Innovation through the European Social Fund
(Follow-up 1)
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1. The European Social Fund: providing employment and equal opportunities

The European Social Fund (ESF) is the main financial tool through which the European Union supports the development of people’s skills in order to improve their prospects for work.

For the current programming period 2000–06, the Fund supports measures to prevent and combat unemployment and to develop human resources and social integration into the labour market. By doing so, it promotes not only a high level of employment and equality between men and women, but also sustainable development and economic and social cohesion. Furthermore, the Fund contributes to putting the European employment strategy’s priorities into practice.

The ESF’s five key policy fields are:

1. Developing and promoting active labour market policies to combat and prevent unemployment;
2. Promoting equal opportunities for all in accessing the labour market, with particular emphasis on those exposed to social exclusion;
3. Promoting and improving training, education and counselling as part of lifelong learning policy;
4. Promoting a skilled, trained and adaptable workforce, innovation and adaptability in work organisation, developing entrepreneurship and conditions facilitating job creation, and enhancing skills and boosting human potential in research, science and technology; and
5. Specific measures to improve women’s access to, and participation in, the labour market.

In addition, the ESF encompasses three horizontal issues:

1. The promotion of local employment initiatives (including territorial pacts for employment);
2. The social dimension and employment in the information society; and
3. Equal opportunities for men and women (as part of the drive for mainstreaming equal opportunity policies).

A. Article 6 measures

As foreseen in Article 6 of the ESF regulation, a part of the overall ESF budget has been reserved for innovative measures, commonly referred to as ‘Article 6’ measures. The types of projects supported include pilot projects, studies, and activities for the exchange of experience and information.

The added value of the innovative measures carried out under Article 6 stems from the lessons that can be drawn from these innovative approaches, which allow for experimentation with new ideas and the demonstration of new hypotheses. This ranges from the possibilities of identification of good practice, to the exchange of knowledge and experience that can be transferred to the ESF mainstream.

1 More information on the ESF can be found on the following website: http://europa.eu.int/esf
2 More information on ‘Article 6’ measures can be found on the following website: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/esf2000/article_6_en.htm
B. Themes covered until 2006

Between 2000 and 2006, the European Union will make available 0.40 % of the total ESF budget for projects that provide a testing ground to develop and disseminate:

- Diverse new forms of work organisation that prepare the transition to a knowledge-based economy and society or that identify new approaches for emerging fields and renew outdated work practices; and
- New and integrated approaches to labour market, employment and vocational training issues.

One of the lessons learned from the past programming period points to the merit of regrouping activities within themes. Thus, a thematic approach will be followed during the period 2000–06. Whilst innovative measures must operate within themes complying with the five policy fields of the ESF Regulation and the three horizontal issues that cut across these fields, the definition of thematic fields must remain sufficiently flexible to cope with new areas of activity and innovation.

Another lesson from the past programming period is that calls for proposals work best if they have a well-defined context and a clear purpose. This facilitates the selection and capitalisation processes. Thus, during the period 2000–06, innovative measures focus on the following three themes:

1. Adaptation to the new economy within the framework of social dialogue;
2. Local employment strategies and innovation; and
3. Innovative approaches to the management of change.

In addition and to further support the dissemination and mainstreaming of the results of innovative projects, the Commission launched a call for proposals intended to facilitate the transfer and dissemination of innovative approaches and methods that have been developed by Article 6 projects during the period 2000–06.

The 41 projects listed in this brochure fall under the theme of local employment strategies and are second in a series of projects implemented under this theme. Projects selected under the themes “Management of change” and “Transfer and Dissemination” will be the subject of further follow-up brochures.

3 A description of the first batch of projects run under this theme can be found in the predecessor to this publication, published in 2004 under the title “Innovation through the ESF”, ISBN: 92-894-6110-1.
2. Local employment strategies

Success often depends on strong and effective partnerships. While the European employment strategy previously relied on efforts at European and national level, there is a growing awareness that the objectives the Union has set itself to improve performances in the area of employment cannot be achieved without greater participation at regional and local levels. In March 2000, the Lisbon European Council created a strategy stressing the importance of interaction between economic, employment and social policies and of the mobilisation of all players, and established a reinforced open method of coordination. This coordination is described as a ‘fully decentralised approach, applied in line with the principle of subsidiarity in which the Union, the Member States, the regional and local levels, as well as the social partners and civil society, will be actively involved, using variable forms of partnership’.

In April 2000, the Commission called on European institutions, and on all those interested in local development, to reflect on the issues raised in its communication ‘Acting locally for employment — A local dimension for the European employment strategy’. The Commission initiated a six-month consultation, ending with the Strasbourg conference organised by the French presidency in December 2000. The consultation highlighted broad political consensus as to the desirability of strengthening the local dimension of the EES. While the local development of employment was once considered as marginal compared to macro-economic and structural strategies, it is now widely accepted that the mobilisation of local bodies can considerably contribute to the success of employment policies.

These advances in employment strategies are based on project experiences of the past, such as the previous programming period (1994–99). Projects that have focused on exploring a clearly defined theme appear to generate more tangible outcomes and products such as guidelines and recommendations that can be applied immediately in practice. In addition, exchanges of experience and networking between bodies working in similar situations have proved to bring significant added value to projects. They have also increased the potential to mainstream innovative ideas into the European Social Fund. With the provision of information, the importance of informing monitoring committees, national ESF administrations including regional and local governments, social partners, third sector organisations and Commission ESF geographical desks of the development of the projects and programmes cannot be overestimated. The pilots also demonstrated the potential added value of accompanying the projects with an ongoing evaluation in which the projects are to participate.
The aim of this theme is to support innovative approaches in the development of local employment strategies in order to assist the implementation of EES at a local level. A call for proposals, entitled ‘Local employment strategies and innovation’, was published in October 2001 and the deadlines for applications were in February 2002 for the first round and in January 2003 for the second round. Of the first selection round, a total of 44 proposals were retained for ESF co-funding. Projects started running at the end of 2002 and were finalised in early 2005. After selection of the second round in 2003, 41 projects were accepted for grants. They all started at the end of 2003 and will be finalised late 2005/early 2006.

Local Employment Strategy (LES) projects include the following activities:

• Analysis of the existing local employment situation;
• Development of partnerships at local level, which include relevant bodies from different sectors;
• Relevant studies and research to prepare the local employment strategies;
• Development and implementation of the local employment strategies;
• Monitoring, benchmarking and evaluation; and
• Exchange of information, dissemination and networking.

Though each employment strategy will vary according to specific local or regional situations, it should, however, contain a number of common elements to ascertain a level of consistency to help to identify and compare good practices for the mainstream ESF and European employment strategy. Therefore,

• Each employment strategy must be developed, refined and implemented through a specific partnership, which includes representatives from as many of the relevant bodies as possible;
• Each local employment strategy must be based on a diagnosis of the local labour market and employment situation (local employment baseline analysis);
• The eventual strategy, or strategies, must address each of the four pillars of the European employment strategy;
• The gender dimension/equal opportunities should be integrated into the local employment strategy at all stages, including the baseline analysis and diagnosis of the territory;
• All possible funding sources must be taken into consideration. The local employment strategy should act as an overarching framework for all employment activities in the territory.

As the projects must be aimed at applying the priorities of the national action plan in a given territory in the form of local/regional employment strategies, two types of strategies are possible:
**Introduction**

- **Type 1** is to develop and implement a **single strategy** in a territory corresponding to NUTS level 2 or NUTS level 3, that demonstrates coherence with the existing regional and/or national action plans.

- **Type 2** is to develop and implement a **coherent series** of individual strategies at a lower territorial level within the NUTS level 2 or level 3 territory for which the applicant is responsible. The project could, for example, propose to develop 10 different local strategies within the territory, coordinated by the applicant organisation.

From the results so far, it is evident that the projects have had an impact on the local and/or regional employment situation. This impact is probably not yet tangible for the individual person seeking employment, as most strategies have worked on the employment context rather than on creating concrete jobs. However, by improving the context, concrete jobs will be created in the future.

For many regions, it is the first time ever that a common and concerted approach has been taken on employment matters. Innovative approaches have been created and already implemented to some extent, thus benefiting not only the regions, but also the individual citizen.

Working networks among the key players have been created to bring into line a multitude of actions, which were often unconnected or even counter-productive. The financial tools available have been identified, classified and will be used in a more strategic way than before.

Finally, employment has moved to the forefront of the political agenda, not only at the regional, but also at the local level, as actors at these levels of government have come to realise that they are best placed to translate European and national strategies into action on the ground.

The LES call has resulted in developmental cooperation, higher conceptual integration among policy fields and improved regional performance in the development of integrated employment solutions.
Projects (local employment strategy)

Regions covered by ESF Article 6 projects developing local employment strategies

- NUTS–2 regions *
- NUTS–3 regions *

* NUTS: Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics.
Ensuring a better match between job seekers and available vacancies is the main objective of a project run by the Brussels regional employment service. Under the scheme, a new system is being set up to regularly survey the human resource needs of each firm in the region and help to fulfil them.

The Brussels region has an employment rate of just 55%, below both the Belgian and European averages. High levels of youth and long-term unemployment are of particular concern. In addition, half of all jobs in the region are occupied by non-residents who commute to the capital. Dominated by the service sector, the region counts a high proportion of foreigners among its population.

Meeting the changing personnel requirements of employers and placing more of the region’s job seekers in work are therefore the primary aims of the ‘coordinated survey of Brussels businesses’ project. Through regular surveys by a team of experts supported by ad hoc studies, they seek to gain a better understanding of firms’ staffing needs. This enables the employment office to ensure a better match between supply and demand in the regional labour market.

In concrete terms, the new service plans to make contact with every employer in the region over the duration of the project – a total of 35,000 firms – and to follow this up annually. Small businesses are also included in the project. The regional employment office works together with local associations to coordinate work in priority zones. It aims to improve its service both to employers and job seekers by being more responsive to firms’ needs on the one hand, and supplying more job vacancies to individuals on the other.

