

THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND



Support to Education and Training: 2014-2018

IRELAND

SUMMARY

ESF Thematic Objective 10 funding is used to support education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning. Over 215 397 148 million euro has been allocated to such operations in Ireland, with 214 932 participations having taken place by the end of 2018. This factsheet summarises the main actions, outputs, results and lessons learned so far in the use of this funding in Ireland.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES

Early school leaving (ESL) rate (%)



► The rate of **early school leaving (ESL)** in Ireland was lower than the EU28 average between 2014 and 2018. In 2018, Ireland was also meeting its national target of the ESL rate of less than 8%.

► **Educational quality** and achievements in reading, mathematics and science are above the OECD and EU averages.

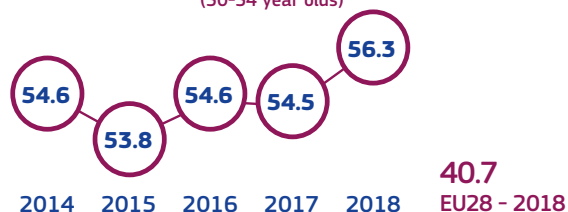
► The **tertiary educational attainment rate** is very high overall (56.3% in 2018 compared to the EU average of 40.7%), with women having a higher attainment rate than men (60.4% compared to 51.7% in 2018). The employment rate of recent graduates is amongst the highest in the EU.

► The **adult participation rate in lifelong learning** was lower than the EU28 average in 2014, but has since risen above it in 2018. The overall rate in 2018 of 12.5% still falls short of the EU 2020 target of 15%.

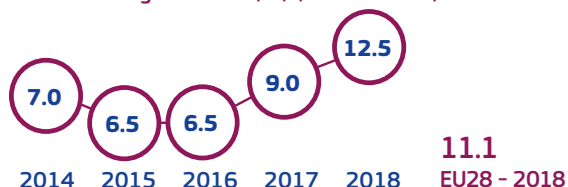
► **Government spending** as a percentage of GDP at all levels of education fell in the period 2012-17 to 3.3% in 2017, which was lower than the EU28 average of 4.6%.

► Ireland began a **large scale restructuring of its further education and training (FET)** sector in 2013 with the creation of SOLAS, a state agency to promote FET, and 16 regional Education and Training Boards.

Tertiary educational attainment rate (%)
(30-34 year olds)



Participation rate in education and training by adults
aged 25-64 (%) (last 4 weeks)



EXPLANATORY NOTES

ESF European Social Fund

TO10 Thematic Objective 10

OP Operational Programme

IP Investment Priority

* Figures present the situation for ESF operations under Thematic Objective 10 and its four Investment Priorities (IPs) for the programming period 2014-2020 implemented up to the end of 2018, as reported on 1 October 2019. In many instances, operations are not yet complete at this stage, or have only recently started.

* As one person could participate more than once in ESF operations over time, the number of participations is reported. These figures exclude Technical Assistance.

* Where the breakdown of participants according to employment status, age, and level of education does not add up to 100%, it means that it was not possible to include characteristics of a number of participants in some OPs.

Support to Education and Training: 2014-2018

ESF PRIORITIES AND ACTIONS IN IRELAND

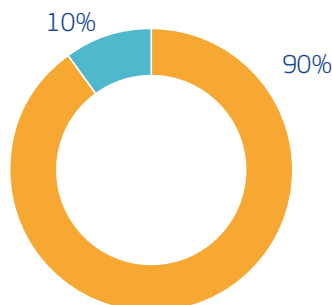
- ▶ Ireland has **one ESF Operational Programme (OP)**: the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020.
- ▶ ESF Thematic Objective 10 (TO10) funding corresponds to Priority 3 of the PEIL: '**Investing in Education, Training and Lifelong Learning with a view to upskilling and re-skilling the labour force**'.
- ▶ The OP has the following priorities:
 - ▶ To address educational imbalances, including low levels of participation among some young groups, **barriers to participation** at higher education, and address key challenges in areas such as **lifelong learning and adult literacy**.
 - ▶ To complement national priorities to develop **talent in the vocational educational system** and to **increase the number of apprenticeships**.

23% of total ESF funding¹...

€215 397 148

...is allocated to the following TO10 investment priorities: **access to quality tertiary and equivalent education (10%)** and **enhancing access to lifelong learning (90%)**.

Allocation of ESF TO10 funds



- Improving quality and access to tertiary education - IP10.ii
- Enhancing access to lifelong learning - IP10.iii

STATE OF PLAY

100% of planned resources under TO10 had been allocated in 2018, with 44% spent.

Number of overall participations in TO10 operations by the end of 2018:

214 932

▶ **49 182** participations in operations to improve the access to, and quality of, tertiary and equivalent education

▶ **165 750** participations in operations to enhance access to lifelong learning

¹ This includes EU-only funding and co-financing from the Member State.

