



# **Study for the Evaluation of ESF support to Education and Training (Thematic Objective 10)**

Final report

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## Executive summary

Investing in education and training for all is a key priority for the European Union. The importance of education and training, in order to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, is recognised in the Europe 2020 strategy<sup>1</sup>, with two of its headline targets focusing specifically on education and training. The European Pillar of Social Rights re-affirms the priority focus on education and training.

Alongside other key funding mechanisms, EU support to education and training is provided by the European Social Fund (ESF) via Thematic Objective 10. This Thematic Objective allows investments in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning through **four Investment Priorities**: (i) Reducing and preventing *early school leaving* and promoting equal access to education; (ii) Improving the quality and access to *tertiary* and equivalent education and training; (iii) Enhancing equal access to *lifelong learning* for all age groups; and, (iv) Improving the *labour market relevance* of education and training systems.

In order to reach its education and training goals, *the EU allocated **approximately EUR 39.2 billion** (including EU and national co-financing) to ESF support for education and training for 2014-2020*, representing 32% of total planned funding for the ESF. The largest planned allocation (29.1%) is for early school leaving, followed by 27.4% for lifelong learning and 26.2% for labour market relevance, with the smallest planned allocation (17.3%) for tertiary education. The highest financial allocations were for Portugal and Poland (just below EUR 4 billion each) and the lowest to Luxembourg (EUR 7.9 million). More than half (51.4%) of the total funds for ESF support to education and training were allocated to less developed regions.

The Commission is carrying out an evaluation of ESF support to education and training provided through Thematic Objective 10, in preparation for the next ESF programming period. This study contributes to this evaluation by providing evidence on its implementation until the end of 2018.

## Key findings

The study has analysed the evidence gathered against the five evaluation criteria: effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and EU added value.

Our **analysis of effectiveness** of implementation has shown that there has been positive *progress in the financial implementation* of ESF support to education and training, however that there are large differences in performance across countries, Operational Programmes and Investment Priorities. Overall, across the EU, 27% of planned resources were spent by the end of 2018, which is in line with the total EU28 ESF expenditure rate and expectations for this stage of the programming period. *Output performance is also broadly in line with other ESF Thematic Objectives*, with 9.5 million participations by the end of 2018 (35% of total ESF participations).

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission (2010), Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, COM(2010) 2020

While implementation is still ongoing and comprehensive results data are still materialising, the evaluation has nevertheless highlighted *some significant results achievements*. By the end of 2018, 801,096 participants had engaged in education/training and 3.15 million participants had gained a qualification upon leaving. The study has identified some notable achievements at the level of Investment Priorities in particular countries. *The Investment Priorities focused on early school leaving and lifelong learning have been most successful*, both in terms of direct results and the potential for longer-term systemic change. The relative success of these priorities appears to relate to their stronger alignment with national and regional strategic priorities.

The study also finds that ESF support to education and training *has effectively addressed the needs of young people generally*. Success has been more mixed for low qualified adults, NEETs (young people not in employment, education or training), people in employment and the unemployed as despite successful examples of operations aimed at these groups, engagement challenges remain in some Member States, such as developing appropriate outreach mechanisms and supporting more intensive and integrated approaches.

The modelling of the impacts of ESF support for education and training based on RHOMOLO<sup>2</sup> simulations suggests that the programme will add 0.16% to European gross domestic product by 2023 (which amounts to roughly EUR 18 billion) compared to the baseline, and around 170,000 additional jobs, as final macro-economic impact, on top of the positive results for participants in ESF operations.

*Many successful types of operations have been identified* - ranging from support to vulnerable learners and the teaching staff that work with them, to digital innovations in the classrooms and to local action plans to address early school leaving. The evaluation evidence highlights a variety of *success factors and challenges in relation to the specific Investment Priorities and types of operations*. Common *success factors* were identified as:

- Local, regional and national governments adopting a central project delivery role (particularly for early school leaving);
- Strong coordination and the involvement of local and regional stakeholders, who can tailor programmes to specific needs;
- Provision of intensive and tailored support to individuals over a longer-term period of time (especially for early school leaving and lifelong learning).

*Challenges* included reaching some of the hardest-to-reach disadvantaged groups and cases of a lack of sufficient capacity for effective management.

The evaluation has also identified a number of *key success factors in the overall performance of Operational Programmes* including:

- The capacity to deliver ESF education and training programmes on the scale required;

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<sup>2</sup> RHOMOLO is the spatial computable general equilibrium model of the European Commission, see for details: <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/rhomolo>

- A strong strategic approach at programming level;
- Strong coordination processes involving the Managing Authority, local and regional authorities and key partners such as non-governmental organisations and social partners from the design stage; and
- Building the capacity of staff in beneficiary organisations on how to access, implement and monitor the funds.

Key *challenges* include overlaps with the implementation of the previous ESF programme, limited management capacity in Managing Authorities and beneficiary organisations to deliver against targets and limitations to adjusting the ESF priorities to address emerging training and education needs.

The **analysis of efficiency** has shown that *the average expenditure per participant is EUR 1,137* (ranging from EUR 729 for the Investment Priority dedicated to early school leaving, to EUR 2,754 for the Investment Priority focusing on tertiary education), and per result is EUR 2,378, with large variations across countries. Qualitative analysis has shown that *factors that can foster efficiency* include:

- The use of intermediary bodies;
- Wider partnership arrangements, including specialist sectoral organisations; and
- Simplified cost options.

There was also evidence however that too many partners involved in implementation can contribute to the administrative burden and delays. *ESF administrative requirements are considered to be proportionate to the benefits achieved*. Nonetheless there is recognition that these requirements can be complex and time-consuming, thus onerous for smaller beneficiary organisations, for example those working with specific target groups or schools.

There was a *relatively high degree of **relevance** of programming of ESF support to the needs of education and training systems and relevant target groups*, including a range of disadvantaged groups. Programming remained relevant throughout the programming period to date. Ensuring relevance to needs was *fostered by a number of factors* including:

- The needs analyses in Partnership Agreements;
- A flexible approach to programming, allowing adaptation of Operational Programmes and planned actions to any changing needs of Member States/regions; and
- A close alignment of the priorities for ESF support to education and training with the European Semester and its country specific recommendations in the field of education and training.

*Improvements to relevance could however be made through enhanced consultation with actors closer to the needs of target groups*, such as non-governmental organisations, social partners and training providers. Whilst these actors were involved and consulted to some extent – in part thanks to the partnership principle enshrined in the European Structural and Investment Funds – there is room for more meaningful consultation and more engagement with a broader range of actors in both the planning and implementation phases.

ESF support to education and training has a *good overall degree of internal and external coherence*. It is *well aligned with other EU policies and initiatives* in the field of education and training and has supported their concrete implementation on the ground. There is also a good degree of coherence with the education-related European Semester *country specific recommendations*, which are overall well reflected in the situation analyses of Partnership agreements. The fulfilment of ESF ex-ante conditionalities did lead to structural reforms in education and training. ESF support to education and training is *internally coherent* with other ESF-focused Thematic Objectives and between Investment Priorities. *Coherence with other EU funding instruments in the field of education and training is more mixed*: while there is often good coherence in the legal texts, a variety of challenges in articulating different funds in implementation were identified. Good examples of coherence in implementation were nonetheless found in particular with the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Erasmus+, however only to a very limited degree with other relevant funding instruments (e.g. Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions).

ESF support to education and training has generated a *good degree of EU added value across all dimensions*. This includes:

- **Volume effects** including: the participation of large numbers of target groups (e.g. teachers and learners); an important number of actions; and widening the geographical scope and scale of implementation of key programmes.
- **Scope effects** such as: broadening actions to wider target groups, including many disadvantaged groups (e.g. Roma, older workers, low-skilled adults); and addressing policy areas which were not previously high priorities on the agenda (e.g. inclusive education, adult learning, non-formal education).
- **Role effects** in supporting: the transfer of ideas, the introduction of innovations (e.g. digitisation, new pedagogies) and structural reforms such as the development of local or regional education strategies or the rolling-out of new educational approaches and strategies nationwide; and major structural investments (e.g. digital education or adult learning).
- **Process effects** including: improvements to governance and organisation of education and training, such as supporting a better regional organisation of the offer of training; establishing closer links and cooperation between schools and training providers with other stakeholders at local/regional or national level; improving the skills and recruitment processes for teachers and trainers; and the development of new tools and processes to monitor and manage learning programmes.