By opening up communication channels, the surveying exercise will help the employment service develop more lasting relationships with regional employers. The project intends to create durable structures for serving businesses and job seekers, which will continue to operate in the longer term.

**Project name**
Coordinated survey of Brussels businesses

**Project duration**
November 2003 to October 2005

**EU co-funding**
EUR 1,295,345 (64.40 %)

**Total budget**
EUR 2,011,294

**Partners**
Mission locale d’Ixelles pour l’emploi
Mission locale jeunes de Saint-Gilles
Mission locale Forest
Mission locale Molenbeek
Mission locale de Bruxelles
Mission locale de Saint-Josse
Mission locale d’Etterbeek
OOTB
Mission locale de Schaerbeek

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A partnership of local authorities in Flanders is developing an employment action plan for the Mechelen region designed to involve all social and economic actors. The strategy includes a series of local plans to promote employment among excluded groups.

Situated between the two most important economic centres of Belgium (Brussels and Antwerp), the Mechelen region enjoys a relatively strong socio-economic position. The employment rate – at 67.5% - is higher than the European and Flemish averages. Nevertheless, significant gaps exist between population groups, with high levels of joblessness among migrants, the disabled, young people and older workers.

Go-for-it is trying to bridge these gaps by putting together a regional employment strategy in partnership with 13 local authorities and involving employers, trade unions, the educational world and the social economy. The idea is to harness the combined strength of the actors to create a dynamic and proactive employment policy.

Three main strands make up the regional strategy: drawing up integrated local action plans for employment; using pilot projects to stimulate participation of excluded people in the labour market; and engaging employers and educational bodies, for example through the introduction of company ‘diversity plans’.

By using innovative measures, Go-for-it tests projects which could provide added value to the existing employment initiatives in the region.

The project aims to increase the employment rate among disadvantaged groups in the region by 3% within two years and create at least 30 new jobs for these groups in service sectors. A Go-for-it charter has also been introduced, which the project hopes will be signed by at least 50 employers.

Communication of the project’s objectives and activities to citizens and stakeholders is assured by a website, a newsletter and regular events.

GO-FOR-IT – An integrated employment strategy
In response to different socio-economic challenges, the Danish county of Storstrøm is developing a regional employment strategy that will provide a framework for future initiatives. Bringing together different interest groups, the project will test and disseminate new measures and policy ideas for inclusion in the strategy.

Storstrøm county is situated to the south of the greater Copenhagen area in Denmark. Like many other regions, it is suffering from an ageing population and shrinking workforce. Moreover, young people often leave the county to pursue a higher education and there are few high-quality jobs to attract them back. Agriculture has been an important part of the region’s employment and business structure, and the rural economy is struggling to adjust to policy reforms. Added to this, women are still less likely to be employed than men, especially in entrepreneurial or managerial posts. Furthermore unemployment among the immigrant and refugee populations remains consistently higher than among the native Danish citizens.

In line with the issues identified, the strategy has six key aims: retaining older workers; improving the position of immigrants in the job market; supporting entrepreneurship; increasing women’s employment levels; strengthening the rural economy; and raising professional levels. It will combine policies and proposals for concrete action in the fields of education, business and the labour market. Such a regional employment strategy will provide a point of reference for future efforts, thereby ensuring their coherence and accountability to different interest groups.

To tackle these complex challenges, the regional administration is developing a comprehensive employment strategy. Key actors from the public and private sector are being brought together in working groups to pool their expertise and ideas. Some of the initiatives emerging will be tested through pilot projects and the results discussed and promoted through three regional conferences. The overall strategy will thus take account of the projects’ experience and the expertise and interests of a range of different actors.
An industry specific-approach to addressing the skills gap

In an innovative approach to tackling the skills deficit and unemployment, the county of Viborg in Denmark is encouraging companies to form ‘industrial clusters’. This approach relies on employers working together to identify the skills they require and to develop joint training and work placement schemes.

Although the county of Viborg in central Jutland currently enjoys relatively low levels of unemployment, the future labour market situation looks less certain. With some 30% of jobs based in industry, the county’s economy is vulnerable to drops in international demand. Furthermore, an assessment of the education and skill levels in the region – a so-called Regional Competence Account – revealed that the existing and future needs of businesses are not being met.

The wood processing and furniture industry is one of the sectors that risks running short of qualified labour in the near future. Much of Denmark’s furniture production is concentrated in Viborg. There are some 100 enterprises working in this sector, employing around 8,000 people. But to retain these employment levels, the industry needs to address several structural challenges.

For example, there is no culture of ‘life-long learning’ in the industry. Employees, from shop floor to management, rarely participate in continued education and training. As a result, enterprises often lack the flexibility and efficiency to respond to the pressures of competition. Furthermore, the industry as a whole has been slow to take up new technologies and digitisation.

The furniture industry is therefore the first sector to test a new approach to the growing education and skills gap in Viborg country – based on ‘industrial clusters’. Companies work together to identify their skill needs and to set up training programmes for their workers. At the same time, employers are encouraged to take on unemployed people while their existing staff are participating in training.

The local higher education institute – the Skive Technical School – also plays an important role in defining the continuing education and training programmes. The participation of the regional employment council and county council is crucial to coordinate these ‘cluster-based’ employment strategies with the overall regional employment pact.

In the future, the ‘cluster-based’ approach may be used to address skill shortages in the construction and metal industries and in the meat-processing sector.

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**Project name**
Education and social responsibility

**Project duration**
November 2003 to October 2005

**EU co-funding**
EUR 660,789 (74%)

**Total budget**
EUR 894,339

**Partners**
AF- Public Employment Services
DA- Danish Employers’ Confederation
LO Viborg Amt, Danish Confederation of Trade Unions
AMU-Midtvest, Adult Vocational Training System
TIC Viborg amt, Centre for technological services to SMEs
Viborg Handelsskole, Viborg Business College
Skive Tekniske Skole
NVU – Nordvestjysk Uddannelsescenter, North West Educational Centre
Rummeligt Arbejdsmarked, Roomy Labour Market

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Coordinating employment efforts for added value

Braunschweig – the northern German state of Lower Saxony’s second city – has two overriding employment concerns: more coordinated planning and better training for the jobless. As such, improved qualifications and a ‘holistic’ approach are central to the new employment strategy that is being developed under the BABS project.

Although Braunschweig’s unemployment rate is around the national average, there are still chronic problems for young people, the long-term unemployed and those with few qualifications. Job market distortions have also accompanied the city’s growing reputation as a ‘high-tech’ location. As a result, the proportion of highly qualified employees and those working in the service sector are well above the German average. Better equipping the low-skilled and restoring balance to the city’s job market have therefore become major concerns for local authorities.

The BABS project aims to unify diverse strategies with a view to improving financial and human resource efficiency. In more concrete terms, it seeks to improve the coordination of a range of measures: from raising qualification levels among unemployed people to helping identify the training and human resource needs of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). One of the key outcomes is the creation of a database (www.wa-bs.de), which gives an overview of the vast array of training possibilities available in the city of Braunschweig.

Building and cementing partnerships has been the project’s main activity, and one of the first initiatives was to produce a formal written agreement between key players. From the start, the project’s strategic planning has required equal input from all partners, with decisions taken jointly in team meetings. Chambers of commerce and industry, as well as handicrafts and employers’ organisations, have ensured the participation of start-ups and SMEs. Adult education institutes and specialist training bodies have been key to increasing qualifications. For their part, the city’s employment office and job centre have focused on getting unemployed people with few or no qualifications back into work.

This is the first unified employment strategy for the city of Braunschweig. Local authorities are realising more and more that a joint, coordinated approach not only avoids overlaps and contradictions but also adds value by pooling resources and sharing expertise. In this way, the positive results are proving that this strategy is far ‘more than the sum of its parts’.

Project name
BABS (Braunschweig Labour Market and Employment Strategy)

Project duration
December 2003 to November 2005

EU co-funding
EUR 360,022 (74.25 %)

Total budget
EUR 484,895

Partners
Agentur für Arbeit Braunschweig
Arbeitgeberverband Region Braunschweig e. V.
Ausbildungswerkstatt Braunschweig e. V.
Braunschweig Zukunft GmbH
Handwerkskammer Braunschweig
Industrie- und Handelskammer Braunschweig
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Bundesanstalt für Arbeit
Arbeitsamt Braunschweig

Handwerkskammer Braunschweig

Stadt Braunschweig

AGY

Ausbildungswerkstatt

IHK Braunschweig
The Burgenland district, in central Germany, has faced a number of economic challenges over the last fifteen years. But in the wake of several reform programmes, it is consolidating traditional strengths as well as moving forward in key growth sectors. The LISA project is investing new financial and human resources in markets such as renewable energy and information technology.

German reunification led to economic marginalisation for the Burgenland district, with far-reaching changes for business, a massive drop in production and widespread redundancies. Despite recent positive trends, the local unemployment rate remains high at 20.9%, with the long-term unemployed accounting for almost half of this total. Over recent years, however, local people and planners have joined forces to tackle the harsh economic situation – culminating in a local innovation strategy backed by the ESF.

The LISA project aims to develop a new employment plan for the Burgenland district that involves all local actors. These include the district offices for equality and economic development, the job centre, research institutions, trade unions and training associations. Creating a single local partnership has been a key aim, hand in hand with linking existing employment actions in the different areas of Burgenland. Indeed, establishing harmonised management of local actors – working for different interest groups in the three sub-regions of Nebra, Naumberg and Zeitz – has been a primary concern.

Five working groups have also been set up to focus on economic development, networking of metal processing companies, creation of networks among the self-employed and handicrafts sectors, a start-up campaign, and initial and continuing education and training.

