature and extent of prioritisation and targeting by OPs**, although this varies across the three groups. Young people feature as an explicit target group in many OPs and Priority Axes. Targeting has enabled large numbers of young people to be attracted into LLL provision across several OPs, though the success of targeting varies according to the contextual circumstances of each country and the type of support offered. For example, in some cases, targeting has allowed dedicated streams or programmes of provision for young jobseekers to be developed within broader Priority Axes. Within this target group there has been a strong focus on young people not in employment, education or training and/or young people from deprived and disadvantaged groups. As a group young people are more homogenous and easily identified compared to the low skilled target group and many have recently been in education or training (e.g. the early school leavers sub-group). In short this group - of the three - is generally easier to identify and target, where it is an ESF priority. It is also commonly a focus of national employment and training policies, reinforcing this targeting through ESF.

Explicit targeting of low-skilled people has been more uneven across the case study OPs. Instead, the targeting of young, unemployed or disadvantaged people in general has very often enabled low-skilled people to be reached. Moreover, the nature of much of the activity provided has amounted to an implicit targeting of low-skilled people and thus enabled them to be reached. For example, prioritisation of active labour market policy and inclusion approaches has led to many low-skilled people being reached – although the tendency has been for such approaches to focus on short-term support for employability rather than long-term pathways into LLL. A key issue for targeting low skilled workers is the wide diversity there is within the low skilled group, from those in employment to those who are somewhat away from employment and who have not worked for some time, if at all.

In the case of older workers, the influence of prioritisation and targeting on the extent of reach is often complex and uncertain. This group is the furthest away - in years - from formal education and training, and for those who have been in employment for most of their working lives they are also often furthest away - again in years - from an interaction with employment and careers advisors. Their interaction with LLL is often the result of a significant change in circumstances forcing the need to retrain or secure new employment. LLL activities have generally been targeted at older workers to a lesser extent than for other people; as a consequence, older workers' rate of participation in LLL (ESF and non-ESF funded) is below the average rate for the workforce as a whole. Even where older workers are prioritised or targeted for support involving LLL activity, this is mostly to a lesser degree than is the case for young people and low-skilled people. Targeting at the level of the OP has not necessarily translated into specific projects or activities aimed at older workers at the level of delivery. As a consequence, older workers have more often been served by LLL provision that is targeted at the workforce or at unemployed people in general.

A second determining factor in the extent of reach is **the nature of delivery arrangements and mechanisms**. In the case of young people, approaches to ESF contracting may affect the extent to which young people are reached by LLL provision. For example, outcome-based funding models have worked

positively (by encouraging a focus on successful attainment and progression) or negatively (by encouraging a focus on more able participants and the neglect of less able ones). Multi-disciplinary teams and partnerships have been found to be particularly important for young people with complex needs who require a "package" of support rather than a single course of learning. Similarly, support for some low-skilled people has been more effective when the delivery system features a wider supporting infrastructure for such individuals rather than isolated interventions. In the case of older workers, it would appear that the low priority traditionally given to this group by mainstream national policy and provision and by ESF means that dedicated infrastructure and delivery mechanisms have much less often been put in place. Again, this has resulted in older workers more often being served by LLL provision that is targeted at the workforce or at unemployed people in general rather than by dedicated provision.

Certain types of learning activities have proved successful in reaching the target groups. For young jobseekers, these have included:

- Intensive support to attract and retain young people in learning;
- Activities designed to be engaging and of interest to young people;
- Addressing barriers to education and training, particularly for disadvantaged or disaffected young people;
- Personalised and tailored packages of support (including individual action planning) that facilitate pathways to further learning or employment;
- Ongoing assistance to address issues beyond learning, e.g. confidence and motivation; and
- Effective support systems.

For low-skilled workers, successful activities have included:

- Initial skills assessment as part of broader introductory sessions, followed by effective referral to appropriate provision;
- Intensive one-to-one support to build confidence and open up other learning opportunities;
- Development of life skills, communication skills, etc.; and
- Activities targeted at job-related skills or qualifications, e.g. in the workplace or leading to accreditation and awards.

For older workers, successful activities have included:

- Learning activities that involve a social element, as a means of engaging and developing camaraderie amongst older unemployed people who may be isolated;
- Ongoing support to help with loss of confidence and absence from labour market;
- Flexible and varied network of referral options for further training;
- Focus on specific and up-to-date skills provision, particularly work-related; and
- Offering a menu of provision options.