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PARTICIPANT PROFILES WHEN RECEIVING SUPPORT

Employment status



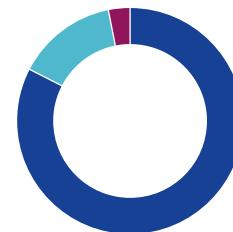
34% (73 470) Unemployed
38% (80 939) Inactive²
19% (39 871) Employed

Sex

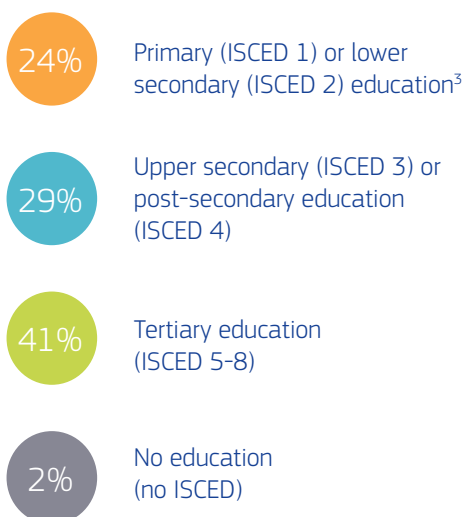
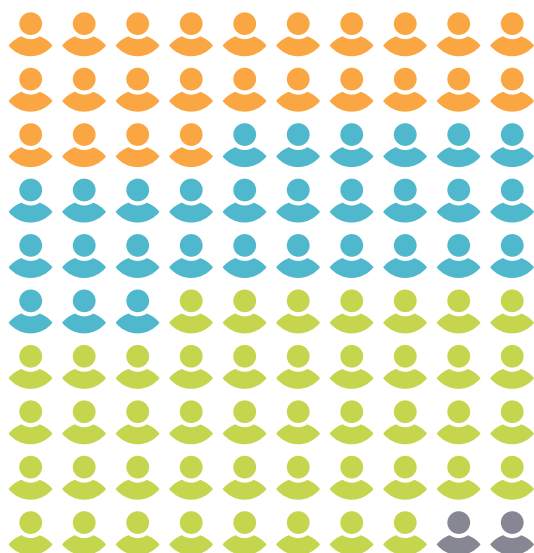


62% Women
38% Men

Age



19% (41 485) <25 years
54% (116 168) 25-54 years
17% (36 627) >54 years



32 229
Migrants

62 151
Other disadvantaged

22 692
Participants with disabilities

577
Homeless

Key achievements to date of ESF T010 operations in Ireland include⁴:

- ▶ **102 173** successful results have been achieved to date following participation in an activity funded by ESF T010, of which:
 - ▶ **438** inactive participants went on to engage in job searching
 - ▶ **46 317** participants went into education or training
 - ▶ **49 586** participants gained a qualification
 - ▶ **5 832** participants moved into employment upon leaving
- ▶ The number of long-term unemployed participants with low education levels gaining a qualification or successfully completing ESF operations to enhance access to lifelong learning was 24 269. This corresponds to 151% of the 2023 target figure.

² The inactive population can include pre-school children, school children, students, pensioners and housewives or -men, for example, provided that they are not working and not available or looking for work.

³ ISCED is the UN reference classification for organising education programmes and related qualifications by education levels and fields.

⁴ Participants' data are collected when starting an operation. Data on results are collected at the end of an operation or even later. Because of this time lag the two sets of data (participations and results) should not be directly compared

LESSONS LEARNED SO FAR

► Measuring impact

ESF data monitoring requirements have prompted government departments to work closer together in tracking the progress of ESF project participants, and influenced the development of the Programme Learner Support System (PLSS) database in Ireland.

► Coherence

ESF funding has been allocated in line with Ireland's national Action Plan for Education 2016-2019, which incorporated the Department of Education and Skills' strategy statement to make the Irish education and training system a leader in Europe within the next ten years.

► Changed economy

An improved economy and labour market situation has meant that fewer people are taking part in ESF-funded lifelong learning projects than initially anticipated. Milestone targets for the ESF programme in Ireland were revised in 2018 in order to take the changed economic situation into account, with funding being concentrated further on the remaining unemployed and inactive.

► Structural reforms and spending

The wide-ranging nature of the reforms carried out in Ireland's further education and training sector in 2013-14 meant that ESF project spending was low in 2014-17 before increasing in 2018 as more operations came online.

► Mental health

Implementation of the ESF in Ireland has revealed that one of the most underappreciated and difficult factors in the design and implementation of ESF operations is participants' mental health. Project providers in ESF operations, for example the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI), are increasingly dealing with people who require support to improve their mental health before they can meaningfully participate in the other types of activities related to education and training.

► Cost effectiveness

A mid-term evaluation in 2018 of the ESF in Ireland found that TO10 operations were effective and cost-effectively provided. The adoption of a simplified cost option system has made using and accounting for ESF funds easier for beneficiary organisations.

PROJECT EXAMPLES

► Fund for Students with Disability (FSD)

The FSD provides higher education institutions with funding so that they can better support students with disabilities to acquire tertiary level qualifications. This is not only in the interests of equity, but also in the interests of ensuring that Ireland's population of working age has the skills necessary to compete in the global marketplace.

► Adult Literacy Initiative

This ESF TO10 operation provides online and face-to-face learning opportunities for unemployed people, particularly the long-term unemployed, disadvantaged groups, and those formerly employed in declining sectors such as the construction sector who want to improve their basic literacy, language and numeracy skills.

► Back to Education Initiative (BTEI)

The BTEI programme provides a range of part-time learning opportunities that enable learners to reconcile participation in education with family and/or employment responsibilities. The accredited learning opportunities lead to awards on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) to facilitate BTEI participants' access, transfer and progression to other education or employment pathways.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

'Mid-term evaluation of the ESF', December 2018. <https://www.esf.ie/en/information-centre/evaluation/evaluation-reports/peil%20mte%20and%20yei%20evaluation.pdf>

European Commission, Study supporting the evaluation of ESF support to education and training (Thematic Objective 10)

The ESF in Ireland: <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=385&langId=en>

Website of the ESF in Ireland: <https://www.esf.ie/en/>