Burgenland’s project has played to local strengths and boosted existing networks for growth and job creation. Emerging from deep recession, traditional sectors (like crafts, engineering and construction) have survived and consolidated their efforts under this new initiative. The project is also making the most of key growth sectors, such as biotechnology, renewable energy and tourism. As a result, the area is winning more inward investment, training people in new and sought-after skills and paving the way for long-term job creation.

New sectors for jobs growth

**Project name**
LISA (Local Innovation Strategy for More Work in the Burgenland district)

**Project duration**
October 2003 to October 2005

**EU co-funding**
EUR 444,507 (63.80 %)

**Total budget**
EUR 696,757

**Partners**
isw e.V.
MIBRAG mbH
WFG BLK mbH
BBj Consult AG
IHK BIZ GmbH
future GmbH
Land Sachsen-Anhalt
ZSG mbH
Südzucker GmbH
Stiftung "Aufbau Unstrut-Finne"
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South-west Saxony’s main employment challenge is clear: harnessing young workers to boost the local economy. This means persuading the brightest young talents to stay or return to the eastern German region, while developing the skills of youngsters in general. Through the InnoJOBS project, it is looking to the future and training its youth in high-tech skills.

Bordering the Czech Republic, south-west Saxony is among the most densely populated industrial areas in Germany. After soaring unemployment in the early 1990s, the job market has recently stabilised with around 17% out of work – though this is still twice the national average. Problems remain due to a lack of large companies in the local economy and low levels of technological expertise. But most of all, high emigration among young skilled workers is reducing the growth potential of firms in the region. As such, South-West Saxony has set to work on a new and focused strategy – dedicated to bringing young workers back home.

InnoJOBS’ first priority has been to produce an employment strategy focusing on youth and young adults. Seeing these groups as the keys to regional competitiveness, the project is seeking to develop their ‘human potential’ in order to maintain and enhance the economy. It aims to raise awareness among young people about local job opportunities, with a view to their returning or staying in the region. Concurrently, the project is working to provide the social, economic and cultural conditions necessary to underpin these efforts.

The keystone of the project is a broad regional partnership, assembling job centres, local authorities, higher education, social partners and professional bodies. With this in place, partners then put together new employment strategies, based on extensive consultation with both youth and business. In turn, these contributed to guidelines for pilot projects in two key areas: education and further training, and new structural policies for promoting ‘future-oriented’ sectors. The project has successfully developed plans for the early preparation of young people and their insertion in the local labour market. Alongside this, InnoJOBS partners are working with small and medium-sized enterprises to upgrade the skills of young employees with targeted training schemes. These are focused on technological improvement as well as cross-border cooperation with partners in the neighbouring Czech Republic. Ultimately, the results are keeping and bringing more young workers back to the region.
Sandwiched between Leipzig and Berlin, the region of Elbe-Elster aims to improve cooperation among players in the local labour market. Driven by high unemployment and countrywide reforms to the welfare system, the Work in the Elbe-Elster Region project is a timely one. It seeks to improve the underlying conditions for employment into the best and brightest workers.

Elbe-Elster has high unemployment and an ageing population, and has also suffered high levels of emigration since the fall of the Berlin Wall and German reunification. The main concern is the mass departure of the most promising and productive segments of the workforce: young people and skilled workers. With around 20% out of work, and 69 jobless people for every vacancy, Elbe-Elster had to reform its employment structures. At the same time, it needed to send a positive signal to persuade young people that they have a future in the region.

The overriding goal of this ESF-backed project is to develop a 'holistic' regional employment strategy – uniting the approaches of different labour market actors to create a stable open network. Partners include regional players from the business world, banks, local authorities, associations, training services, job centres and local people that are out of work. In this way, the project aims to create a broad coalition for public consultation, strategic planning, and decision-making. It also seeks to shift the prevailing mentality and to promote greater personal responsibility and creativity in the quest for alternative job opportunities.

A network of employment actors has been established to pool measures between job centres and training providers, consultancies and various local authorities. But the service sector, social-cultural bodies and non-governmental organisations have also been involved. They have helped produce local strategies aimed at changing people's attitudes to employment and entrepreneurship, fostering a climate of hope. At the heart of this has been an effort to 'sell' the project, its aims, and the region per se, both within Elbe-Elster and beyond.

The project has also set up training schemes for the unemployed and a labour pool of young employees to aid access to jobs. Employers’ groups have been enlisted to predict and counter economic ups and downs. But overall, the project is not only providing new skills and new systems – it is shaping the future of Elbe-Elster by changing people's outlooks and by harnessing the potential of the youngest and brightest minds.
In the context of radical reforms to the German welfare state, the northern city of Hamburg aims to help those who are fit to work but who face chronic social exclusion. ‘Help into work’ is the key to unlocking the potential of disadvantaged people who have been otherwise excluded from active employment.

Hamburg, like many other German cities, is over-reliant on the service sector, while suffering high structural unemployment. With limited demand for low-skilled workers and large numbers of long-term unemployed persons, the port is set to turn the tide with a specific programme for the disadvantaged. As such, the ‘Expanding city’ project aims to increase the options for both planners and jobseekers during the nationwide ‘Hartz Reform’ programme.

Drafting a new strategy for employment and social inclusion is the project’s main aim. It seeks to do this by analysing the state of local employment so as to better understand the trends and dynamics in force. Establishing stable decision-making and project-related partnerships has been equally important – with a view to maintaining the project’s momentum and helping people back into work well into the future. In addition, ambitious pilot schemes have been planned in order to examine and confirm the long-term effectiveness of new aid systems.

Following a first snapshot of the local job market, with particular focus on disadvantaged groups, the project is helping coordinate the various actors involved. It has launched a partnership-based network, assembling local authorities, job centres, chambers of commerce and non-governmental organisations. Their core job is to identify the stakes involved in reforming employment institutions. Taking stock of both risks and opportunities, partners are coming together to implement the best possible strategies for the various districts of Hamburg.

The project is making real progress in combating social exclusion in Hamburg. Combining new social and employment strategies, it is also helping to apply the European social model – bringing local policies up to EU standards. And with regular workshops and conferences, the ‘Expanding city’ project continues to raise its profile and give better prospects to disadvantaged groups. It is, in short, opening the door to jobs for people left out in the cold.

**Project name**
Employment in the expanding city – new opportunities for the disadvantaged

**Project duration**
December 2003 to November 2005

**EU co-funding**
EUR 707,265 (74.60%)

**Total budget**
EUR 948,111

**Partners**
Senatsamt für Bezirksangelegenheiten
Hamburger Arbeit-Beschäftigungsgesellschaft mbH
Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Freien Wohlfahrtspflege (AGFW) e.V.
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An effective employment strategy should be based on a sound analysis of labour market needs. This is the objective of the German city of Magdeburg, which is targeting its efforts on four key sectors of the local economy as part of the ESF-backed LAM project.

Magdeburg, state capital of Saxony-Anhalt, lies on a key development axis between the old and new states of Germany and acts as a gateway between eastern and western Europe. It is well served by several major transport routes which pass through the city and the state. With unemployment at 17.6% in 2003, Magdeburg has a lower unemployment rate than Saxony-Anhalt as a whole, but rather higher than the national average (9.7%). The city has long been a centre for the mechanical engineering industry, although this sector has faced significant restructuring in recent years. The service sector is important and is foreseen to become increasingly so.

The goals of the LAM project are to develop more effective and sustainable strategies for labour market management, focused on the four key sectors for the local economy: mechanical and plant engineering, industry-oriented services, product lifecycle management (including recycling), and the retail trade. This combined region and sector-specific approach aims to improve the allocation of resources for employment measures in the area – Magdeburg and its surrounding districts.

The project’s approach is a thorough one, starting with an inventory of relevant research and the results of current and past projects in the regional job market. This has been followed by an analysis of the labour market and its potential for development. Information and communication structures are being set up – such as a project website – to publicise best practice activities and ensure exchanges between partners.

One planned output of the project, besides the sector-specific strategies, is the setting up of four specialised ‘centres of competence’ to address the same key sectors. The centres would act as central contact and network point for businesses, employees and those seeking training in the industry.
Since job creation is dependent on a healthy business climate, support for entrepreneurship is key to a successful employment policy. This is the strategy being pursued by the German city of Offenbach, which is promoting new jobs by creating better conditions for business start-ups. A network of relevant actors is being put in place along with a model local action plan.

The city of Offenbach is located close to Frankfurt, in one of Europe’s most economically dynamic regions. Nevertheless, it faces major challenges in coming to terms with recent structural changes in the local labour market. Traditional industries like metalwork and chemicals have experienced large-scale restructuring and subsequent redundancies over the last twenty years. Growth in the service sector has been unable to make up the jobs shortage, partly because of the different skills required. The small business sector is limited in size and lacks competitiveness.

Meanwhile the workforce is composed of above average numbers of immigrants and low-skilled people, who suffer high levels of unemployment.

By enhancing Offenbach’s image as an entrepreneurial city, the Gründerstadt project aims to boost new business creation and thus generate jobs. This includes fostering a spirit of enterprise, improving the climate for business start-ups and providing practical information and support to new firms and the self-employed.

To do this, the city started out with an analysis of its employment needs and researched the work of other local development projects across Europe to gauge their potential for use as models. Examples of good practice were compiled in a handbook. The city then went about setting up a network of local actors in the field of business enterprise, with a steering committee to coordinate the partner organisations.

The project is developing a local action plan designed to serve as a transferable model for application elsewhere. Similarly, the process of drawing up a strategy for jobs and networking of partners is intended to act as a blueprint for future use. For the longer term, an association has been set up by the city to build upon the project’s work after it has run its course.