For LLL activities supported by the ESF the twin challenges are the recruitment and retention of participants (the latter being a particular concern for those participants who are furthest away from employment, often requiring considerable levels of support, and for whom regular attendance is itself a key achievement). The overall figure for participations show that reach is not an issue - certainly for

young people and the low skilled - in so far as the numbers of people within each target group is concerned. A focus on workers and those recently out of work as a consequence of the economic crisis is likely to make recruitment easier. Equally, as the volume of potential participants - in all three target groups - rises the need to increase demand for LLL provision through extensive efforts to engage participants should diminish. This is likely to mean that the focus on retention and effective delivery of support, as opposed to engagement, becomes more significant.

5.3 Impact on the three groups

Across the case study countries, ESF has supported a diverse range of LLL activities and achieved an diverse range of impacts for the three target groups, though impacts vary across the three target groups and the project context in some very important ways.

A first tangible impact has been the **development of skills and qualifications**. The evidence suggests that a high proportion of young people and low-skilled people have gained skills and qualifications as a result of ESF-supported LLL activities. Where data was available across the case study countries, it suggests that more than 70% of young people and of low-skilled people gained qualifications. As well as formal qualifications, young people and low-skilled people have developed vocational and/or other work-related skills. In the case of young people, developing skills and qualifications has been seen as a key barrier to employment. As well as gaining formal qualifications, young people have developed skills through work experience placements taking a diversity forms and lasting from one week to several months. For low-skilled people, the priority has very often been to develop basic literacy, numeracy and ICT skills, as much as vocational skills. In contrast to support for the other two target groups, support for older workers has tended to focus more on updating skills rather than providing basic skills or formal qualifications. Indeed, the case study countries have tended to perceive older workers as being relatively well-qualified compared to the other two groups but very often having outdated skills. ESF support has therefore tended to prioritise development of skills related to new processes, technologies and ICT requirements for older workers in their current job rather than retraining older workers for new jobs in new sectors.

A second tangible impact has been **positive employment outcomes for participants**. ESF-supported LLL activities have tended to focus on unemployed young people and very often those that are far from the labour market, rather than young people already in employment. This reflects the current policies of Member States, which tend to prioritise the entry of young people into work rather than their progression once in work. Many of those young people have lacked qualifications and work experience and also suffered from a range of personal issues. The tendency has therefore been to use LLL to increase employability of young people and promote their progression towards employment rather than use LLL to facilitate a direct entry into employment. As a consequence, around 20-30% of young people participating in ESF-supported LLL was reported to have entered into employment, though the extent of employment outcomes have varied across the case study countries. It is difficult to provide a context for this level of employment but our stakeholder consultations suggested that this level of employment outcome was positive, especially given the characteristics of many of the participants (e.g. a generally low level of skills and individuals in some cases furthest away from entering employment). Many project managers reported that their overall goal was to help young people progress into additional ESF or non-ESF provision as opposed to assisting them directly into a job after they had left the project. The employment rate therefore

needs to be seen as a measure of immediate or short term outcomes with the likelihood of increasing levels of employment over time, aided by the cumulative impact of LLL.

The evidence in respect of low-skilled people suggests that the focus has similarly been on using LLL to increase skills and employability of low-skilled people in general rather than to facilitate immediate employment outcomes. As a result, it is estimated that around 25-35% of low-skilled people participating in ESF-supported LLL provision have gained employment after ESF support. In contrast, LLL support for older workers has tended to be for people in employment rather than for the unemployed, in part reflecting the lower unemployment rates of older workers. As a consequence, the evidence suggests that a much lower percentage of older workers have entered employment after participation in LLL than is the case for the other two target groups.

Impacts on the three groups have gone beyond "traditional" measures of success to include **improved soft skills, increased confidence and motivation for all target groups, and for both those who are workers and/or economically active, and those further away from employment**. For young people, in particular, improved confidence was reported to be one of the most significant impacts and crucial in setting participants on the way to a qualification and/or entry into employment. LLL provision is also reported to have helped bring some "structure" to the lives of young people who may have complex personal problems, e.g. related to early school-leaving, crime and/or addiction. Confidence-raising has equally been a key ambition and impact of much LLL provision for older workers. Such individuals may not lack life skills but were often observed to lack the confidence to re-enter learning, particularly where they had not been in a formal learning environment for many years. LLL was reported to be particularly effective when providers allowed older workers to learn at a pace that best fits their needs.