*Many of the positive effects of ESF support to education and training are likely to be sustainable after the end of funding*. There is a strong likelihood of ongoing benefits at individual (e.g. skills, qualifications), institutional (e.g. new curricula, training materials) and policy level (e.g. educational reforms, local action plans).

### **Reflections for the next programming period**

Based on the lessons emerging from the study, *key forward-looking reflections* for the next programming period, further detailed in the final report, concern:

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- Fostering a strategic approach to programming ESF support to education and training;
- Maintaining a strong focus on disadvantaged learners;
- The need for better cooperation and consultation at all levels;
- Increasing impact through a greater focus on mutual learning and dissemination;

Improving the management capacity for ESF support to education and training.

## Étude pour l'évaluation du FSE en soutien à l'éducation et à la formation (objectif thématique 10)

### Synthèse

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Investir dans l'éducation et la formation pour tous constitue l'une des principales priorités pour l'Union européenne. L'importance de l'éducation et de la formation, pour parvenir à une croissance intelligente, durable et inclusive, est reconnue dans la Stratégie Europe 2020<sup>3</sup>, dont deux objectifs portent spécifiquement sur l'éducation et la formation. Le socle européen des droits sociaux réaffirme que l'éducation et la formation sont des axes prioritaires.

Parallèlement à d'autres mécanismes de financement essentiels, l'UE soutient l'éducation et la formation par le biais du Fonds social européen (FSE) et son objectif thématique numéro 10. Cet objectif thématique permet d'investir dans l'éducation, la formation et la formation professionnelle pour des compétences et un apprentissage tout au long de la vie grâce à **quatre priorités d'investissement**: (i) Réduire et éviter l'*abandon scolaire précoce* et promouvoir un accès égalitaire à l'éducation; (ii) améliorer la qualité et l'accès au *tertiaire* et à une éducation et formation équivalentes; (iii) renforcer l'égalité d'accès à l'*apprentissage tout au long de la vie* pour tous les groupes d'âge; et (iv) améliorer la *pertinence* des systèmes d'éducation et de formation pour le *marché du travail*.

Pour atteindre les objectifs en matière d'éducation et de formation, l'UE a alloué **quelque 39,2 milliards EUR** (qui incluent des cofinancements par l'UE et le pays concerné) au FSE en soutien à l'éducation et à la formation pour la période 2014-2020, ce qui représente 32 % du financement total prévu pour le FSE. Le plus haut montant alloué (29,1 %) est dédié à l'abandon scolaire précoce, vient ensuite l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie avec 27,4 % et 26,2 % vont à la pertinence pour le marché du travail. Le montant le plus faible (17,3 %) est destiné à l'enseignement supérieur. Le Portugal et la Pologne ont reçu les montants les plus élevés (un peu moins de 4 milliards EUR chacun) et le plus faible est revenu au Luxembourg (7,9 millions EUR). Plus de la moitié (51,4 %) de la totalité des fonds du FSE destinés au soutien à l'éducation et à la formation ont été alloués à des régions moins développées.

La Commission procède à une évaluation du soutien qu'apporte le FSE à l'éducation et la formation par le biais de l'objectif thématique 10, en préparation de la prochaine période de programmation du FSE. La présente étude contribue à cette évaluation en fournissant des éléments probants concernant sa mise en œuvre opérée jusqu'à la fin 2018.

### Principales conclusions

La présente étude a analysé les éléments recueillis par rapport aux critères d'évaluation suivants: efficacité, efficience, pertinence, cohérence et valeur ajoutée de l'UE.

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<sup>3</sup> Commission européenne (2010), Europe 2020: Une stratégie pour une croissance intelligente, durable et inclusive, COM(2010) 2020

Notre **analyse de l'efficacité** de la mise en œuvre a montré un *progrès dans la mise en œuvre financière* du soutien qu'apporte le FSE à l'éducation et à la formation, bien qu'il existe des différences entre les pays au niveau des performances, des programmes opérationnels et des priorités d'investissement. Globalement, 27 % des ressources prévues ont été dépensées avant la fin 2018 dans l'UE, ce qui correspond aux dépenses totales par le FSE pour les 28 pays de l'UE et aux attentes à cette étape de la période de programmation. *Les résultats correspondent également largement à d'autres objectifs thématiques du FSE*, avec 9,5 millions de participations avant la fin de l'année 2018 (35 % des participations totales au FSE).

Bien que la mise en œuvre soit encore en cours et que les données sur les résultats doivent encore être complétées, l'évaluation a néanmoins mis en lumière *des résultats significatifs*. À la fin de l'année 2018, quelque 801 096 personnes avaient participé à un programme d'enseignement/de formation et 3,15 millions avaient obtenu une qualification à leur sortie du programme. L'étude a identifié certaines réalisations notables au niveau des priorités d'investissement dans des pays particuliers. *Les priorités d'investissement axées sur l'abandon scolaire précoce et l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie ont été les plus réussies*, tant en termes de résultats directs que de potentiel pour un changement systémique à long terme. La réussite relative de ces priorités semble être liée à leur alignement plus marqué avec les priorités stratégiques nationales et régionales.

L'étude conclut par ailleurs que le soutien que le FSE apporte à l'éducation et à la formation *a effectivement répondu aux besoins des jeunes, en général*. S'agissant des adultes ayant un faible niveau de connaissance, les NEET (jeunes ne travaillant pas, ne suivant pas d'études ou de formation), les personnes qui travaillent et les demandeurs d'emploi, la réussite est plus en demi-teinte, car malgré la réussite d'activités destinées à ces groupes, des difficultés à les intéresser subsistent dans certains États membres, où il faudra développer des mécanismes de sensibilisation adéquats et soutenir des approches plus intensives et plus intégrées.

La modélisation de l'incidence du soutien qu'apporte le FSE à l'éducation et à la formation réalisée sur la base de simulations RHOMOLO<sup>4</sup> suggère que l'impact macroéconomique du programme se traduira par une croissance de 0,16 % au produit intérieur brut européen d'ici 2023 (ce qui correspond à environ 18 milliards EUR), par rapport au chiffre de référence, et la création d'environ 170 000 emplois supplémentaires. Cet impact s'ajoute aux résultats positifs pour les participants aux activités du FSE.

*Beaucoup de types d'activités fructueuses ont été identifiées*; elles vont du soutien aux apprenants vulnérables et au corps enseignant qui travaille avec eux aux innovations numériques dans les salles de classe et aux plans d'action locale visant à réduire l'abandon scolaire précoce. Les éléments recueillis dans le cadre de cette évaluation soulignent une multitude de *facteurs de réussite et de difficultés liés aux priorités*

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<sup>4</sup> RHOMOLO est le modèle d'équilibre spatial général calculable de la Commission européenne, pour plus d'informations, consultez: <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/rhomolo>

*d'investissement spécifiques et aux types d'activités.* Les facteurs de réussite couramment identifiés sont les suivants:

- Les gouvernements locaux, régionaux et nationaux adoptent un rôle central pour l'exécution du projet (en particulier pour l'abandon scolaire précoce);
- Une coordination solide et l'implication des parties prenantes locales et régionales, qui peuvent adapter les programmes aux besoins spécifiques;
- Un soutien intense et adapté aux personnes sur une période plus longue (en particulier pour l'abandon scolaire précoce et l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie).

*Les difficultés* incluent la capacité à toucher certains des groupes les moins accessibles parmi les plus désavantagés et le manque de capacités suffisantes pour assurer une gestion efficace.

L'évaluation a également identifié une série de *facteurs de réussite clés dans les performances générales des programmes opérationnels*, notamment:

- La capacité à réaliser les programmes d'éducation et de formation du FSE à l'échelle requise;
- Une approche stratégique solide au niveau de la programmation;
- Des processus de coordination bien établis qui impliquent l'autorité en charge de la gestion, les autorités locales et régionales et des partenaires clés comme des organisations non gouvernementales et les partenaires sociaux, à l'étape de la conception; et
- Renforcer les capacités du personnel des organisations bénéficiaires en matière d'accès, de mise en œuvre et de suivi des fonds.

Les principales *difficultés* rencontrées incluent le chevauchement avec la mise en œuvre du programme antérieur du FSE, une capacité de gestion limitée chez les autorités en charge de la gestion et les organisations bénéficiaires pour réaliser les activités et satisfaire aux objectifs, ainsi que des contraintes lorsqu'il est nécessaire d'ajuster les priorités du FSE afin de répondre aux besoins émergents en matière de formation et d'éducation.