Project name
Gründerstadt Offenbach (Start-up city Offenbach)

Project duration
October 2003 to March 2005

EU co-funding
EUR 274,096 (73.11 %)

Total budget
EUR 374,921

Partners
Arbeitsamt Offenbach
Sparkasse Offenbach
Hochschule für Gestaltung Offenbach
KIZ Kommunikations- und Innovationszentrum GmbH Network
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Osterholz, close to the north German coast, is one of the smaller districts in Lower Saxony. Tackling a number of worrying trends, like an ageing population and chronic problems for marginal groups, this project proposes new technologies and stronger networks in order to ensure a prosperous future.

With only 8% of the population unemployed, Osterholz appears to be faring well. But despite growth in sectors like services, commerce and administration, certain traditional industries are now in decline, including woodwork, textiles and food. Moreover, the proportion of the population aged over 60 is due to rise from 22% to 27% by the end of the decade. At current development levels, the rate of economic activity among residents is therefore set to drop. In light of all this, Osterholz began work on a sustainable framework for the district’s shifting employment needs.

Osterholz’s project has several objectives, most of which aim to develop the information available to different ‘economic agents’ (school pupils, start-up firms, small and micro-entrepreneurs, the unemployed and disadvantaged people). In turn, the project plans to improve interaction between these groups and establish a long-term network for training, growth and job creation. Drawing from the European Employment Strategy, the project also aims at a far-reaching improvement of local skills. Lifelong learning schemes are being specifically targeted at rural women, which are among the most in need of employment assistance.

The project has launched a number of measures, ranging from a directory of training sites to insolvency prevention. Special training meetings have been organised with local business (mostly small and medium-sized enterprises), along with special qualification offers for small companies. On the research side, the project has set about profiling the unemployed, monitoring approaches to job-finding and analysing barriers to work for disadvantaged people.

Harnessing the flexible power of information technologies, the project has set up and promoted teleworking schemes among local businesses. This is helping people who need to balance work and family life, as well as those in remoter regions. As such, the project has been of special help to women in rural areas, improving their skills and giving them viable means to work. Beyond a dedicated website, the project has also established a special network for entrepreneurs, preparing for more growth and more jobs in the district of Osterholz.
Attica’s level of unemployment is 10.4%, even though it covers the capital and several growth industries. With chronic problems for women, immigrants and young people, ODISSEIA has concentrated on more efficient monitoring, lifelong learning, and flexible ways of working.

Strict urban policies and declining investment have hit Greek industry hard over the last fifteen years. High illegal immigration, fuelled by the black market for cheap labour, has also made it hard to track employment levels and plan for the future. With major social and environmental problems, and notorious traffic in Athens, Attica needed a thorough strategy for regional development. Figures from 2001 showed that 14.7% of women were out of work, compared to 7.3% of men. In addition, 62.9% of jobless women were long-term unemployed, compared to 37.1% of men.

Helping the disabled, women and immigrants to become more employable – and less socially excluded – is a key aim of the project. As such, ODISSEIA is promoting lifelong learning and new working patterns (whether part-time, “flexi-time”, or working from home) to improve prospects and conditions. Moreover, the project has special provisions for entrepreneurs and people entering the job market for the first time.

With special training schemes and new working patterns, ODISSEIA helps vulnerable groups to realise their potential. By including more immigrants in the social and economic life of the country, and getting more women into work, the project has also directly addressed long-term inequalities.

ODISSEIA first established economic and social points of reference, carrying out studies and conducting interviews. There have been regular progress reports, and the project has raised awareness using the media, Internet and seminars. It has also built on key success stories – like the electronics, communications and research industries – by encouraging cross-sector cooperation and the exchange of best practices. The network of employment policy-makers was a remarkable advance in creating the right climate for new business.
The district of Evros, in north-eastern Greece, aims to stimulate growth by cutting red tape for new business. Also high on the agenda is providing work opportunities for excluded groups of people with targeted training programmes. From detailed research to media campaigns, Evros is keen to improve its position and has set very clear goals for job creation.

Home to 1% of the Greek population and with rising unemployment, Evros knew it had to punch above its weight. With a majority rural population, the local authority wanted to improve its networking and employment monitoring and to cooperate more with industry. Across the broader region in 2001, of the 9% without a job, 43.6% were long-term unemployed – and over two-thirds of these were women.

The project has set up special units to spread best practice, monitor progress and find alternative funding for job creation. It also works to bring local policies up to national and European standards, while fighting discrimination through targeted schemes across the region. In this respect, the project has made extra provision for young people, women and vulnerable groups (such as those with disabilities and the long-term unemployed).

Evros aims to work more with local communities to address social exclusion. New partnerships with the business world have brought more companies and jobs to the area and the project has set up training schemes – to help those most in need acquire the most sought after skills. Conferences, websites and leaflets have kept the project in the public domain and also helped refine its goals along the way. Getting at least 200 women into regional employment was one concrete goal.

Evros set itself very clear aims: it wanted 10,000 people – including 7,000 women and 1,000 with disabilities – to use the new employment scheme. The project aimed to serve 300 existing firms and to launch 100 small and medium-sized enterprises. It also planned to provide 50 “innovative ideas” for job creation and to improve its enquiry response rate by 5% every six months. The results are still coming in but Evros looks set to achieve its goals.
Promoting new skills for new sectors is the main focus of the Central Macedonian employment strategy. With dedicated research and networking programmes, this region in northern Greece is making the most of home-grown talents, whilst fostering key growth markets such as information and communication technologies (ICT).

Recognising their over-reliance on agriculture, local authorities were keen to promote new sources of employment, from technology to culture, construction and leisure. Encouraging controlled tourism has also helped to address major development, employment and environmental concerns – from the deprived mountain areas to the city of Thessaloniki.

The first aim of this “innovative co-operation” project was to launch a long-term labour review, allowing decision-makers to observe trends and plan for the future. The data collected was used in pilot projects for each of the seven local authorities. Establishment of a social dialogue forum was next on the agenda: assembling local officials, civil society, and the business community. This aimed to launch and cement long-term partnerships for job creation. In the same vein, the active support of new businesses and entrepreneurs was another priority area.

Central Macedonia was keen to ensure balanced development across the region and to bring local planning up to national standards. On the one hand, the project has sought to upgrade traditional industries such as agriculture, food-processing and tourism; on the other, it has aimed to develop transport and skills, paving the way for new sectors such as ICT, leisure and construction. New rail links in the districts of Pella, Pieria and Thessaloniki (among others) are key examples of forward-looking investment in infrastructure.

With industrial parks being set up throughout the region (like in Chalkidiki, Kilkis and Serres) the project is attracting more new business and providing new opportunities to once isolated rural communities. The local employment fund created under the project has been key to the entire process and remains instrumental.
Special support for women, entrepreneurs, and the rural population are key to West Thessaly's Local Employment Strategy. A study and public debate have sought long-term ways to improve the business climate, from IT training to job creation partnerships.

A mainly mountainous area, West Thessaly has serious access problems and has long relied on intensive farming. With exports, competitiveness and incomes all in decline, the area needed new ways to advance development and tackle unemployment. West Thessaly has therefore sought a new, over-arching plan to foster skills, schemes and structures for effective job creation. For Thessaly as a whole in 2001, 19.5% of women were out of work, compared to 6.5% of men. Of the 11.6% without a job, 58.5% were long-term unemployed and 71.8% of these were female.

The needs of rural people, especially mountain dwellers, soon became clear: they have the lowest levels of education and income, greatest difficulties of access, and least contact with information technology. Better access to training, combined with flexible ways of working, therefore became central to the project. Recognising the lack of support for joint business initiatives, the project was also keen to make it easier to start and run a business and to employ people in it. Job creation partnerships with the private sector and local groups have therefore been encouraged.

Experts from various sectors led a public debate to examine ongoing problems at home and best practices abroad. With conferences and campaigns, the project has sought new and sustainable ways to tackle unemployment, raise awareness, and bring the local economy up to European standards. Two fresh approaches to social exclusion and job creation stand out: promoting female entrepreneurs and flexible working patterns.

West Thessaly is pursuing development initiatives, leading to the re-population of areas threatened with desertion and the creation of large numbers of jobs. With IT and other training schemes, the project is upgrading the skills not only of local workers but also of public sector support agencies. A well-trained workforce and consistent public support are crucial: they can help West Thessaly meet the demands of the global market, now and in the future.
To increase the number and quality of jobs in the province of La Coruña, the regional government has launched three employment strategies. Although each focuses on a specific target group, they share a common approach: emphasising inclusion, partnership and the use of local resources.

The relatively low official unemployment figures in La Coruña hide a more complex labour market reality. The four territories that make up the province are predominantly rural, and have low population densities. Agriculture and fishing are still the primary economic activities in much of the region. Only Santiago, where the city of Santiago de Compostela is located, has a large urban population.

Many of the employment challenges faced by the province are characteristic of rural areas: depopulation as young people look for better job opportunities elsewhere; under-employment; and the risk of exclusion of people living in remote areas. But other problems are also emerging, particularly in the towns and their surrounding areas. An increasing number of people are employed in temporary or insecure jobs, and many disadvantaged groups still find it difficult to access the job market.

The regional government of La Coruña has responded by launching three strategies to promote and support employment in the province. The first one is targeted at ‘peri-urban’ areas and focuses on employability and equal opportunities. The second aims to rejuvenate the rural economy and promote adaptability and entrepreneurship. Finally, the third focuses on business creation among young people and women. All three strategies share common elements: inclusion and local development, partnership and solidarity between different actors, and recognition and exploitation of local strengths and resources.

Each of the three targeted territories, namely Arzúa-Melide, Barbanza and Bergantiños, is implementing one or more of the strategies according to their local needs. For example in Barbanza, an area strongly reliant on fishing and the fish-processing industry, the strategy is helping to build networks among small and medium-sized enterprises. By working together, companies are better equipped to create new jobs and integrate the socially excluded into the labour market. Here, as in other territories, the strategy builds on past initiatives and the particular strengths and resources of the local area.