Participants' journeys into sustainable employment are often long term and require a series of ESF and non ESF supported interventions. The evidence suggests that **ESF provision and other provision together do not yet amount to a joined-up pathway of support for the three target groups**. Key problems were reported to include inadequate signposting and long-term planning, limited impetus to refer participants on, and monitoring systems that fail to measure progression effectively. It would appear that very often the responsibility and initiative to find follow-on learning opportunities remains with the individual. However, ESF was very often reported to have generated intangible benefits in terms of making young people more aware of the benefits of learning as well as tangible benefits in terms of helping some young people progress into further learning. Where data existed, it suggested that more than 30% of young people progressed on to some form of further learning beyond the period of ESF support.

One further impact for the target groups, which can be seen as a consequence of increased skill levels and confidence, is that of **improved job security, better salaries and progression into more highly-skilled positions**. These tended not to be reported for young people, where the focus has been more on getting participants into employment rather than progression for those in employment. However, there was evidence that many low-skilled people and older workers benefiting from LLL provision had moved into more highly-skilled work with their current employer or (to a lesser extent) with a new employer. Increased skill levels were also reported to have been a key factor in improving job security and wages for low-skilled people and older workers. There is also anecdotal evidence that ESF may have helped change the mindset of some employers who had previously been sceptical about the benefits of investing in LLL for older workers but who now recognised the potential returns from improved productivity.

5.4 Gender issues

There are some gender imbalances that mainly stem from labour market conditions and the nature of ESF training provision (some of which has a potential gender bias (e.g. a focus on manual trades). The study provided no evidence of intentional gender discrimination and there are examples of projects designed to tackle traditionally low female participation rates. In terms of the case study countries the Netherlands stands out with a very strong participation bias in favour of males. The reasons are complex and long standing. A lack of child care provision relative to some other countries is one factor, whilst cultural factors are also important. Finally, measures by the Dutch government to readdress the balance have been less successful than anticipated although there is no clear cut evaluation evidence on the reasons why.

5.5 Key success factors in achieving impact

Given that ESF supported LLL already reaches significant numbers of EU citizens the overall factor in achieving and improving levels of impact concerns delivery rather than reach. Evidence from the case study countries has identified a number of success factors in the provision of LLL with ESF support. These should be seen as complementing the success factors in reaching the target groups, as described above. They fall into three main categories.

First, there are a number of key success factors around the design of **delivery arrangements and mechanisms**, which when considered alongside the success factors relating to reach can be seen as helping ESF to provide learning pathways rather than mere instances of learning. Those relating to impact are:

- Managing and tracking progression of participants between ESF activities, in order to better understand (and thus plan for and facilitate) effective learning journeys;
- Referral systems between different LLL activities, being prioritised by OPs and built into the design of programme and project delivery arrangements;
- Output or performance targets linked to LLL, for example, relating to progression into further learning, increased confidence, soft skills gained, as well as to qualifications; and
- Encouraging an LLL culture and ethos amongst employers and individuals, such that they increasingly perceive the benefits of continued learning, both through activities within LLL projects and also through discrete activities (e.g. projects, communication and valorisation activities, etc.) dedicated to that aim.

Second, a number of critical success factors have been identified in relation to the **design of provision**. These are:

- Personal action plans for the long-term, which enable ESF to respond to individuals' holistic long-term needs, rather than to short-term (un-)employment problems, particularly where individuals' needs are multiple and complex;

- Similarly, long-term and multi-faceted interventions that constitute a "package" of support for learners, ideally in conjunction with a personal action plan for the long term; in particular, there is often a need to bring together the formal learning with support for life skills and active labour market policies more generally;
- Provision of life skills as a complement to vocational or work-related skills, particularly where individuals are distant from the labour market and/or have complex needs;
- Striking the right balance in the formality of provision, which will vary according to the needs of the particular cohort of learners; and
- Allowing participants a significant degree of control and choice in the learning that they undertake, for example, through the use of voucher systems, so that individuals can receive the most appropriate form of learning, e.g. in line with any personal action plan.

Finally a review of common interventions to support the three target groups provides some pointers to 'what works best'.

