



## The European Social Fund in the Island of Réunion, France, 2007-2013

One of France's overseas regions, Réunion has an exceptionally high unemployment rate. Its Operational Programme for ESF funding from 2007-2013 takes on this daunting challenge, tackling social exclusion and improving qualifications and adaptability, intending to make the best possible use of the island's human capital.

### The European Social Fund in brief

The European Social Fund, created in 1957, is the European Union's main financial instrument for investing in people. It supports employment and helps people enhance their education and skills. This improves their job prospects.

Member States and regions devise their own ESF Operational Programmes, in order to respond to the real needs 'on the ground'. Over the period 2007-2013, the ESF will spend over 10 billion euro per year across all Member States. This represents more than 10% of the European Union's total budget.

These are the five priorities of ESF funding at EU level:

- Helping workers and enterprises adapt to changing circumstances in the economy
- Enhancing access to employment and participation in the workforce
- Improving training and skills, both for individuals, and through better education and training systems
- Promoting partnerships between actors such as employers, trade unions and non-governmental organisations, for reform in the fields of employment and inclusion in the labour market
- Reinforcing the social inclusion of disadvantaged people and combating discrimination in the labour market

In some Member States and regions, the ESF can also support actions to improve the capacity and effectiveness of public administrations and public services.



## The socio-economic and employment situation in Réunion

The island of Réunion is one of the most far-flung regions of France, set in the Indian Ocean 10 000 km from Paris and 700 km from Madagascar. As well as its remote location, it faces severe structural difficulties. The climate is challenging and the geographical relief of the island leaves very limited space to accommodate demographic pressures. The population is currently growing by 1.5% a year, compared with 0.6% in mainland France and the EU average of 0.5%. Between 2000 and 2005, the population grew by 10%, and it is expected to rise from 775 000 in 2005 to close to 1 million by 2030. As a result, Réunion has a youthful population: 35% under 25 and only 11% over 60 (compared to 25% and 21% respectively for the whole of France).

For decades now, economic growth in Réunion has outstripped mainland France and the EU average, with GDP growth in 2005 estimated at 7.3%, compared to 1.2% for France and 1.6% for the EU-25. This high economic growth cannot, however, generate sufficient new jobs to absorb the rapidly growing labour force. Réunion is therefore facing an unemployment rate that is amongst the highest of the EU, at 31.9%. Youth unemployment (53% in 2003) and long-term unemployment (70% of total unemployment in 2003) are also extremely high.

Despite sustained economic growth, Réunion's GDP per capita is still only half that of mainland France. Social cohesion is precarious. Proportionally, six times more people receive state benefits in Réunion than they do in metropolitan France. The average level of qualifications in the labour force is improving but lags behind the rest of France. Numbers leaving school with no qualifications are much higher, and illiteracy is a major problem, affecting 15% of the population. Employment and unemployment rates show disparities between men and women – the unemployment rate for women is 7 percentage points higher than for men, compared with 2 percentage points in France as a whole.

## Réunion's ESF priorities, 2007-2013

Réunion's Operational Programme for ESF funding proposes a positive strategy to overcome the island's two major problems with its human capital – poor qualifications and a lack of social cohesion. The programme is split into two priorities, the first developing innovative training schemes and promoting mobility, and the second reinforcing cohesion, raising qualifications and increasing the professionalism of the population. Both cover the whole range of priorities set out for the ESF in general, and are in line with the strategic priorities laid down in the French National Strategic Reference Framework for the French convergence regions.

### Priority 1: Responding to new challenges through developing innovative training schemes

This priority concentrates on developing new training schemes in order to support emerging economic activities. It absorbs 35% of the total ESF funding. Objectives covered will be:

- The development of new and innovative training services. This will help to develop new skills in the workforce and will better equip the unemployed for work.