**L'analyse d'efficacité** indique que *le montant moyen dépensé par participant s'élève à 1 137 EUR* (entre 729 EUR pour la priorité d'investissement consacrée à l'abandon scolaire précoce et 2 754 EUR pour la priorité d'investissement axée sur l'enseignement supérieur), et que le montant par résultat est de 2 378 EUR, avec de grandes différences entre les pays. L'analyse qualitative montre que parmi les *facteurs pouvant favoriser l'efficacité* figurent:

- L'utilisation d'organes intermédiaires;
- Des partenariats plus larges, notamment avec des organisations sectorielles spécialisées; et
- Des options budgétaires simplifiées.

Cependant, des éléments indiquaient également que lorsque trop de partenaires sont impliqués dans la mise en œuvre, cela peut renforcer la charge administrative et provoquer des retards. *Il est estimé que les exigences administratives du FSE sont proportionnées aux résultats positifs obtenus grâce au fonds.* Il est toutefois reconnu que ces exigences peuvent se révéler complexes et chronophages, et donc onéreuses pour les organisations bénéficiaires plus modestes, notamment celles qui travaillent auprès de groupes ou écoles cibles spécifiques.

Un degré de **pertinence** relativement élevé de la programmation du soutien du FSE par rapport aux besoins des systèmes d'éducation et de formation et des groupes cibles concernés, notamment une série de groupes défavorisés, a été constaté. À ce jour, la programmation demeure pertinente tout au long de la période de programmation. S'assurer que l'adéquation avec les besoins a été *favorisée par une série de facteurs*, notamment:

- des analyses de besoins réalisées dans les accords de partenariat;
- une approche flexible de la programmation, qui permet d'adapter les programmes opérationnels et les actions prévues à l'évolution des besoins des États membres/régions; et
- un alignement étroit des priorités établies dans le cadre soutien du FSE à l'éducation et à la formation avec le Semestre européen et ses recommandations spécifiques par pays portant sur le domaine de l'éducation et de la formation.

*Des améliorations pourraient toutefois être apportées en matière de pertinence grâce à une consultation renforcée avec des acteurs plus au fait des besoins des groupes cibles*, comme les organisations non gouvernementales, les partenaires sociaux et les prestataires de formations. Bien que ces acteurs aient été impliqués et consultés, en partie grâce au principe de partenariat inscrit dans les Fonds structurels et d'investissement européens, il est possible de procéder à une consultation plus significative et d'impliquer des acteurs plus divers dans les phases de planification et de mise en œuvre.

Le soutien du FSE à l'éducation et à la formation présente, en général, un *bon degré de cohérence interne et externe*. Il est *bien aligné sur les autres politiques et initiatives de l'UE* dans le domaine de l'éducation et de la formation et appuie leur mise en œuvre concrète sur le terrain. Il est également assez cohérent avec les *recommandations spécifiques par pays* en matière d'éducation émises par le Semestre européen, lesquelles se reflètent bien, de manière générale, dans les analyses de la situation des accords de partenariats. Le respect des conditionnalités *ex ante* du FSE a conduit à des réformes structurelles dans le domaine de l'éducation et de la formation. Il existe une *cohérence interne* entre l'objectif portant sur l'éducation et la formation et les autres objectifs thématiques du FSE ainsi qu'entre les priorités d'investissement. *La cohérence avec d'autres instruments de financement de l'UE dans le domaine de l'éducation et de la formation est plus mitigée*: bien qu'il existe souvent une bonne cohérence dans les textes juridiques, des difficultés à articuler la mise en œuvre de différents fonds ont été identifiées. De bons exemples de cohérence dans la mise en œuvre ont toutefois été constatés, notamment avec le Fonds européen de développement régional (FEDER) et Erasmus+, alors que cela ne se perçoit qu'à un degré très limité avec d'autres instruments de financement pertinents (p. ex. les actions Marie Skłodowska-Curie).

Le soutien du FSE à l'éducation et à la formation a généré un *bon degré de valeur ajoutée à l'UE dans toutes les dimensions*. Ceci comprend des:

- **Effets de volume**, notamment: la participation de beaucoup de groupes cibles (p. ex. des enseignants et des apprenants); de nombreuses actions; et l'élargissement de la portée géographique et de l'échelle de mise en œuvre des

programmes clés.

- **Effets de portée**, tels que: l'élargissement des actions afin d'y inclure des groupes cibles plus larges, notamment de nombreux groupes défavorisés (comme les Roms, les travailleurs âgés, les adultes ayant un faible niveau de compétences); et l'inclusion de domaines politiques qui n'étaient pas prioritaires à l'ordre du jour auparavant (p. ex., l'éducation inclusive, l'apprentissage des adultes, l'éducation non formelle).
- **Effets de rôle** dans le soutien au transfert d'idées, à l'introduction d'innovations (p. ex. la numérisation, les nouvelles pédagogies) et aux réformes structurelles comme l'élaboration de stratégies pédagogiques locales ou régionales ou le déploiement de nouvelles approches et stratégies éducatives à l'échelle nationale; et aux investissements structurels majeurs (p. ex. l'éducation numérique ou l'apprentissage des adultes).
- **Les effets des processus**, notamment: améliorations de la gouvernance et de l'organisation de l'éducation et de la formation, comme le soutien à une meilleure organisation régionale de l'offre de formation; l'établissement de liens et d'une coopération plus étroites entre les écoles et les prestataires de formation et d'autres parties prenantes au niveau local/régional ou national; l'amélioration des compétences et des processus de recrutement des enseignants et des formateurs; et l'élaboration de nouveaux outils et processus pour assurer le suivi et la gestion des programmes d'apprentissage.

*Nombre des effets positifs du soutien du FSE à l'éducation et à la formation sont susceptibles d'être durables après la fin du financement. Il y a de fortes chances de voir des retombées positives à long terme au niveau individuel (p. ex., les compétences, les qualifications), institutionnel (p. ex., les nouveaux programmes d'études, le matériel de formation) et politique (p. ex., les réformes éducatives, les plans d'action locaux).*

### **Perspectives pour la prochaine période de programmation**

Selon les enseignements tirés de cette étude, les principales perspectives prévisionnelles pour la prochaine période de programmation, détaillées plus avant dans le rapport final, devraient:

- Favoriser une approche stratégique de la programmation du soutien du FSE à l'éducation et à la formation;
- Continuer de se concentrer davantage sur les apprenants défavorisés;
- La nécessité d'améliorer la coopération et la consultation à tous les niveaux;
- Augmenter son incidence en mettant plus l'accent sur l'apprentissage mutuel et la diffusion;
- Améliorer les capacités de gestion du soutien du FSE à l'éducation et à la formation.

## **Studie zur Bewertung der ESF-Förderung für die Aus- und Weiterbildung (thematisches Ziel 10)**

### **Kurzfassung**

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Investitionen in die Aus- und Weiterbildung für alle haben für die Europäische Union höchste Priorität. Die Bedeutung der Aus- und Weiterbildung für ein intelligentes, nachhaltiges und integratives Wachstum wird in der Europa-2020-Strategie<sup>5</sup> anerkannt, wobei sich zwei ihrer Hauptziele speziell auf die Aus- und Weiterbildung konzentrieren. Die Europäische Säule der sozialen Rechte bekräftigt den vorrangigen Schwerpunkt auf die Aus- und Weiterbildung.

Neben anderen wichtigen Finanzierungsmechanismen wird die EU-Unterstützung für Aus- und Weiterbildung vom Europäischen Sozialfonds (ESF) über das thematische Ziel 10 bereitgestellt. Dieses thematische Ziel ermöglicht Investitionen in Bildung, Ausbildung und Berufsausbildung für Fähigkeiten und lebenslanges Lernen mit **vier Investitionsprioritäten**: (i) Verringerung und Verhinderung des vorzeitigen Schulabbruchs und Förderung eines gleichberechtigten Zugangs zur Bildung; (ii) Verbesserung der Qualität und des Zugangs zu tertiärer und gleichwertiger Aus- und Weiterbildung; (iii) Verbesserung des gleichberechtigten Zugangs zu lebenslangem Lernen für alle Altersgruppen; und (iv) Verbesserung der Arbeitsmarktrelevanz von Aus- und Weiterbildungssystemen.