- Young jobseekers: given that accessing a first job is a key issue for young jobseekers activities that provide work experience have been beneficial. Career guidance and activities to support progression into higher education, thereby reducing early school leaving have also been seen as important and effective interventions. Personal action plans for the long-term, which enable ESF to respond to individuals' holistic long-term needs, rather than to short-term (un-)employment problems, particularly where individuals' needs are multiple and complex;
- Low skilled workers: the key interventions are those that provide specific job search and personalised advice and guidance (including the use of Individual Learning Accounts where an ESF participant can 'purchase' training suited to their needs). Measures to up skill and individual learning accounts to allow participants to manage their LLL experience were also highlighted in the research. A key factor is ensuring that there is a strong match between the requirements of a job and the profile of the low skilled worker. Job matching and activities (e.g. CV support, interview preparation etc.) to help participants improve their match to specific jobs have been a feature of LLL for low skilled workers. Helping to meet the costs of travel to interviews has also been a feature of LLL provision;
- Older workers: The key interventions here concern measures to motivate and re-engage older workers with the labour market, in addition to re-skilling projects. This has included activities to improve levels of confidence which has included specific group working for older workers (on the basis they can feel more 'comfortable' working with participants from within their target group). Collaborative working with employers, where those employers emphasis the value placed on the experience and attributes of older workers has also proved effective.

5.6 European Added Value

We suggest here some of the areas where European Added Value has occurred, using the four dimensions of added value set out in the DG Employment guidance.¹⁶³ Given that the stated purpose of ESF is to support the policies of Member States, our focus here is not so much on the overall effectiveness of ESF but on the added value in relation to those policies.

¹⁶³ European Commission DG Employment, Affairs and Equal Opportunities, (2008), *Methodological note: A framework to describe the Community Added Value of ESF*.

In terms of volume effects, **ESF has supported LLL activities for large numbers of the three target groups**. The case study evidence suggests that many of these outputs represent a substantial contribution to the volume of participants served by mainstream provision in the Member States. Nevertheless, it is important that this positive finding is balanced by evidence suggesting that in some cases the risk is that ESF, in effect, replaces national funding. In addition additional provision funded through ESF reflects the way in which ESF is used in some countries (e.g. the use of ESF to support and enhance the level of mainstream provision in Lithuania, Sweden and elsewhere). In the absence of a counterfactual it is not possible to quantify what would have happened to LLL provision in the absence of ESF but there can be little doubt that the main impact would be a significant reduction in provision, and in LLL opportunities for young people, low skilled workers and older people.

With regards to scope effects, **ESF has extended the groups covered by mainstream provision or reached groups not well served by such provision in at least five countries**. In addition, ESF has widened the types of provision offered to participants in mainstream programmes. In at least five countries, it has been reported that ESF enables additional LLL services to be offered that are typically more flexible and customised and thus more appropriate to the needs of individual participants.

In terms of innovation effects, the evidence suggests that **ESF is not generating extensive European Added Value related to innovation, agenda-setting and learning (role) effects**. None of the case studies revealed a policy intention to use ESF to encourage innovation, agenda-setting and learning in any comprehensive or systematic way. Where innovation has been reported, it tends to consist of fairly isolated instances at project level, for example, relating to tools and approaches. Such innovations have reportedly been adopted by mainstream providers, though such mainstreaming tends to be localised, for example within the same provider or locality. Moving forwards to the new programming period and the significant challenges posed by the economic crisis it could be argued that the time is less for innovation and more for solid delivery of what has been shown to have worked best.

With regards to process effects, the research did not identify any policy intention to generate process effects in any systematic or comprehensive way in the case study countries (other than through ESF support to systems and structures). **Where the research has identified process effects, these tend to be in the form of better governance of LLL activities**. Whilst evidence is limited, it does appear that the extent of the process effects in any Member State varies according to the degree of “maturity” of its delivery system.

5.7 Monitoring and Evaluation

In order to measure the impact of ESF supported LLL in the future there are improvements that can be made to ensure a greater consistency of data, and stronger monitoring and evaluation processes. Particular weaknesses at present include:

- Differences in definitions for LLL and the three target groups;
- Gaps in the collection of SFC data;
- An inability to cross tabulate lifelong learning with the participations data by target group;

- Partial survey data at the Member State levels of ESF participants and then normally for a maximum of six months after completion of ESF provision (in Poland survey data has also been taken at 18 months to measure long term effects);
- Variable coverage of LLL in ESF evaluations.