The project is co-funded by the European Union under the LEADER programme. The total budget is EUR 927,774, of which the EU provides EUR 657,318 (70.85%). The project is being implemented by the regional authorities and other partners, including ADterra and FEGAMP.

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Competing in the global economy demands flexibility and foresight. The regional employment strategy for Asturias, in northern Spain, aims to pool ideas and focus efforts so as to face the challenges head-on.

Asturias has a rich industrial heritage. But with the collapse of the coal mining and steel industries in the 1980s and 1990s, the region suffered massive job losses. Policy makers reacted by focusing on industrial restructuring and diversification.

Today, the region’s economy is getting stronger and unemployment levels are falling. Nonetheless, it still has one of the lowest levels of labour market participation in the country, with only 41% of the working age population in employment. The rural areas in particular face problems associated with an ageing population and poor accessibility. Although industrial production has diversified in recent years, there is still a strong focus on intermediate products (73% of total exports) that are particularly vulnerable to price fluctuations.

The employment strategy of the Asturias regional government is designed to address these challenges, while capitalising on the region’s strengths and the opportunities presented by globalisation. The government has adopted a proactive stance towards industrial change and unemployment. The emphasis is thus on building human resources, promoting entrepreneurship and supporting partnerships.

Three working groups involving key public and private sector actors have set a list of priorities in each of these areas. For example, in the field of human resources, the strategy seeks to stimulate new working cultures that enhance productivity and innovation. To encourage entrepreneurship, it prioritises support mechanisms for new business and targeted education programmes. Finally, a working group has explored the roles and responsibilities of different actors in assuring the competitiveness of Asturian businesses in a global economy. It seeks to review the services offered by different levels of government and employment offices and the interaction between them.

Regional and local government, business, social partners and civil society are involved at each stage of design and implementation of the employment strategy. Good communication and a sense of ownership are seen as key to the strategy’s success.
Today's employment challenges need to be tackled with well-informed and well-designed policies. The provincial government of Cordoba is developing a new model that will help to ensure that local employment strategies are more effective.

Many of the employment challenges faced by Spain in general are accentuated in the province of Cordoba. Unemployment levels far exceed the national average (22% compared to 10.5% in 2001). In addition, the gender imbalance in the labour market is particularly acute, with only 36% of women economically active compared to 63% of men.

This employment situation can be attributed, in part, to the province's continued economic reliance on agriculture. Approximately 17% of the population works in the primary sector, compared to 10% in the whole region of Andalusia and 7% nationally. And, although employment in services is increasing, it is still below the national level: 53% of the active population compared to 60% for Spain.

With support from Article 6 of the European Social Fund, the provincial government is reforming the policy-making process to ensure that future employment strategies have a lasting, positive impact. The model they have developed is based on four principles: coherence with the regional and national plans, cooperation between all private and public stakeholders, equal opportunities for men and women, and continual monitoring and evaluation.

Six municipalities in Cordoba province are using the model to develop their local employment strategies. The first step involves collecting and analysing information relevant to the area's labour market and economic situation. This is then assessed to identify the particular strengths and weaknesses of the municipality. The lessons learnt from previous employment strategies are also taken into account.

An important element of the model is the involvement of all key actors. Each municipality will organise a seminar bringing together politicians and socio-economic actors. Furthermore, local committees are being set up to feed into and monitor the project's development.

The six employment strategies will therefore be tailored towards the needs and situation of each municipality. They also incorporate indicators that can be used to evaluate results against the agreed targets.
The regional government of the Balearic Islands in Spain is applying the principle of shared management to develop its regional employment strategy. It relies on the active participation of all the different levels of administration plus social partners and training bodies.

The Balearic archipelago, comprising the islands of Majorca, Menorca, Ibiza and Formentera, is a renowned tourist destination. Some 80% of the region’s GDP is generated through services linked to tourism. A further 8% comes from the construction industry.

Employment trends also reflect the region’s reliance on tourism. Although unemployment levels are relatively low – 6.7% compared to 13% in Spain as a whole – many jobs are seasonal and low-skilled.

One of the key challenges facing the region is the low level of qualifications among the working population. Only 5% have completed university studies. Many young people drop out of further education so as to find work in the tourist sector.

Furthermore, a closer analysis of the employment statistics reveals that the low-qualified are over-represented among the unemployed or partially employed. According to the national institute of employment, almost 50% of those with no secondary education were unemployed in 2001. Those active in occupations with low skill requirements also had more precarious employment conditions.

The regional government is responding with the development of a Regional Action Programme for Employment. It will be built on a sound analysis of the labour market needs and the human resources available, and will take account of the European Employment Strategy guidelines and National Action Plans.

Importantly, the regional government envisages developing and testing the ‘shared management model’ involving the regional government, ten territorial bodies, centres of further education and social partners. Together they should agree on the measures to be implemented and the integration of other employment initiatives.

Six pilot projects are being developed to test the approach: Calvia City Council, Eivissa City Council, Ibiza City Council, Palma City Council, Raiguer County Council, Insular Council of Menorca and Insular Council of Eivissa and Formentera. The results of these trials will be evaluated for their wider use in the region.
Investment programmes in the province of Seville in south-west Spain are catapulting the region into the 21st century. But to the east of the province, traditional olive cultivation is still the main economic activity. Two new employment strategies are helping to modernise the economy, while preserving its agricultural heritage.

Many olive plantations in the eastern part of Seville are currently managed in the same way as they have been for centuries. Farmers have been slow to adopt new technologies. And there are still few secondary processing industries, meaning that olives and olive oil tend to be exported with minimum added value to the region.

This is a missed opportunity that the region can ill afford. Unemployment levels are above the 25% rate in the province as a whole, and many young people leave the region to find work in the city or coastal tourist resorts. Women, in particular, suffer from a lack of employment opportunities.

This project targets two specific regions: the Sierra and La Campiña to the east of Seville. Its aim is to catalyse employment creation by exploiting the region’s olive production. Significant potential exists in the area of processing, packaging and marketing of olive products. But other sectors can also be developed, such as rural tourism or agricultural machinery.

Through training activities, networking and international exchanges, the project aims to promote self-employment and entrepreneurship. The project also supports a ‘virtual observatory’ on the olive sector. This on-line resource provides comprehensive information on research and innovation, new markets, companies, regulations, subsidies and grants, and marketing opportunities.

Another of the project’s results is the creation of new networks of local actors and associations in each of the two regions. They provide a forum for the exchange of experience and knowledge. They are also responsible for designing a local employment strategy around the olive oil sector.

The project relies on close cooperation between the local and regional authorities and employment services. It dovetails several other initiatives aimed at injecting a new dynamism into the economy of the Seville province.

**Project name**
Rural development, innovation, employment linked to local products: the olive sector

**Project duration**
November 2003 to October 2005

**EU co-funding**
EUR 1,140,528 (69.20 %)

**Total budget**
EUR 1,648,158

**Partners**
Ayuntamiento de Arahal  
Ayuntamiento de Marchena  
Ayuntamiento de Paradas  
Ayuntamiento de Coripe  
Ayuntamiento de Montellano  
Ayuntamiento de Pruna  
Ayuntamiento de la Puebla de Cazalla  
Ayuntamiento de Morón de la Frontera  
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Creating jobs through the use of new technologies is the main aim of the CONT eNT project in Agrigento, Sicily. The Italian province has major development potential – especially in the tourism sector – but has been held back by poor coordination between local authorities and job agencies. CONT eNT aims to help people learn new skills and find new routes to employment.

Disposable incomes in Agrigento are among the lowest in Italy and large sections of the community depend on welfare benefits. With poor transport links, a declining population and the second lowest employment level in Italy, Agrigento needed a new focus for growth, especially outside the provincial capital.

The major aim of the project has been to upgrade the skills of the workforce, specifically in the use of information and communication technologies (ICT). The motivation was not only to develop the local economy but also to address profound social exclusion. Unemployment among young women is extremely high: 80.1% compared to 69.9% on the regional level. Special training programmes have therefore been set up for women as well as for other groups in need, such as young people and those with disabilities.

Local authorities began the project by analysing the labour market and interviewing owners of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). A fundamental concern was to understand the technology needs of business, with a view to balancing supply and demand in the labour market. With methods developed at European level, Agrigento has strengthened links between local authorities, training agencies, employment services and the labour force. Recognising the needs of outlying areas, this has been carried out throughout the province.

Keen to share expertise and raise public awareness, the project has used conventional methods such as workshops and seminars, as well as innovative ones based on ICT. In this respect, the use of Computer Mediated Conferencing (CMC) was a crucial initiative.

To ensure efficiency and progress, Agrigento has provided for monthly monitoring and end-of-phase reports for individual projects. This has allowed the benchmarking of key achievements and will contribute to the final report. A website has also been launched to assist the development of SMEs – a key portal for the region’s growth and a practical example of ICT in action.
IDEA aims to provide innovation, development and employability in the area of Bari. Part of the region of Puglia, in south-east Italy, Bari seeks to balance supply and demand in the provincial labour market by focusing on information and communication technologies (ICT). Local authorities also aim to attract new business by cutting red tape; reform of public planning has thus been key from the outset.

At 12.1%, Bari’s unemployment rate is above the national average of 9.5%. Inadequate training and a lack of job centres have been suggested as reasons for the high unemployment in the region. And faced with a rising black market in cheap and informal labour, Bari decided further action was needed. The province therefore sought to address underlying factors with a new incisive project for ‘development and employability’.

IDEA first aimed to simplify procedures: from planning and training, to access to the labour market. To this end, Bari has established long-term partnerships between public and private systems of education, vocational training and work. Ultimately, these schemes aim to cut the high unemployment levels, especially among women (17.8%) and young people (27.1%).

Research into job creation on the local, national and European levels aims to facilitate the sharing of expertise and set proven policies to use throughout the province. Joint planning for public and private partners has been central to IDEA for new ideas, new growth and a new sense of responsibility. Promoting investment by local business and supporting targeted training projects – in line with actual market demand – have also been important launch pads for new job creation. Furthermore, to ensure efficiency, long-term monitoring of local employment policies has been crucial. One original scheme has been to aid growth in the non-profit sector as an active labour policy.