Um ihre Aus- und Weiterbildungsziele zu erreichen, hat die EU **ca. 39,2 Mrd. EUR** (einschließlich EU- und nationaler Kofinanzierung) für die ESF-Unterstützung der Aus- und Weiterbildung im Zeitraum 2014-2020 bereitgestellt, was 32% der geplanten Gesamtfinanzierung des ESF entspricht. Die größte geplante Zuweisung (29,1%) entfällt auf das Problem des vorzeitigen Schulabbruchs, gefolgt von 27,4% für lebenslanges Lernen und 26,2% für Arbeitsmarktrelevanz; die kleinste geplante Zuweisung (17,3%) entfällt auf den tertiären Bildungsbereich. Die höchsten Zuweisungen entfielen auf Portugal und Polen (jeweils knapp 4 Mrd. EUR) und die niedrigsten auf Luxemburg (7,9 Mio. EUR). Mehr als die Hälfte (51,4%) aller Mittel wurden der ESF-Förderung der Aus- und Weiterbildung in weniger entwickelten Regionen zugewiesen.

Die Kommission führt derzeit eine Bewertung der ESF-Förderung für die im Rahmen des thematischen Ziels 10 bereitgestellte Aus- und Weiterbildung durch, um sich auf den nächsten ESF-Programmplanungszeitraum vorzubereiten. Diese Studie trägt zu dieser Bewertung bei, indem sie Belege für ihre Umsetzung bis Ende 2018 liefert.

### **Wichtigste Ergebnisse**

In der Studie wurden die erreichten Ergebnisse anhand folgender fünf Bewertungskriterien analysiert: Effektivität, Effizienz, Relevanz, Kohärenz und EU-Mehrwert.

Unsere **Analyse der Effektivität** bei der Umsetzung hat gezeigt, dass bei der

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<sup>5</sup> Europäischer Rat (2010), Europa 2020: Eine Strategie für intelligentes, nachhaltiges und integratives Wachstum, COM(2010) 2020

*finanziellen Umsetzung* der ESF-Förderung der Aus- und Weiterbildung *positive Fortschritte* erzielt wurden, dass jedoch zwischen den Ländern, den operativen Programmen und den Investitionsprioritäten große Leistungsunterschiede bestehen. Insgesamt wurden bis Ende 2018 EU-weit 27% der geplanten Ressourcen verbraucht, was der gesamten ESF-Ausgabenquote der EU28 und den Erwartungen für diese Phase des Programmplanungszeitraums entspricht. *Das Ergebnis entspricht* mit 9,5 Millionen Beteiligungen bis Ende 2018 (35% der gesamten ESF-Beteiligungen) *auch weitgehend anderen thematischen ESF-Zielen*.

Obwohl die Implementierung noch andauert und umfassende Ergebnisdaten noch nachgeliefert werden, hat die Bewertung dennoch *einige bedeutende Erfolge* hervorgehoben. Bis Ende 2018 hatten 801.096 Teilnehmer an einer Aus- oder Weiterbildung teilgenommen, und 3,15 Millionen Teilnehmer hatten zum Schluss eine Qualifikation erworben. Die Studie hat einige bemerkenswerte Erfolge auf der Ebene der Investitionsprioritäten in bestimmten Ländern festgestellt. Die Investitionsprioritäten, die sich auf den *vorzeitigen Schulabbruch und das lebenslange Lernen* konzentrieren, waren sowohl hinsichtlich der direkten Ergebnisse als auch ihres Potenzials für einen längerfristigen systemischen Wandel *am erfolgreichsten*. Der relative Erfolg dieser Prioritäten scheint mit ihrer stärkeren Anpassung an die nationalen und regionalen strategischen Prioritäten zusammenzuhängen.

Die Studie stellt außerdem fest, dass die ESF-Förderung für die Aus- und Weiterbildung *die Bedürfnisse junger Menschen im Allgemeinen effektiv berücksichtigt* hat. Der Erfolg war bei gering qualifizierten Erwachsenen, NEETs (junge Menschen ohne Anstellung und nicht in Aus- und Weiterbildung), Erwerbstätigen und Arbeitslosen gemischt, da trotz erfolgreicher Beispiele für Maßnahmen, die auf diese Gruppen abzielen, in einigen Mitgliedstaaten noch Herausforderungen bestehen, wie z. B. bei der Entwicklung geeigneter Kontaktmechanismen oder der Förderung intensiverer und ganzheitlicherer Ansätze.

Die Modellierung der Auswirkungen der ESF-Förderung für die Aus- und Weiterbildung auf der Grundlage von RHOMOLO<sup>6</sup>-Simulationen legt nahe, dass das Programm als endgültige makroökonomische Auswirkung außer den positiven Ergebnissen für die Teilnehmer an ESF-Maßnahmen im Vergleich zum Ausgangswert bis 2023 0,16% (was ungefähr 18 Mrd. EUR entspricht) zum europäischen Bruttoinlandsprodukt beitragen und rund 170.000 zusätzliche Arbeitsplätze schaffen wird.

*Es wurden viele erfolgreiche Arten von Maßnahmen festgestellt* – von der Förderung schutzbedürftiger Lerner und dem mit ihnen zusammenarbeitenden Lehrpersonal über digitale Innovationen in den Klassenzimmern bis hin zu lokalen Maßnahmenplänen zur Bekämpfung des vorzeitigen Schulabbruchs. Die Bewertungsnachweise heben *in Bezug auf die spezifischen Investitionsprioritäten und Arten von Maßnahmen eine Vielzahl von Erfolgsfaktoren und Herausforderungen* hervor. Allgemeine Erfolgsfaktoren wurden wie folgt festgestellt:

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<sup>6</sup> RHOMOLO ist das räumlich berechenbare allgemeine Gleichgewichtsmodell der Europäischen Kommission. Weitere Einzelheiten unter <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/rhomolo>

- Lokale, regionale und nationale Regierungen, die eine zentrale Rolle bei der Projektabwicklung übernehmen (insbesondere für den vorzeitigen Schulabbruch);
- Starke Koordination und Einbeziehung lokaler und regionaler Interessengruppen, die Programme auf besondere Bedürfnisse zuschneiden können;
- Bereitstellung einer intensiven und maßgeschneiderten Unterstützung von Einzelpersonen über einen längeren Zeitraum (insbesondere beim vorzeitigen Schulabbruch und dem lebenslangen Lernen).

Zu den *Herausforderungen* gehörten das Erreichen einiger der am schwersten erreichbaren benachteiligten Gruppen und Fälle, in denen nicht genügend Kapazitäten für ein effektives Management vorhanden waren.

Bei der Bewertung wurden auch verschiedene *wichtige Erfolgsfaktoren für die Gesamtleistung der Maßnahmenprogramme* festgestellt, darunter:

- Die Fähigkeit, ESF-Aus- und Weiterbildungsprogramme im erforderlichen Umfang anzubieten;
- Ein starker strategischer Ansatz auf Programmebene;
- Starke Koordinierungsprozesse, an denen die leitende Behörde, lokale und regionale Behörden sowie wichtige Partner wie nichtstaatliche Organisationen und Sozialpartner ab der Entwurfsphase beteiligt sind; und
- Aufbau der Personalkapazität in begünstigten Organisationen hinsichtlich des Zugangs zu, der Umsetzung und der Überwachung der Mittel.

Zu den *wichtigsten Herausforderungen* gehören Überschneidungen mit der Umsetzung des vorherigen ESF-Programms, begrenzte Kapazitäten bei leitenden Behörden und begünstigten Organisationen, um die Ziele und Einschränkungen bei der Anpassung der ESF-Prioritäten an den sich abzeichnenden Aus- und Weiterbildungsbedarf zu erreichen.

Die **Effizienzanalyse** hat ergeben, dass die *durchschnittlichen Ausgaben pro Teilnehmer 1.137 EUR* (von 729 EUR für die Investitionspriorität für den vorzeitigen Schulabbruch bis zu 2.754 EUR für die Investitionspriorität mit Schwerpunkt auf der tertiären Bildung) und pro Ergebnis 2.378 EUR betragen. Dabei gibt es große Unterschiede zwischen den Ländern. Die qualitative Analyse hat gezeigt, dass folgende Faktoren die *Effizienz* steigern können:

- Einsatz von Vermittlungsstellen;
- Weitergehende Partnerschaftsverträge, einschließlich spezialisierter branchenspezifischer Organisationen; und
- Vereinfachte Kostensoptionen.

Es gab jedoch auch Hinweise darauf, dass zu viele an der Umsetzung beteiligte Partner zum Verwaltungsaufwand und zu Verzögerungen beitragen können. *Die administrativen Anforderungen des ESF werden im Vergleich mit den erzielten Vorteilen als verhältnismäßig angesehen.* Es wird jedoch anerkannt, dass diese Anforderungen komplex und zeitaufwändig sein können und daher für kleinere begünstigte Organisationen, beispielsweise diejenigen, die mit bestimmten Zielgruppen oder Schulen arbeiten, belastend sind.