Survey data is due to improve for the new programming period with specific requirements set out in the Annex to the regulation. There is also a greater emphasis on impact measurement and ongoing discussions over the use of counterfactual analysis to provide a scientific assessment of impact. Whether the counterfactual can be effectively used – and in a variety of circumstances - in respect of ESF, given the rich requirements for data, has still to be demonstrated. However, the debate is raising interest in monitoring and assessment of ESF supported LLL, and new ways of determining impacts.

5.8 Recommendations

The discussions over the next round of OPs allows for a re-assessment of the value of LLL and the support the ESF can provide. At an operational level it also allows for improvements to be made to the reach and impact of ESF supported LLL and to the measurement of its benefits. LLL has an important role to play in the economic recovery of Europe but this will require investment and patience to deliver longer term benefits, resisting the pressures for 'quick fix' solutions. Cuts in national budgets and the understandable desire to actively and quickly reduce unemployment, particularly for young job seekers, does not always sit easily with the objectives of LLL.

The research reinforces many of the messages from previous studies. Many of the findings are what might be expected but it is nevertheless timely to remind Member States of the critical success factors that can enhance the reach and impact of LLL.

5.8.1 Recommendations to improve reach

1. The research highlights the links between prioritisation by Member States - as set out in the OPs - and the level of participations by each target group. It is not the sole factor but the message prioritisation sends is reflected in targets and the contracts entered into with ESF providers. The new OPs will be written with full knowledge of the economic crisis, provide the opportunity to utilise the best labour market and demographic intelligence, and to link this to the ambitions of the Europe 2020 strategy and national (Member State) priorities. **The Commission should ensure that more stringent tests are in place to ensure that priorities reflect labour market information, trend and projection/forecast data**, as well as possible. A greater level of clarity and consistency over the definitions of the target groups, especially the low skilled would also be helpful.
2. The information supporting the prioritisation (or not) for older workers, may not reflect the material available. Given the growing importance of older workers as a percentage of the future labour market there could be stronger **planning and research to assess the scale and characteristics of the older workers group, their LLL needs and the types of provision that will attract, retain and provide effective support to this target group.**

3. Targeting, tailored to specific groups can help to enhance reach, especially amongst those groups who have proved more difficult to recruit to ESF projects (older workers in general, early school leavers, low skilled and older women in some countries). **Group specific targeting and recruitment should be encouraged.** This may sit alongside group specific provision, where the 'environment' will help to attract and retain participants (placing participants alongside others with similar characteristics and objectives).
4. The research shows that a menu of provision together with structured links into additional LLL support can attract and help to retain participants. **Where possible, choice should be provided that includes educational tasters** (further and higher education) **and opportunities to develop entrepreneurial skills and establish new businesses** (for older workers and some low skilled groups).

5.8.2 Recommendations to improve impact

1. The research suggests that focused support, tailored to specific groups, often with smaller numbers of participants and delivered in an informal (non classroom) manner can prove to be more effective than the more generic, all-age provision. A choice of activities is also beneficial. Overall, whilst this approach is more expensive and requires additional capacity for one-to-one/small group working, it will deliver a stronger LLL experience. **More focused and tailored provision should be considered and delivered (the report provides some good practice examples), alongside more generic provision.**
2. There will be a stronger and more sustainable impact if ESF providers fully embrace the LLL concept, many but not all do. Some will see their role as to simply supply vocational training. As the provider is the main interface with the participants there is **considerable benefit if providers can be a 'one stop shop' for LLL with life skills, advice, personal support, job search and careers guidance alongside vocational training and other activities (e.g. support for new businesses).** Where this is not practical and appropriate providers should assist in the referral, monitoring and tracking of participants, ensuring they do not get 'lost in the system'.
3. Payment systems are a key factor in determining the strategies and activities. If systems are geared solely to employment targets they can miss the broader elements of LLL. **Where payment is linked to achievement the payments should reflect a range of factors including further training and qualifications and completion of ESF courses.** For this to be effective project monitoring systems need to have the data to allow for assessments to be made (this is likely to include post-provision participant survey data).
4. LLL involves a range of provision, either sourced in one place (see recommendation 2) or from a range of agencies. It might be continuous (ideally) or sporadic. It is important that participants can be tracked effectively and can follow a 'pathway' towards further training and employment. From the research **more investment is included in most Member States to improve tracking and ongoing support for ESF LLL participants.** This could lead to a choice between doing more intense work with smaller numbers of participants at the expense of volume provision.