Throughout Bari, the focus has been on better training in ICTs – helping unemployed people into growing sectors. The project has also reinforced links between training and employment so that the local population – especially young people – can avoid the trap of irregular black market work. To this end, job centres in four areas of the province are IDEA’s lasting legacy for the local population.
Knowledge as a motor for change

A large region in south-western Italy, Campania aims to use ‘Knowledge as a motor for change’. This project seeks to kick-start the local economy with effective research, planning and training across a wide variety of industries. From cheese-making to renewable energies, Campania wants to include all sectors in the new knowledge economy. Measures foreseen range from individual training programmes to reforming public planning.

Unemployment in Campania remains high at 21%, though it has fallen in recent years. The region still has a high proportion of young people out of work – well over half according to recent estimates. This raises questions about the prevalence of informal and irregular work, which around the town of Salerno is said to account for almost a third of all ‘employment’. Campania therefore aims to improve its monitoring system and provide new skills to help people escape the black market.

Campania’s primary aim has been to upgrade its economic planning across the region. Directly linked to this has been a need to improve public employment services and establish job creation partnerships. Modernising vocational training schemes, with a view to giving people the right skills for new markets, has been another project goal. This aims not only to match labour supply with demand, but also to give priority to the most competitive new sectors. Overall, Campania has sought distinct approaches: applying local strategies for local issues in five diverse provinces.

The project has provided for comparative studies of the five local strategies – where knowledge is a motor for change it is vital to share both good and bad experiences. Programme guidelines were drawn from local, national and European models, while pilot projects and efficiency monitoring became major planning conditions. Awareness-raising campaigns and a meaningful public debate have also been kept to changing attitudes, learning lessons and making progress.

In Benevento, the project has focused on new markets such as wind power – a renewable energy with great development potential. In Caserta and Salerno, COMMENT has sought to extend traditional cheese-making: in this case the protected designation of origin “Buffalo Mozzarella”, famously used on pizzas. In this respect, the project has modernised distribution and helped owners find new ways to expand their business.

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**Project name**
COMMENT (Knowledge as a motor for change)

**Project duration**
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**EU co-funding**
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**Total budget**
EUR 2,704,746

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Located around 100km north of Naples, the province of Campobasso is pushing ahead with joint action for effective innovation. The ACTION project aims to make employment a central, unifying theme in all local policies, while emphasising cooperation and the application of information and communication technologies (ICT).

Floods and earthquakes hit Campobasso hard in 2002-3, destroying homes, businesses and infrastructure. This seriously affected the province’s road network, reducing mobility and deepening social exclusion. With almost 20% of women and 50% of young women out of work, targeted schemes and new ideas for local employment were clearly needed.

The ACTION project’s main aim is to draft a local employment plan focusing on social inclusion and the information society – creating new opportunities through ICT. Around this, it is seeking to integrate employment in all local policies, making jobs a basic concern for all decision-makers. Reinforcing ties between education, professional training and business has also been a core concern from the outset. The creation of a “learning community” of stakeholders and institutions is an example of cooperative action for job creation.

The project has sought to balance supply and demand of labour in a number of ways: by researching and better understanding the market, by helping job centres identify opportunities and by equipping the jobless with sought-after skills. At the same time, pilot projects and case studies have successfully integrated national and European employment strategies. In one particular initiative, the project identified and developed non-profit organisations as a major source of employment, above all for women.

Campobasso’s ACTION plan has checked its progress with regular reports and spread its message with media presentations. A seminar on models for integrated business development, held in Bojano in November 2004, was a recent update to the programme. This enabled partners to exchange best practice, mainly on improving opportunities for women and small businesses.
In the deep south of Italy’s ‘Mezzogiorno’, Catanzaro has one overriding concern: fighting undeclared labour. Around this central theme, a project led by the province is also tackling related issues, such as crime and the weak entrepreneurial culture. Overall, it aims to reform and redeem problem areas with incisive research, strong partnerships and local empowerment schemes.

‘Irregular’ work represents over 40% of all activity in the wider Calabrian region. In light of this, Catanzaro’s primary aim has been to effectively track employment. The province also suffers from poor road and rail infrastructure, rendering monitoring and networking even more problematic. As such, and against a backdrop of nearly a quarter of Calabrians out of work, Catanzaro has launched a scheme for getting employment back on track in its own backyard.

The project’s main aim is to shift as much irregular or illegal work as possible on to a legal basis. Encouraging strong partnerships between local authorities and the business world have been key – not only for job creation but also for stamping out illegal work. Choosing major target groups was not hard, with a third of women in the wider region listed as jobless. With this in mind, Catanzaro has promoted tourism and the service sector, mainly because they offer more scope for people to balance work and family life, especially women.

To identify and tackle the black economy, the project has launched both broad and in-depth research programmes, feeding into a rigorous local strategy. The focus on partnering between public bodies and the business world, as well as on corporate social responsibility, has been key to reform. The responsibilities and rewards for promoting growth, innovation and bona fide employment are therefore being shared and strengthened in a systematic way.

As with any project of this kind, information and cooperation are crucial to success. Comparative analyses, as well as targeted schemes for raising awareness and cementing partnerships, remain central to this project. Catanzaro is slowly but surely eroding the pervasive problem of undeclared labour, and is en route to achieving its targets.
Located on Italy’s southern coast, the province of Crotone has a clear strategic plan: strengthening partnerships for employment. An ESF-backed project here is developing the capacities of local actors while reinforcing ties and communications – all with a view to a more integrated and effective policy-making process.

Placed 98th out of 100 in a survey of Italian living standards and with an unemployment rate six percentage points above the national average, Crotone had to be pro-active in promoting jobs and growth. At the heart of the project’s strategy is a plan to foster business innovation as well as partnerships from local to European levels. Its ultimate aim, however, is to improve the quality of life for people in the province.

It began by assessing the state of play in the labour market by launching a long-term monitoring scheme. At the same time, it aims to improve local job centres by making them more accessible and more supportive to companies and the unemployed. A key part of this strategy is to cement relations between private and public agencies, local authorities and the business world. Concurrently, the project is maximising new growth sectors, like services (e.g. tourism) and small businesses. To fill new vacancies from new markets – matching supply and demand – it is re-training and upgrading the skills of people out of work.

Crotone divided its strategy into four stages, starting with an analysis of the current employment situation. The second stage involves stakeholder interviews and reform proposals, with close reference to information gained from stage one. The third includes setting up technological and training programmes. The final stage focuses on study tours, raising the project’s profile, and the exchange of best practice on regional, national and European levels.

The project has set a series of clear targets: to launch three cooperation projects, win over ten service sector groups, process 1,000 questionnaires and distribute 50,000 pages of information. A recent programme giving a “macro-profile” of the local employment system showed that Crotone is on track to achieving its long-term goals.
An ESF-backed project in the Italian region of Puglia aims to kickstart the local economy and train the unemployed. The southern region, on the heel of Italy, is putting the service sector – including areas like tourism, retail and leisure – at the heart of its sustainable development strategy.

While unemployment in Puglia – which includes the provinces of Brindisi, Lecce and Tarant – is around 13%, the rates are far higher among women and young people, especially those aged 25-29. The broad regional decline has been blamed on a decade-long drop in public and private investment and poor transport infrastructure (e.g. between rural and urban areas). But the service sector is a growth area with potential to help solve the region’s employment problems, especially among the young.

The project’s main aim is therefore to build a service-based local economy, by drawing up local action plans to promote the sector. The project team began by drafting a “cognitive map”: seeking the best ways to produce social and economic plans. With these models, they aim to build networks between public and private bodies – assembling key actors to share ideas about development strategies, support policies and training programmes. At the same time, the project has been keen to support entrepreneurial and managerial development in the service sector.

A key tool for the project is a central website to coordinate partners and publish results. One of the first activities was to produce a baseline study of local employment, with a special focus on the service sector. This helped explain chronic local problems and paved the way for planning, partnership and consultations. Concrete actions have focused on both commercial and not-for-profit organisations, in an effort to find employment for disadvantaged groups (e.g. women and young people). Overall project management, in the form of three provincial networks and a regional “control room”, helped answer local innovation needs in the most coherent way possible.

The project has sought to broaden employment services in two ways: by providing more and improved service sector training (especially to excluded groups), and by extending job centres (and opportunities) to rural areas. This dual approach aims to beat social exclusion. With programmes subject to continuous testing, the strategy should offer real improvements well into the future.
The province of Ragusa, in south-east Sicily, is concentrating on its agriculture and food-processing (agro-food) sectors in the quest for growth and job creation. ‘Territorial Marketing’ is on the menu as the MTI project aims to expand established firms by improving the quality and marketing of local products.

At 20%, unemployment in the wider region of Sicily is over twice the Italian average. Rates among women are very high (29%) and exceptionally high among 15-24 year olds (54%) – putting Ragusa in a very difficult situation. Coupled with the remoteness of the province and problems faced by local firms in marketing their products, Ragusa chose a hands-on approach for its local employment strategy.

The MTI project’s first goal has been to fuel growth and jobs in the province by promoting local agro-food companies. To this end, it is backing new distribution and marketing techniques to raise the profile of Ragusa’s unique products – especially overseas. In a parallel effort to boost product quality, the scheme is focusing on the training needs of the sector by studying the efficiency of agro-food workers. But public administrations, job centres and vocational training centres are also coming under scrutiny in the ongoing effort to improve planning and training. Another goal has been to launch an experimental network: assembling key actors to identify consumer needs, market potential and competition, while taking stock of the European Employment Strategy.