Die **Relevanz** der ESF-Förderungsprogramme für die Bedürfnisse der Aus- und

*Weiterbildung und der relevanten Zielgruppen, einschließlich verschiedener benachteiligter Gruppen, war relativ hoch.* Die Programme blieben während des gesamten bisherigen Programmplanungszeitraums relevant. Die Sicherstellung der Relevanz für die Bedürfnisse wurde *durch verschiedene Faktoren gefördert*, darunter:

- Die Bedarfsanalysen in Partnerschaftsverträgen:
- Ein flexibler Programmansatz, der die Anpassung der Maßnahmenprogramme und der geplanten Aktionen an sich ändernde Bedürfnisse der Mitgliedstaaten/Regionen ermöglicht; und
- Eine enge Abstimmung der Prioritäten für die ESF-Förderung der Aus- und Weiterbildung mit dem Europäischen Semester und seinen länderspezifischen Empfehlungen im Bereich der Aus- und Weiterbildung.

*Verbesserungen der Relevanz könnten jedoch durch eine verstärkte Beratung der Akteure erzielt werden, die den Bedürfnissen der Zielgruppen, beispielsweise nichtstaatliche Organisationen, Sozialpartner und Schulungsanbieter näher kommt.* Während diese Akteure in gewissem Umfang – teilweise dank des im Europäischen Struktur- und Investitionsfonds verankerten Partnerschaftsprinzips – einbezogen und beraten wurden, besteht Raum für eine bedeutsamere Beratung und ein stärkeres Engagement für ein breiteres Spektrum an Akteuren sowohl in der Planungs- als auch in der Umsetzungsphase.

Die ESF-Förderung für die Aus- und Weiterbildung weist insgesamt einen *hohen Grad an interner und externer Kohärenz* auf. Sie ist *gut abgestimmt auf andere Politikbereiche und Initiativen der EU* im Bereich der Aus- und Weiterbildung und hat deren konkrete Umsetzung vor Ort unterstützt. Es besteht auch ein hohes Maß an Kohärenz mit den *länderspezifischen Bildungsempfehlungen des Europäischen Semesters*, die sich insgesamt gut in den Situationsanalysen der Partnerschaftsverträge widerspiegeln. Die Erfüllung der Vorbedingungen des ESF führte zu Strukturreformen in der Aus- und Weiterbildung. Die ESF-Förderung für die Aus- und Weiterbildung steht intern im Einklang mit anderen ESF-fokussierten thematischen Zielen und zwischen den Investitionsprioritäten. *Die Kohärenz mit anderen EU-Finanzierungsinstrumenten im Bereich Aus- und Weiterbildung* ist uneinheitlicher: Während Rechtstexte oftmals eine gute Kohärenz aufweisen, wurden verschiedene Herausforderungen bei der Formulierung unterschiedlicher Mittel bei der Umsetzung festgestellt. Gute Beispiele für die Kohärenz bei der Umsetzung findet man jedoch insbesondere beim Europäischen Fonds für regionale Entwicklung (EFRE) und bei Erasmus+; bei anderen relevanten Finanzierungsinstrumenten (z. B. Marie-Sklódowska-Curie-Maßnahmen) hingegen aber nur in sehr begrenztem Umfang.

Die ESF-Förderung für die Aus- und Weiterbildung hat in allen Dimensionen einen guten **EU-Mehrwert** geschaffen. Dazu gehören:

- **Mengeneffekte**, darunter die Teilnahme einer großen Anzahl von Zielgruppen (z. B. Lehrern und Lernenden), eine wichtige Anzahl an Maßnahmen und die Erweiterung des geografischen Umfangs sowie des Ausmaßes der Umsetzung von Schlüsselprogrammen.
- **Umfangseffekte** wie die Ausweitung der Maßnahmen auf breitere Zielgruppen, einschließlich vieler benachteiligter Gruppen (z. B. Roma, ältere Arbeitnehmer, gering qualifizierte Erwachsene) und die Behandlung von

- Politikbereichen, die zuvor keine hohen Prioritäten auf der Tagesordnung hatten (z. B. integrative Bildung, Erwachsenenbildung, nicht-formale Bildung).
- **Rolleneffekte** bei der Förderung: Ideentransfer, Einführung von Innovationen (z. B. Digitalisierung, neue Pädagogik) und Strukturreformen wie beispielsweise die Entwicklung lokaler oder regionaler Bildungsstrategien oder die landesweite Einführung neuer Bildungsansätze und -strategien, sowie große strukturelle Investitionen (z. B. digitale Bildung oder Erwachsenenbildung).
  - **Prozesseffekte**, darunter die Verbesserung von Governance und Organisation der Aus- und Weiterbildung, z. B. Förderung einer besseren regionalen Organisation des Ausbildungsangebots, der Aufbau engerer Verbindungen und Zusammenarbeit zwischen Schulen und Ausbildungsanbietern mit anderen Interessengruppen auf lokaler/regionaler oder nationaler Ebene, die Verbesserung der Fähigkeiten und Einstellungsverfahren für Lehrer und Ausbilder, sowie die Entwicklung neuer Tools und Verfahren zur Überwachung und Verwaltung von Lernprogrammen.

*Viele positive Auswirkungen der ESF-Förderung für die Aus- und Weiterbildung dürften nach dem Ende der Finanzierung Bestand haben. Es besteht eine hohe Wahrscheinlichkeit für anhaltende Vorteile auf individueller (z. B. Fähigkeiten, Qualifikationen), institutioneller (z. B. neue Lehrpläne, Schulungsmaterialien) und politischer Ebene (z. B. Bildungsreformen, lokale Maßnahmenpläne).*

### **Reflexionen für den nächsten Programmplanungszeitraum**

Basierend auf den Lehren aus der Studie betreffen die *wichtigsten zukunftsgerichteten Überlegungen für den nächsten Programmplanungszeitraum*, die im Abschlussbericht näher erläutert werden, Folgendes:

- Die Förderung eines strategischen Ansatzes zur Programmierung der ESF-Förderung für die Aus- und Weiterbildung;
- Die Aufrechterhaltung eines starken Fokus auf benachteiligte Lernende;
- Die Notwendigkeit einer besseren Zusammenarbeit und Konsultation auf allen Ebenen;
- Die Verbesserung der Auswirkungen durch stärkere Konzentration auf gegenseitiges Lernen und Lehren;
- Die Verbesserung der Managementkapazität bei der ESF-Förderung für die Aus- und Weiterbildung.

**List of acronyms and abbreviations**

AIR	Annual Implementation Report
AMIF	Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
CBA	Cost-Benefit Analysis
COSME	EU programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs
CPR	Common Provisions Regulation
CSRs	Country specific recommendations
DG EAC	Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport & Culture
DG EMPL	Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
ECEC	Early childhood education and care
ECVET	European Credit transfer system for Vocational Education and Training
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance Framework in Vocational Education and Training
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
ESF	European Social Fund
ESL	Early school leaving
ET 2020	Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training 2020
EU	European Union
EUR	Euros
EURES	European Employment Services
IP	Investment Priority
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
IT	Information technology
iVET	Initial vocational education and training
MA	Managing Authority
MS	Member State
MSCA	Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions
NEET	Not in Education, Employment and Training
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
OMC	Open method of coordination
OP	Operational Programme
PA	Partnership Agreement
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SFC	System for Fund Management in the European Union
TO	Thematic Objective
VET	Vocational education and training
YEI	Youth Employment Initiative

**Country abbreviations**

BE	Belgium
BG	Bulgaria
CY	Cyprus
CZ	Czech Republic
DE	Germany
DK	Denmark
EE	Estonia
EL	Greece
ES	Spain
FI	Finland
FR	France
HR	Croatia
HU	Hungary
IE	Ireland
IT	Italy
LT	Lithuania
LU	Luxembourg
LV	Latvia
MT	Malta
NL	Netherlands
PL	Poland
PT	Portugal
RO	Romania
SE	Sweden
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia
UK	United Kingdom

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The evaluation study will contribute to the staff working document of the European Commission which is aiming to both take stock of the achievements to date (2014-2018) under Thematic Objective 10 dedicated to Education and Training, while providing lessons for the design and implementation of the future European Social Fund plus (ESF+) and paving the way for the ex-post evaluation.

