

The European Social Fund at work



The European Social Fund (ESF) is funding projects across the EU to get more people into better jobs through activities such as training, re-skilling, counselling and quality careers advice.

Put in practice by the relevant local organisations, ESF projects improve the employment prospects of millions of Europeans, focusing in particular on those with the most difficulties in finding a job. Between 2007 and 2011 alone,

2.4 million ESF participants in employment programmes found a job within 6 months following their project.

The ESF also prepares Europe's workforce to cope with the changing needs of the economy. Training programmes help people make the most of new opportunities in a greener economy. The ESF supports changes to curricula and better teaching to make sure everyone can fulfil their potential.

The ESF – a practical approach to opening up opportunities

Through an active approach to getting people fit for the job market...

The economic crisis has many looking for a suitable job, finding that their current skills might not be needed in their local area. What is more, the face of the job market in Europe is changing – a move away from heavy industry and manufacturing has ended some traditional forms of employment. At the same time, the need for a highly-skilled workforce is not being met in a number of sectors, leaving vacancies unfilled.

The ESF supports many organisations that offer training courses, along with personalised services and guidance. Depending on local needs, assistance can also be provided to help people into apprenticeships or vocational education.

Skilled workers risk losing their jobs if their industry is struggling. ESF projects offer various possibilities for training, often opening up opportunities

in the low-carbon economy and green business. The ability to work in other EU countries is also supported through language training or exchanges with partners, including employers in other countries.

Public employment services, in close contact with both jobseekers and employers, are a major partner for projects aimed at getting people into work.

Recipe for success

A training programme in Portugal, supported by the ESF, has helped around 100000 people develop valuable skills needed on the job market. The Centre of Professional Training in the Food Sector (CFPSA) promotes training programmes in meat, food and agricultural quality control, food management and catering.

Courses are offered both to young people looking for their first job and to those currently employed who wish to widen their skills.

The employment rate of those who have attended one of the Centre's 8 000 courses shows just how effective the programme is – almost all of those participating were in work once they had finished.





Through making it easier to learn new skills at any age...

New skills bring new opportunities

ESF actions should raise skill levels and increase the proportion of job seekers qualified for today's labour market. A key concept in achieving these qoals is lifelong learning.

Lifelong learning removes barriers that stop some people getting the most out of traditional education and training systems. A successful strategy aims at both improving and reforming systems of education, and at supporting individuals.

The ESF is a major funder of projects for lifelong learning across the EU. In the period 2007-2013, over € 32 billion (or 42% of the total ESF budget) was allocated to this priority. Around 5 million young people, 5.5 million people with low-level skills, and 576000 older people participated across the EU, in the first half of that period alone.

For people at risk of losing their jobs, the long-term unemployed or those who have never had a job, a lack of confidence can add to the difficulty. In such cases, projects that include training in work and life skills or guidance through the first steps at work can give the help that makes the difference.

By connecting all elements of lifelong learning, from training and advice to counselling and coaching in informal skills, ESF actions greatly improve the employment prospects of participants.

Through helping people work longer...

As the profile of Europe's workforce changes, assisting older workers will become increasingly important. The experience of this group is not in question, but shifting opportunities in the job market can call for a change in working practices and retraining.

Helping older workers stay in jobs that suit them also means that employers need to offer age-friendly working practices. The ESF supports businesses that want to offer more part-time opportunities, flexible working hours or an adapted work environment. This way they will be more likely to retain the expertise of their older employees, to the benefit of both sides.

Through fostering Europe's entrepreneurial spirit...

Ninety-nine per cent of businesses in Europe are small and medium-sized, employing around 65 million people across the EU. From immigrants setting up family businesses to parents with young children launching online services from home to meet the needs of their family, Europe is full of bright ideas.

Reducing barriers that people face when launching their own businesses, such as access to financing, is one way the ESF can step in to help small companies thrive. In many countries, ESF initiatives offer micro financing to start-ups that can find it hard to get loans through traditional channels.

ESF-funded training courses also improve people's business skills, covering subjects like accountancy or employment law. Consultancy can also be offered, especially when would-be entrepreneurs are creating their business plans. Networking with others whose small businesses are successful is another way to encourage those just starting out.

Pooling resources to put young jobseekers on a path to success

An investment package worth over €100 million, bringing together cash from local and national government along with ESF support and investment from employers, aims to help up to 10 000 young people in Scotland into work – particularly in small businesses. An additional 3 000 jobs are expected to be created in small businesses around the country for workers of all ages.

What lies ahead?

ESF support to EU countries and regions to help people into jobs is more important than ever in the light of the economic crisis. Re-training, upgrading skills and personalised counselling have helped many people be successful in the job market: the ESF reaches over 15 million participants a year.

The thousands of local, regional and national organisations that fill the ESF with life will continue to build on these experiences but place ever greater focus on funding projects that show clear results. Young people will be the focus of many activities. The ESF will help them into work by improving education and training systems, facilitating their transition into employment, putting in place apprenticeship schemes or supporting entrepreneurship and mobility.

Another task is meeting the needs of Europe's older workers. Helping employees benefit from lifelong learning and supporting employers to introduce suitable arrangements will help this increasingly significant group work in a way that works for them.

The ESF invests in people. It is people who are undoubtedly Europe's richest attribute.

More information on the ESF:

http://ec.europa.eu/esf

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