The project kicked off with an opening conference, designed to raise its profile throughout the province. This paved the way for a study on local production and employment. Beyond a list of products surveyed, this specifically focused on management structures and company methods. From another angle, seminars for partners and selected firms have also aimed to raise awareness, publish results and share expertise. Throughout the process, employment-monitoring projects have focused on how to help disadvantaged groups, such as women and young entrants to labour the market. Simply put, the project has asked companies what human resources they need and trained disadvantaged groups in the most sought-after skills. A self-monitoring plan, or vademecum, has been a novel and useful addition to the project, containing precise product details and proven marketing strategies.

The project continues its simple but effective approach: improve quality and skills at home to increase demand and sales abroad. In turn, this is bringing more growth and more jobs to the province: proving the old motto that ‘what you reap is what you sow’.
The province of Varese lies just north of Milan, close to the border with Switzerland. A project here is highlighting the mediation role of job centres to help match supply and demand for employees. Coupled with in-depth local studies, it aims to produce a ‘tool box’ of good practice for local partners and actors.

With just 3% unemployed, the wider region of Lombardy is faring well – putting Varese in a favourable position for growth. But the region is not free of employment problems, with 19,000 people out of work and higher rates of unemployment among young and disabled people in particular. With labour supply and demand out of sync throughout most of northern Italy, the project aims to reform the province’s vocational training system.

Matching people with jobs, both now and in the future, is the primary aim of this project. Responding to the needs of major production sectors, the strategy focuses on training on the most sought-after skills – rationalising educational and vocational training while supplying local firms with the most suitable candidates. These new “professional profiles” are being researched by means of pilot projects in two of the most important local sectors – with the ultimate goal of providing job creation guidelines to serve the province well into the future.

Beyond researching labour market trends, the project is also monitoring the effectiveness of job centres. Services provided to jobseekers, employers and vulnerable groups (such as the disabled or “differently-abled” people) have all been under the spotlight. To bridge the gap between supply and demand for employees, job centres have been giving better start-up support for new business and improved career guidance. They are also providing more targeted training and more internship opportunities to help those who need it most get a foot in the door.
The Dutch province of Overijssel is using pilot measures to tackle a number of distinct problems in the local labour market. The results of the pilots will be analysed and translated into a coherent, integrated employment strategy for the area. Effective communication and dissemination of the project’s work is a priority for its organisers.

Unemployment in Overijssel, in the east of the Netherlands, is lower than elsewhere in the country and the employment rate is close to the national average. Nevertheless, the area faces a number of distinct labour market problems. With a high proportion of jobs in industry, demand for technically qualified workers exceeds supply, leaving a skill gap. Similarly, the province suffers from a low rate of qualifications among school leavers, leading to youth unemployment. Ageing of the workforce is another challenge, with the ratio of those of working age to those over 65 forecast to double from the current rate of 22% to 43% by 2040.

The RATIO in PROGRESS project has launched three dedicated pilot actions to take on these three key problems. Each is being developed and implemented by the local employment platform in one of the three regions making up the province. They aim to bridge the gap between technical education and the labour market, improve the qualifications of school leavers, and encourage older employees to remain in work longer. The results of the three pilots are being used to put together an integrated employment strategy covering the whole province. The ultimate objective of the project is to achieve an increase in the employment rate in Overijssel.

The pilots use the RATIO system (a labour market information system for the region) as a basis for analysing the local employment situation. Regional stakeholders, such as social partners, local authorities and the education sector are also involved. The project makes use of best practices and innovative approaches developed elsewhere in the Netherlands and the EU. A number of seminars have been organised in the framework of the pilot measures and the project as a whole, while a website has been set up and regular newsletters distributed to partners and stakeholders.
A Finnish province is developing a strategic approach to regional employment issues for use as a permanent model in the future. A forum of stakeholders is responsible for directing the strategy, while local employment teams work on projects on the ground.

Persistent structural unemployment is the main economic challenge for Central Ostrobothnia, a province on the west coast of Finland. The area is divided into two sub-regions, each with special characteristics and development needs, but in the past there has been little coordination in employment policies across the whole province. Other issues to be tackled are youth unemployment, ageing and levels of education and training below the national average.

The MUTTI project is working on an integrated approach to employment by putting together a coordinated job strategy for the province for the first time. Led by the regional council, the partnership involves the province’s sub-regions and municipalities.

Two separate strategies are being developed for each of the sub-regions, taking into account their differing socio-economic structures and needs. At the same time, the two areas have a number of common features and a high level of economic interdependence. The overall strategy will therefore tackle shared problems like population loss and focus the province’s combined resources on priority areas.

One of the project’s innovations is the creation of an employment forum for the province, bringing together representatives of business, employees, educational bodies and the public sector. The forum is helping to steer the employment strategy, while local employment teams, made up of core actors at grassroots level, coordinate projects.

Meanwhile, thematic working groups are planning innovative projects to test new approaches and identify the best ways of tackling the region’s problems. If successful, the project’s results could serve as a model for the province to deal with employment issues in the future.
On the EU’s eastern border with Russia, the region of North Karelia is getting to grips with the ongoing effects of the collapse of the Soviet Union. An action plan for the coming five years is being drawn up to tackle the dual challenges of high unemployment and demographic change.

The recession of the early 1990s hit North Karelia hard; the border region suffered from high job losses and has never fully recovered. While the region has since experienced economic growth, it continues to lag behind the rest of Finland in terms of production, employment and per capita income levels. Particular problems are high long-term joblessness and net migration away from the region, combined with an ageing population. This raises two simultaneous threats: potential labour shortages in certain sectors, while large numbers of people remain out of work due to a mismatch of skills with labour market demands.

Bringing together a new partnership of the public, private and voluntary sectors to tackle these problems is the main objective of the ‘Local employment strategies and innovation’ project. It is taking on the challenges of socio-economic change by putting together a five-year employment strategy for the region as a whole. The strategy is supported by an action plan covering the same period: 2005-2010.

Studies and reports on the existing employment situation are being used as a basis for the strategy. Meanwhile, new working methods and models for cross-sector cooperation are being developed as part of the project.

A central aim is to achieve a permanent reduction in joblessness, while raising the North Karelian employment rate from its current level of 58.6% to the national average of 67.7%. Measures are also planned to prepare for the challenge of ageing and to combat exclusion of groups like the disabled and older people from the labour market.
Anticipating changes in supply and demand for labour is crucial to building an effective strategy for jobs on a regional level. This is the objective of an Article 6-supported project in the Finnish region of Northern Savo. Expert groups and on-the-ground coordinators are being used to confront the region’s main labour market problems – high unemployment and an ageing workforce.

Like the rest of eastern Finland, the Northern Savo region lost both jobs and population in the recession of the early 1990s. With one in five jobs in the region disappearing, people moved to other parts of Finland with brighter employment prospects. Although the picture has since improved, economic progress has been slower than in the rest of the country. The unemployment rate remains high, while long term joblessness is a particular problem. The situation is compounded by the effects of ageing and population loss, which threaten to bring about a shortage of skilled workers.

Better understanding of future employment needs and preparing for changes in the labour market are the main objectives of the Learning Employment Strategy for Northern Savo. In this way, the project aims to achieve an increase in the employment rate and a reduction in long-term unemployment. At the same time, they intend to tackle the region’s skill gaps and reduce the problems associated with finding qualified employees.

Expert groups have been set up at regional level and in five sub-regions, bringing together stakeholders like local authorities, businesses, trade unions and vocational schools. The groups forecast changes in employment needs, based on analytical input from the local university and economic development centre – both partners in the project. The experts support the strategy development process by feeding in new proposals, like adapting local education and training programmes to meet demand for new skills. Each of the groups has a coordinator, who works with local employers to investigate labour requirements on the ground.

Around 60 different actors are involved in developing the regional strategy, while 100 businesses and employers are expected to take part in the negotiation process at sub-regional level. Two regional and eight sub-regional seminars are being held during the course of the project, which is coordinated by the regional council. The organisers are using the results of previous employment projects in the region to develop the new strategy.
Achieving a sustainable balance between job supply and demand is the aim of a regional partnership in South-East Finland. ‘Future in innovative services’ is drawing up an employment strategy to promote a versatile workforce and address the problem of an ageing population.

Transport and forestry-related industries are key economic activities in South-East Finland, which lies at the crossroads between the EU and Russia. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, a major recession in the early 1990’s was followed by economic recovery, but a mismatch between jobs and the skills of those seeking work remains a problem. The region also suffers from a problematic age structure and a declining population.

Four sub-regions and two regional councils are now pooling resources to build an employment strategy for the region. It aims to bring greater balance to the labour market, focusing on the potential of the service sector and promoting entrepreneurship. The policy developed is being turned into a concrete action plan for regional employment. Implementation is being monitored and evaluated.

The authorities involved are working with training institutions to address skill shortages and to promote flexibility in the labour force. A key emphasis is placed on research, with innovative solutions being sought and good practices mainstreamed.

In terms of outcomes, the project seeks to create new models for organising work to encourage social inclusion, for example through social companies and family-friendly working. A second theme is cooperation with neighbouring border regions on issues such as cross-border working and immigration. Finally, the project aims to increase the number of small and medium-sized companies operating in the region, promoting employment through entrepreneurship. This includes challenges like ensuring the longevity of small businesses after an owner’s retirement.
Creating a new regional employment strategy is a major task in itself. But developing the structures and culture required to maintain and embed such a strategy in the future is another challenge. This is the focus of the Collabora project in Finland.

The Tampere region in southern Finland has a diverse economic structure, with strong high-tech industry and service sectors. Although job creation in recent years has been strong, the region still suffers from structural unemployment on the one hand, combined with skills shortages on the other. Ageing of the population is offset to some extent by net migration from other, economically weaker parts of the country.

Made up of several diverse sub-regions, the area has lacked a co-ordinated employment strategy in the past. At the same time, regional strategies have failed to take sufficient account of the specific needs of the component sub-regions. There have also been large differences in strategic focus between the various parts of the region – and a lack of involvement in employment issues by stakeholders.