It should be noted that the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic are not covered in the report as the evaluation research was largely conducted prior to the start of the pandemic. Some reflections on the implications of the pandemic for the future ESF Thematic Objective 10 priorities are nonetheless included in the conclusions section.

### 1.1. Purpose and objectives of the study

The importance of education and training - in order to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth - are recognised in the Europe 2020 strategy<sup>7</sup>. Two of the EU2020 headline targets focus specifically on education and training: reducing early school leaving to below 10%<sup>8</sup> and 40% of 30-34 year olds having completed tertiary education<sup>9</sup>. The recently adopted European Pillar of Social Rights also affirms the importance of education and training for every European citizen stating that:

*'Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions to the labour market'*<sup>10</sup>.

Investing in education and training for all is therefore a key priority area for the European Union and its Member States. Alongside other key funding mechanisms – such as Erasmus+, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions (under HORIZON 2020) – support to education and training in the EU is mainly provided by the European Social Fund (ESF), alongside the other European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), via Thematic Objective 10. It is important to note however that this evaluation focuses on ESF only. Other ESI Funds are covered in separate evaluations. The ESF support is provided under shared management, which allows for responsibility to be taken at the appropriate level: ESF guidelines are designed at European level through consultation with a wide variety of stakeholders, and Operational Programmes are negotiated between national authorities and the Commission. Implementation on the ground, through Operational Programmes,

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<sup>7</sup> European Commission (2010), Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, COM(2010) 2020

<sup>8</sup> The indicator on early leavers from education and training is expressed as the percentage of people aged 18 to 24 who have completed at most lower secondary education and are not involved in further education or training out of the total population aged 18 to 24

<sup>9</sup> Europe 2020. A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, COM (2010)2020; more information on [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm)

<sup>10</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en)

is managed by the relevant authorities in each country, as governed by the Regulations<sup>11</sup>.

The European Social Fund (ESF) is the Union's main instrument for promoting employment and social inclusion – helping people get a job (or a better job), integrating disadvantaged people into society and ensuring fairer life opportunities for all. It does this by investing in Europe's people and their skills – employed and jobless, young and old. The ESF, with a total budget of over EUR 120 billion for the 2014-2020 period<sup>12</sup>, aims to improve lives and develop human capital in the EU. As well as supporting education and vocational training, the ESF invests in sustainable and quality jobs<sup>13</sup> and promotes social inclusion<sup>14</sup>, helping people to get jobs, maintain them, access better quality employment and to ensure fairer job opportunities for all EU citizens. ESF support is focused in particular on individuals who are at risk of leaving education and training, the long-term unemployed, and other disadvantaged people and communities<sup>15</sup>.

In the current period (2014-2020), ESF investments focus on specific Thematic Objectives (TOs) of the EU cohesion policy: promoting employment and supporting labour mobility (TO8); promoting social inclusion and combating poverty (TO9); investing in education, skills and lifelong learning and enhancing institutional capacity (TO10) and an efficient public administration (TO11). Based on the size of the total envelope allocated (EUR 39.2 billion), education and vocational training is among the main objectives of the ESF, closely following the objective of supporting sustainable and quality employment (total budget EUR 40.2 billion). Support to social inclusion amounts to EUR 31.3 billion, with a further EUR 5 billion to be invested in technical assistance and efficiency of public services each.

Thematic Objective 10 supports 'investments in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning' through four Investment Priorities for the ESF:

- Investment Priority 10.i: Reducing and preventing early school leaving and promoting equal access to education, including formal, non-formal and informal learning pathways for reintegrating into education and training (hereafter referred to as IP10.i Early school leaving and access to learning pathways);
- Investment Priority 10.ii: Improving the quality and efficiency of, and access to, tertiary and equivalent education and training (IP10.ii Tertiary education);

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<sup>11</sup> (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006

<sup>12</sup> Amount for total (EU and national) funding. EU contribution will be €83.9 billion.

<https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/funds/esf>

<sup>13</sup> Including through Youth Employment Initiative

<sup>14</sup> It also supports provision of technical assistance activities and improving public administration in the EU.

<sup>15</sup> Article 2.1 of the ESF Regulation

- Investment Priority 10.iii: Enhancing equal access to lifelong learning for all age groups in formal, non-formal and informal settings (IP10.iii Lifelong learning); and
- Investment Priority 10.iv: Improving the labour market relevance of education and training systems. (IP10.iv Labour market relevance).

The evaluation has addressed all four ESF Investment Priorities of Thematic Objective 10 during the period 2014-2018. In geographical terms, the evaluation is covering all 28 Member States<sup>16</sup>. It does not cover investments from other Structural and Investment Funds under Thematic Objective 10.

The overarching objective of the study is to provide the Commission with evidence and analysis to support its evaluation of ESF support to education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning delivered under Thematic Objective 10. The purpose of the study is threefold, encompassing:

- Taking stock of the results of ESF support achieved so far in the current programming period, covering 2014-2018;
- Supporting the negotiation of the Programmes for the ESF plus for the next programming period 2021-2027, by providing lessons learned, notably as regards relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, EU added value, outreach and target groups most in need, as well as synergies between relevant EU instruments;
- Paving the way for the ex-post evaluation of the ESF by the Commission due by December 2024.

## **1.2. Methodology and work carried out**

The specific objectives of the study are to assess the education and training investments supported by ESF against the five specified evaluation criteria – relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, and EU added value, in line with the Better Regulation guidelines. A series of high-level evaluation questions and sub-questions that correspond to these criteria, which form the basis of the evaluation framework, are presented in Annex Four, which also contains the detailed description of the methodology.

The evaluation criteria are used as a mechanism for exploring the range of key issues of relevance to the evaluation. These encompass, amongst others: whether the defined target groups were reached, what changes are being achieved as a result of support, as well as any success factors and barriers. In particular, the evaluation has considered pilot projects and the changes or reforms to service delivery which they are achieving. While the assessment of the effects resulting from the operations in scope are primarily at the individual or target group level, where appropriate and applicable the evaluation has also considered broader impacts (e.g. structural), particularly in terms of added value. It also includes an estimation of the potential macroeconomic impacts of Thematic

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<sup>16</sup> In practice 27 countries will be covered as there is no allocation of funds to Thematic Objective 10 in the Netherlands. As the evaluation covers the period 2014-2018, it should be noted that the UK will be referred to as a Member State in the rest of the document.

Objective 10 operations that have been obtained by the Joint Research Centre using the RHOMOLO model<sup>17</sup>. Further key areas for investigation for the study have included the administrative burden of EU support, the visibility of EU support, the suitability of the programme monitoring framework and the extent to which ESF has been effective in supporting reforms and improvement of education and training systems.

Full detail of the methodological approach to the evaluation is set out in Annex 4: Detailed methodology and analytical models used for the evaluation. An outline of the evaluation tasks is provided below:

- **Task 1 - Mapping ESF monitoring and socio-economic data including:** country reviews by all country experts; systematic analysis of socio-economic and monitoring data for all Member States; overall analysis of country findings; and review of evaluation evidence.
- **Task 2 - Assisting Commission in the consultation process including:**
  - Public Consultation - support was provided to the Commission in drafting and finalising the questionnaire for the Public Consultation. The Public Consultation was launched on 18 November 2019 by the European Commission and was open for 14 weeks until 24 February 2020. There were 817 responses;
  - Targeted consultations were also completed with 29 stakeholders (25 interviews);
  - Meta-analysis of OP ESF participant surveys of relevance to TO10 was completed;
  - A synopsis consultation report was also developed which summarises the activities, methods and findings of the entire consultation task, in line with the requirements of the Better Regulation and guidelines and toolbox.
- **Task 3 - Cost-effectiveness analysis:** Cost per output and cost per result analysis was undertaken at the EU level by Member State and IP, drawing on the available monitoring data. An overall, indicative cost-benefit estimation at the EU level was carried out based on participations and results data collected for Task 1. The overall cost-effectiveness analysis was expanded to provide an in-depth understanding of the factors having an influence in delivery and effectiveness (and thus cost-benefit ratios) at the level of specific OPs and/or actions.
- **Task 4 - Individual case study reports:** In-depth research of a sample of 20 Operational Programmes based on detailed desk review and interviews with 6-8 stakeholders for each case study.
- **Task 5 - Country-specific and Investment Priority factsheets:** 27 individual country factsheets submitted with final report.

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<sup>17</sup> RHOMOLO is the spatial computable general equilibrium model of the **European Commission**, see for details: <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/rhomolo>

- **Task 6 - Final analysis and reporting:** Draft report submitted early April; validation process using the Policy Delphi approach with 22 experts/ stakeholders.