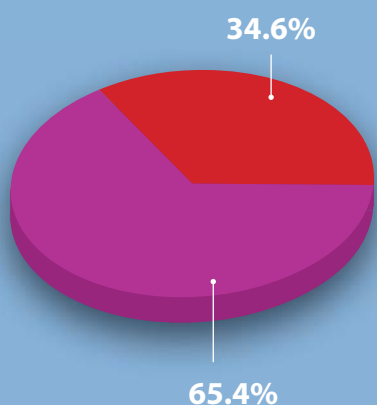
- Investing in anticipating future challenges regarding human capital. Here, training, employment and inclusion policies will be studied, assessed and structured to anticipate the future needs of the labour force.
- Promoting educational and professional mobility. This will allow skills to be transferred to other arenas, whether in mainland France or overseas.
- Technical assistance for the implementation of the programme.



## Priority 2: Reinforcing social cohesion and raising the qualifications and professionalism of the labour force

This priority accounts for 65% of ESF funding and will cover the following objectives:

- Facilitating integration into the labour market through tailored training schemes.
- Facilitating access to the labour market through apprenticeship systems.
- Equipping jobseekers for the labour market through the development of qualifications.
- Promoting equal opportunities through measures addressing the potential labour force, employers and institutions.
- Anticipating economic change through adapting competences of workers to the needs of the labour market.

### Financial plan for the European Social Fund in Réunion, 2007-2013 (euro)



Priority axis	Community funding	National counterpart	Total funding
	 	 	
Respond to new challenges through developing an innovative offer of training	179 618 189	76 979 224	■ 256 597 413
Reinforcing social cohesion and pursuing efforts to raise labour force qualifications	337 271 000	147 986 714	■ 485 257 714
<b>Total</b>	<b>516 889 189</b>	<b>224 965 938</b>	<b>741 855 127</b>

## Some earlier ESF projects in Réunion, 2000-2006

### ■ Children's nurse qualification

This project came under the heading of targeted measures to develop work for women and increase lifelong training, it promoted equal opportunities and helped develop a healthy work-life balance. The creation of a new nursing qualification directed specifically at looking after children opened new career prospects for paramedical staff. Developing this qualification was also of real benefit to participants and to the community, as it improved the treatment of children. The project allowed participants to develop and master childcare techniques which could then be transferred for use in hospitals, social service contexts and nurseries.

### ■ Exclusion prevention scheme

As part of the drive to prevent children from being excluded from school, this project put the focus not on schools themselves but on children and, in some cases, their parents. Using after-school associations, the project reinforced links between the school, the family and the student, outside school time. Targets were set to strengthen parents' involvement in their children's education, to contribute to students' academic success, and to minimise the risk of exclusion from school. The overall objective was to create conditions in which the child could succeed academically. Pupils were drawn from both primary and secondary schools. The scheme was of key importance in the eastern part of Réunion, playing a major role in keeping troubled youngsters on track.

## ESF contacts



### In Réunion

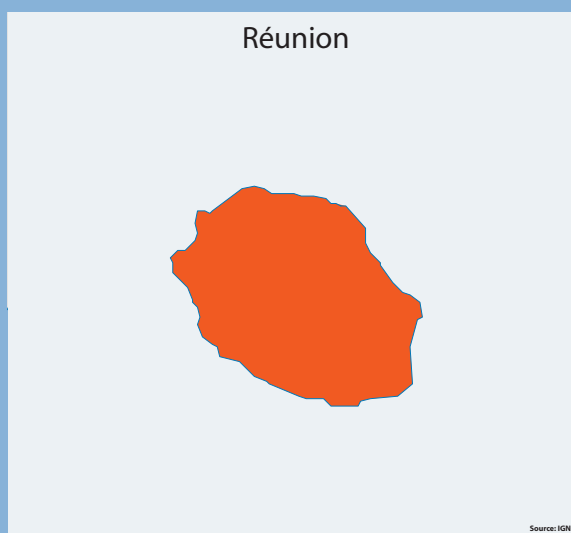
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## Eligible regions 2007-2013



The level of ESF funding differs from one region to another depending on their relative wealth.

■ With a GDP per head of less than 75% of the EU-25 average Réunion is eligible under the convergence objective.