Collabora is overcoming these problems by building locally developed employment strategies for five sub-regions around Finland’s second city – and the operating models to maintain them in the long term. It aims to increase job promotion activities in the sub-regions through a process combining learning and training with strategic planning. The objective is to create a feasible employment strategy for each participating area and to develop new, multi-actor working models in the process.

The project is divided into two stages: a foundation phase to mobilise stakeholders and analyse local employment priorities; and an implementation phase, where the actual strategy-building work takes place. Experts are used mainly in the preparatory stage, while coordinators are employed to implement the second phase together with partnerships in the sub-regions.

In this way, the strategies take specific local factors into account and are based on the commitment of the partners involved. By using a participatory learning process, the project builds up operating models to last beyond its own limited time span. The short duration of the scheme is considered an advantage: this has had the effect of galvanising participants with a series of strict targets and deadlines. Sub-regions were brought together for seminars at the opening and closing stages of the project, while a series of common themes – like ageing, immigration, equality and inclusion – ensured cooperation and coherence among them.
The county of Jönköping, in southern Sweden, is taking action now to tackle a foreseen shortage of labour as well as current skill gaps. An ESF project is drawing up plans to secure future labour supply in the county and thus safeguard its economic future.

Part of Sweden’s economic heartland, the southern county of Jönköping, enjoys strong growth and low unemployment – just 2.4% in 2001 compared to a national average of 3.4% among those aged 16-64. Dominated by a diversified manufacturing industry (employing 32% of workers in contrast to 19% for Sweden as a whole), the area has been able to adjust well to economic change. Nevertheless, the local economy is affected by major shortfalls in skilled labour, which could act as a brake on future growth. Ageing also threatens to restrict the labour supply.

Drawing up a new strategy for skill-building in the region is the priority of a local ESF-funded project. Its main objective is to develop a county-wide employment strategy as part of a broad local partnership. In this way, it aims to tackle future labour shortages, bridge current skill gaps and develop new and lasting methods for job market cooperation.

The project’s work is being carried out on the ground via eleven sub-projects. These include: getting information through to new target groups; building mechanisms for skills recognition among adults; providing training for entrepreneurs; recognising and certifying healthy workplaces; promoting economic activity through new forms of work; and developing a project infrastructure to ensure cooperation and the sustainability of results.

The lasting effects of the project will be felt in the new forms of labour market cooperation developed by its partners. These methods should ensure the supply of labour and skills needed to underpin the county’s strong economic record and business climate in the long term.

**Project name**
Project for Supply of Skilled Labour

**Project duration**
October 2003 to September 2005

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EUR 2,821,715

**Partners**
Jönköping County Administrative Board
Högskolan, Jönköping
Högskoleservice
Integrationsverket
Migrationsverket
LO Distriktet
TCO-rådet
Teknikföretagen
Tranåsbygdens Näringslivsförening
Communes of Nässjö, Eksjö, Gislaved, Gnosjö, Habo, Jönköping, Mullsjö, Nässjö, Sävsjö, Tranås, Varnamo, Vaggeryd, Vetlanda

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**The lasting effects of the project will be felt in the new forms of labour market cooperation developed by its partners. These methods should ensure the supply of labour and skills needed to underpin the county’s strong economic record and business climate in the long term.**
Confronting the various employment problems of a diverse county is the challenge being taken on by Västerbotten in northern Sweden. Five local employment strategies are being drawn up to deal with the different conditions in the county’s five labour market areas, though all address the same basic issues: the supply of labour and skills.

Twice the size of Belgium but with forty times fewer people, Västerbotten is one of the most sparsely populated areas in Europe. Agriculture and forestry are relatively important to the local economy, while healthcare and education also employ a bigger proportion of the workforce than in Sweden as a whole.

The county is characterised by intra-regional variations, with marked differences between the main city Umeå and its rural hinterland. While the city has doubled in size over the last half century, the surrounding areas have suffered population loss, reaching a decline of 40% in some parts. Umeå is young, educated and economically dynamic (thanks in part to its university) – but the rest of the county is confronted with an ageing workforce, unemployment and a shortage of skills. The sparse population in outlying districts makes it hard to match the few inhabitants – and their range of skills – with the limited number of jobs.

Tackling these imbalances and targeting the specific problems of each of the five areas are the objectives of the LAPP project – Local Action Plans in Progress. It aims to address four particular factors in Västerbotten: the high rate of industrial injuries; the relatively low level of entrepreneurship; encouraging more young graduates to stay in the region; and improving access to and provision of learning for adults.

The project is developing and implementing local jobs strategies for five labour market areas in the county, drawing on the experience of previous ESF projects. This includes setting up local skills councils and learning centres. Seminars, conferences and workshops are also used to bring together the participants: municipalities, labour boards and regional authorities.

LAPP intends to disseminate its results and the model of cooperation developed during the project, using websites and marketing via the media. In this way, it could act as an example for other regions facing similar problems.
Unfilled job vacancies alongside pockets of unemployment point to barriers to the job market. The city of Edinburgh is leading a project to tackle social exclusion and support employment growth by identifying and dealing with these barriers. ‘Working Together’ is developing a local strategy to bring together the contributions of all agencies concerned with employment in the city.

The Scottish capital has a growing population, buoyant economy and rising employment. A major tourism centre and the UK’s second financial hub after London, it expects to gain new jobs in catering, banking and business services in the coming years. Nevertheless, the city suffers pockets of high unemployment and larger numbers of ‘hidden unemployed’, not reflected in the rosier, headline statistics. At the same time, local employers are experiencing increasing difficulties in recruiting – reporting both specific skill shortages and a lack of basic skills in potential employees.

Edinburgh’s project aims to create a new framework to take on these twin problems – in the form of a joint employment strategy designed to bring together the different local agencies dealing with jobs. Goals include pooling funding for employment measures; clarifying relationships between employers, training bodies and individuals; making ongoing training routinely available in workplaces; and providing clear, single points of access to services for jobseekers.

In concrete terms, the project has started with a baseline study, focusing especially on the ‘hidden unemployed’ and on the needs of emerging sectors. The services of different labour market actors are being ‘joined-up’ through staff and information exchanges and new communication systems designed to foster better inter-agency coordination. In particular, new information and communication technology (ICT) software is being used to improve identification, referral, tracking and follow-up of those most excluded from the labour market.

As well as improving coordination of services to access jobs, the project aims to bring together the main funding bodies to develop common strategies. Employment services will target not only at the registered unemployed but at a wider group of economically inactive individuals, as well as excluded groups. The social economy sector is attracting attention for its intermediary potential. Project results will be disseminated via a website, newsletter and high-level conference. If successful, the project’s strategy model could be extended beyond Edinburgh to cover the surrounding Lothian region as well.
A county in South-West England is putting together local employment blueprints in six key towns threatened with job losses. Local partnerships have been set up to find ways of raising skill levels, improving job opportunities and enhancing competitiveness. The findings will be mainstreamed in the county’s economic strategy and innovative solutions sought.

While it enjoys an unemployment rate below the national and regional averages, Somerset has a number of market towns where manufacturing jobs are disproportionately important to the local economy – in one case forming 43% of employment. Recent restructuring in the sector has led to large-scale redundancies and leaves the area exposed to further job losses. This vulnerability is exacerbated by the dependency of many towns on a few large employers and industries, many of which are in sectors forecast to decline over the next decade. These sectors represent more than half of all jobs in most Somerset towns.

A project led by the local county council is attempting to safeguard employment opportunities and the future competitiveness of the area by developing local strategy partnerships for six of the largest towns. The aim is for each group to draw up a local employment strategy covering skills, job opportunities and competitiveness. The partnerships engage local communities, public agencies, social partners and businesses.

Each partnership is undertaking a baseline study of their local area, the findings of which are shared through a networking group. This intelligence is used to develop an employment strategy and a plan for implementing it, identifying key challenges and opportunities in the local labour market.

The organisers intend to identify innovative solutions from the project’s results to aid other market towns. Other findings are being shared through a network group so that good practices are passed on and working methods disseminated. The six local employment strategies developed will feed into the county’s wider strategy for economic development and business support.
Coordinated action to better understand local job market needs is the principal aim of a project in Southampton, southern England. The project’s partners are improving their support both to businesses and individuals while addressing the city’s employment problems – low participation rates for women and a shortage of entrepreneurs.

As the second largest city in South-East England after London, Southampton has traditionally been dominated by maritime and related industries. But employment has shifted over recent years from traditional manufacturing and engineering sectors to jobs in services and technology – with consequent changes in skill needs. The city is home to around 7,100 businesses, but is relatively reliant on large employers, which provide 37% of jobs.

Unemployment – at 3.1% – is low, yet economic activity rates are weak compared to national and regional averages. The employment rate for women in the city is especially low, at 12% below the regional level. Nevertheless, Southampton is a net importer of labour, with employers reporting difficulties in recruiting for higher-skilled positions.

Overall though, the city lacks full information on key sectors in the local economy and employers’ skills needs. One aim of the employment strategy is to fill these intelligence gaps with a new research infrastructure to provide reliable job market data. This includes building a comprehensive information base, as well as focused research on the positions of women, young people and asylum seekers in the job market. With this knowledge, the project intends to build a more accurate picture of employment patterns – and better co-ordinate the work of the various organisations active in the field. A Southampton Employment Knowledge Centre has been created to group research outcomes in the form of a public website.

The project is led by a steering group and includes training and educational institutions. The partners’ improved awareness of job market needs will allow them to better target resources for employment support in the city. At the same time, joining up the organisations’ activities will build their capacity to address local labour market needs. In this way, the project intends to increase the employment rates for women and the over-50s, improve business survival rates and expand the social enterprise sector – a key source of jobs for disadvantaged groups.
Innovation through the European Social Fund (Follow-up 1)