### 1.3. Limitations of the research

There are a number of specific limitations associated with the scope and coverage of the evaluation research, the quality of available programme data and the methodology that was developed within the constraints of the available resources for the study. The key limitations which relate to the analysis of monitoring data, and the effectiveness and efficiency evaluation criteria are set out in Table 1, as follows:

**Table 1 Limitations of the research**

Evaluation research element	Key limitations
Analysis of programme monitoring data	<p>A key limitation of the programme monitoring data is that the output indicators are not always specifically oriented towards certain education and training objectives, while there are also data limitations on specific categories of participation. The output indicators do not distinguish between relevant populations for TO10 reached by the interventions, for example whether the participants are teachers or students and levels of education cannot be distinguished in the results data. It is not possible to cross-analyse participation indicators against particular sub-group characteristics. For example, among participants with certain qualification levels, it is not possible to distinguish adults from children or the proportion of low-qualified adults or early school leavers with a certain education attainment (in these cases, cross analysis of the age and the level of qualification would be required). It should also be noted that output data is collected on numbers of participations not participants, therefore it is not possible to be precise on the number of individuals supported.</p> <p>It should also be noted that output data is collected on numbers of participations not participants, therefore it is not possible to be precise on the number of individuals supported.</p> <p>Indicators covering information on employment status, age, and education level cannot be cross-analysed, and it is therefore not possible to count, for example, low-qualified adults or early school leavers with a certain education attainment (in these cases, cross analysis of the age and the level of qualification would be required). Taking into account these constraints, the output data allows analysis of TO10 participations according to the Investment Priority under which they were supported, the region in which they received support, their gender, age, education attainment, employment status and other socio-economic conditions.</p> <p>Data collection on individuals supported by ESF TO10 is not carried out in a consistent way across different Member States, OPs and IPs, limiting comparative analysis. There is also inconsistency in the timing of data collection as some MAs record participants after operations are fully implemented while in other cases data is collected on an ongoing basis. For</p>

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	<p>some operations, data is not collected on the actual number of supported individuals as funding projects are not required to collect data at the level of the individual. This inconsistency makes it difficult to compare the cost-effectiveness of operations across Member States.</p> <p>Taken together the limitations in the monitoring data mean that a note of caution should be attached to the interpretation of outputs and results data. Nevertheless, the monitoring data provides a robust overview of progress towards financial and output targets at the broad level of Investment Priority.</p> <p>The evaluation builds on various sources of evidence to strengthen conclusions in relation to the progress of ESF T010 in supporting specific groups. Particular methods used to mitigate the limitations of the monitoring data include country reviews covering programme reporting documentation, surveys, audit reports, national evaluations, and the results of the open public consultation.</p>
Effectiveness	<p>Monitoring data is not collected in relation to a pre-defined typology of operations, therefore progress on outputs and results cannot be compared across types of operations below the broad level of Investment Priorities. In order to quantify the financial importance of the T010 areas of operation, several methodological approaches were explored and their feasibility was assessed by the evaluation team. The approach adopted in this analysis relies on the lists of operations that the Managing Authorities (MAs) are obliged to publish (CPR art. 115-2) and required classifying them by area of intervention in order to calculate the financial resources breakdown.</p> <p>The key point to be made is that very different activities may be classified/financed under a certain Investment Priority. Therefore, the IP level is not a fully adequate analytical level if we want to assess the effectiveness, efficiency etc. of how a certain priority was delivered.</p> <p>The results data is limited at this stage of the programming period in providing an assessment because many operations are just starting or in progress and the results would only be measured/reported upon completion of the operations.</p> <p>In an ideal case, assessing the additionality of benefits (i.e. those that would not have taken place without the programme, moving from gross to net benefits) requires robust information about the counterfactual, for example through a before-and-after comparison, a treatment-control group comparison, or by using econometric techniques. As shown by the recent feasibility study on the feasibility of using Counterfactual Impact Evaluations in the evaluation of ESF programmes, there has been a challenge in using registers to identify matched control groups<sup>18</sup>.</p> <p>There is limited counterfactual evidence to date on ESF T010 operations. Only a handful of Counterfactual Impact Evaluations were identified through the systematic review of evaluations. As a result, there has been a heavy reliance</p>

<sup>18</sup> Ismeri Europa, IES and Ecorys (2019) Pilot and feasibility study on the sustainability and effectiveness of results for European Social Fund participants using Counterfactual impact evaluations (VT/2017/45), European Commission.

	<p>on stakeholder evidence and self-reporting of supported individuals to assess the effects of operations.</p> <p>Impact analysis has drawn to some extent on the responses from supported individuals to the Public Consultation. The 142 individual respondents out the total number of 817 were not representative of the population of participants and therefore the analysis of responses must therefore be regarded with caution.</p> <p>Taking into account these limitations, it has nevertheless been possible to undertake an extensive analysis of the effectiveness of operations drawing on a wide range of quantitative and qualitative evidence.</p>
<p>Efficiency</p>	<p>The difficulty of linking monitoring data to specific types of operations creates considerable challenges in completing a robust CBA at the EU level. This is because broad assumptions need to be applied on the nature of specific operations below the level of Investment Priorities.</p> <p>The large differences in figures across Member States generally highlight the limitations of using cost per result as an indicator of cost-effectiveness both in terms of making comparisons across countries and IPs. Understanding the reasons for such large variations would require a detailed examination of cost and results data covering all key operations and all Member States which is beyond the scope of this study.</p> <p>At the level of Operational Programmes and types of operation, in many cases it was considered too early in the programming cycle to conduct any meaningful cost per participation analysis. This was generally because either too few participations had been completed or the current available data on participation outputs did not reflect the current position in terms of activities delivered. Illustrative examples of cost-effectiveness analysis at the level of specific operations identified through the case studies are nevertheless included.</p> <p>A full CBA would ideally compare the costs with estimated benefits that would not have taken place without the programme (hence moving from gross to net benefits). We explored however the potential to undertake the CBA at the OP level, using more robust estimates of additional benefits where, for example, counterfactual impact evaluations (CIEs) were in place that provide quantified estimates of additionality to feed into our model. This potential was considered when analysing the national evaluations in Task 1 and selecting OPs for our sample in Task 4. However, by the end of February 2020, the Helpdesk project identified only a limited number of CIEs carried out at national level on interventions funded by the TO10.</p> <p>Across the Investment Priorities, output data on participations does not distinguish between teachers/trainers and students. It is therefore not possible with the available data to estimate the breakdown of students and teachers and trainers being supported.</p>

#### 1.4. Report structure

The structure of the report is set out in the tables below.

<b>Section 1 - Introduction</b>	Sets out the content of the report, the objectives, scope and methodology of the evaluation.
<b>Section 2 - Background</b>	Sets out the key elements of the context for the evaluation including analysis of the socio-economic indicators of relevance to TO10 and a brief overview of other EU education and training policy and related instruments.
<b>Section 3 – Financial and operational implementation of ESF TO10</b>	Provides an overview of the financial and operational progress of TO10 operations, based on detailed analysis of programme monitoring data.
<b>Section 4 – Answers to evaluation questions</b>	Provides a detailed presentation of the specific answers for each evaluation question and sub-question, with reference to evidence collected from across all of the evaluation tasks.
<b>Section 5 – Good practices and lessons learned</b>	Summarises the key lessons from the evaluation in relation to each of the key evaluation criteria, with examples of good practices.
<b>Section 6 – Main findings and forward-looking reflections</b>	Sets out a high-level overview of the main findings of the evaluation, as well as forward-looking reflections in relation to the ex post evaluation and next programming period, including potential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The report includes the following annexes:

<b>Annex 1.1</b>	A mapping of ESF interventions under TO10 by Investment Priorities, target groups and intervention logic (Task 1)
<b>Annex 1.2</b>	Assisting the Commission in the consultation process (Task 2)
<b>Annex 1.3</b>	Cost-benefit analysis (Task 3)
<b>Annex 1.4</b>	Individual case study reporting (Task 4)

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<b>Annex 1.5</b>	Country-specific and Investment Priority factsheets (Task 5)
<b>Annex 1.6</b>	Synthesis papers from the Policy Delphi consultation (Task 6)
<b>Annex 2</b>	Synopsis consultation report
<b>Annex 3</b>	Public Consultation report
<b>Annex 4</b>	Detailed methodology and analytical models used for the evaluation
<b>Annex 5</b>	Selection of good practices

## 2. BACKGROUND

This section of the report sets out the key elements of the context for the evaluation. Through the analysis of the socio-economic context it provides a quantitative reference point for the evaluation. This includes analysis of all indicators of relevance to the ESF Thematic Objective 10 (TO10) operations. It then goes on to address how support under TO10 sits in relation to the wider EU support to education and training.

### 2.1. European socio-economic context relevant to Thematic Objective 10

This sub-section provides a summary analysis of the EU socio-economic context relevant to TO10, based on available secondary data on education and training at country and regional level.

The analysis is carried out across countries and regions as well as over time<sup>19</sup>, focusing on the most relevant dimensions of TO10 defined in the four dedicated Investment Priorities supported by the ESF. This section summarises the detailed analysis of socio-economic indicators and the associated tables of data found in Annex 1.1.

The sub-section provides, first, an analysis of indicators that are relevant to TO10 as a whole and cannot be related to a specific Investment Priority, then it is focused on indicators which can be related to each Investment Priority. We start from a national level analysis and then, where possible, depending on data availability, we provide a regional outlook.

#### Socio-economic context – key findings

There **was an overall improvement in education attainment level in Europe during the last decade**, as the total share of population with upper secondary, post-secondary and tertiary education went up from 72% in 2009 to 75% in 2013 and 78% in 2018. However, significant differences persist across the Member States and at the same time, data indicate falling investments over the period.

**The rate of early school leavers (ESL), one of the Europe 2020 headline targets, has fallen from 15.7% in 2005 to 11.9% in 2013, down to 10.6% in 2018 but a strong gender disparity exists, with the rate being consistently higher among males.** ESL rates vary significantly across countries and regions, and 11 Member States have not yet reached the EU target (an ESL rate of below 10% of 18-24 years old population). The share of pupils between age four and the starting age of compulsory education, participating in pre-primary education, increased from 88% in 2005 to over 95% in 2017, which is the EU benchmark for early childhood education and care (ECEC).

**Educational outcomes on basic skills (reading, mathematics and science), according to the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), also vary**

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<sup>19</sup> Long-term trends in indicators are highlighted from 2005, where available, to the most recent year (2018 or, for a limited number of indicators, 2017). In the analyses across countries, for each indicator we compare the most recent available data with a baseline (in most cases 2013 or other, depending on availability). The baseline indicates the situation at the beginning of the current programming period.

**significantly across countries and regions**, and these disparities persist, with some Member States recording a performance that is consistently below the average. Furthermore, it is worth stressing that no improvement can be observed in PISA 2018, in the sense that the EU has not made any progress towards ET2020 benchmark on the share of low-achievers<sup>20</sup>.

**Tertiary education attainment, another Europe 2020 headline target, experienced a steady growth in the last 15 years** (this indicator went up from 28% in 2005, to 37.1% in 2013 and 40.7% in 2018) **but there are widening gender gaps across the EU, with a higher proportion of female graduates**. Approximately two-thirds of the Member States (18 out of 28) had already achieved the EU target in 2018 (40% of 30-34 year old population have completed tertiary or equivalent education). All countries made significant progress, most notably some eastern European Member States. Significant gender imbalances remain in tertiary education enrolment in specific subjects, as women are underrepresented in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) disciplines.

**Regional disparities remain important across the EU**. Overall, 60 EU regions, out of 281 considered in the analysis and for which data are available, have improved their relative performance with respect to ESL during the current programming period. 170 EU regions show relative stability while in 51 regions the ESL performance deteriorated over the period. **The challenge of reducing and preventing early school leaving is still particularly important in several Mediterranean and Eastern European regions**. As regards tertiary education attainment, 40 regions have improved their relative performance between 2013 and 2018. 184 regions remained relatively stable while the performance of 52 regions decreased. The challenge of improving the quality and efficiency of, and access to, tertiary education is still very important in several central and eastern European regions, in Italian Mezzogiorno, and for several Eastern German regions.

**The participation of adults in education and training increased over time**. Over the same period, disparities between female and male participation however also increased. The participation of employed, unemployed and inactive persons in education and training recovered after the economic crisis and increased during the current programming period but, also in this case, cross-country disparities are significant and more than half of the Member States are characterised by a participation rate which is below the EU average.

The challenge of enhancing **equal access to lifelong learning** for all age groups and promoting flexible learning pathways is still very important in several regions in Bulgaria, Slovakia, Poland and Greece. The **employment rate** of recent graduates increased during the 2014-2018 evaluation period, without fully recovering after the economic crisis. Among the challenges it is worth mentioning a persistent labour market mismatch, in particular related to overqualification, and gender gaps, reflecting an advantage that men continue to have in entering the labour market.

The share of students enrolled in **vocational education** are highest in post-secondary (91.5% in 2017) and short-cycle tertiary levels (86.4%). In lower secondary education, the share of VET students is low (7.4%) while in upper secondary education there is a substantial equilibrium between students in general and vocational education. **Overall, the number of VET students has been declining in the EU over the decade**, with some exceptions such as an increase of: upper secondary level students in Estonia, Cyprus, Malta, Luxembourg,

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<sup>20</sup> Fewer than 15% of 15-year-olds should be under-skilled in reading, mathematics and science. See section 2.2 for more information on ET2020 benchmarks.

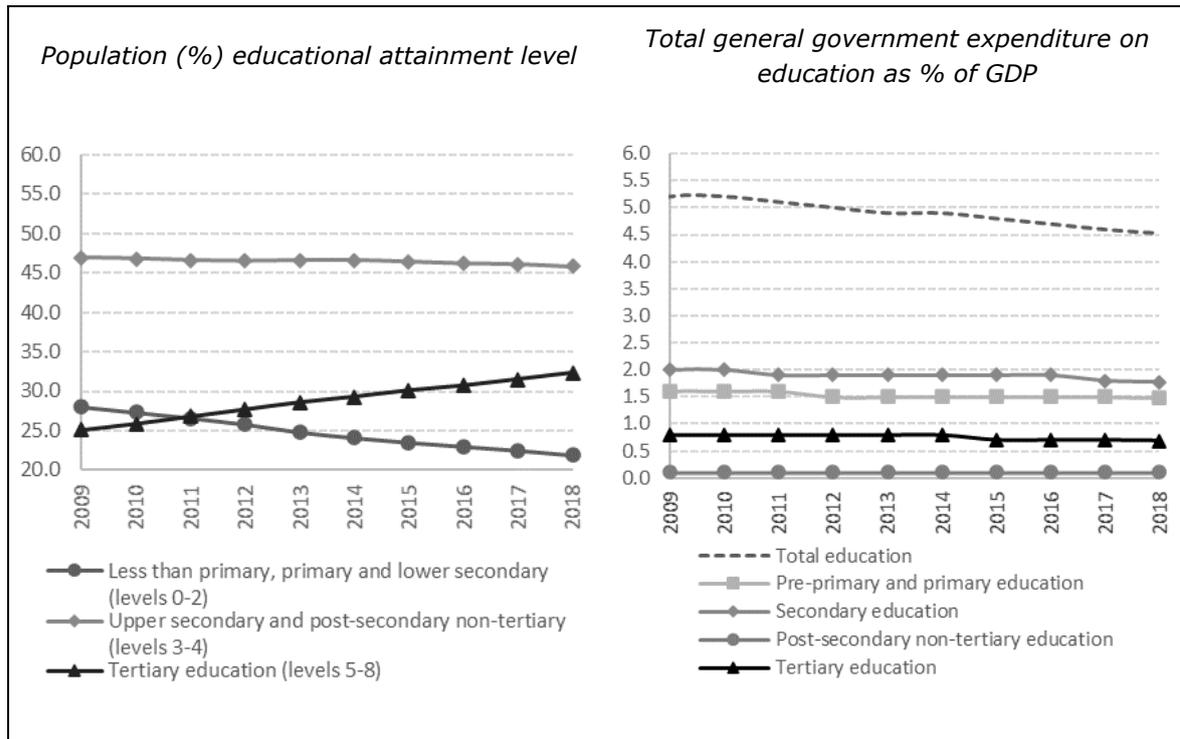
Slovenia and UK; post-secondary level students in the Czech Republic and France; and short-cycle tertiary level students in Sweden.

***General improvement in education level achieved with no public spending increase***

In the EU there was a general improvement in levels of education attainment in the last decade (Figure 1). The share of the population with tertiary education (levels 5-8), for the 25-64 age group, increased from 25.1% in 2009, to 28.6% in 2013, and then to 32.3% in 2018. The share of population with upper secondary, post-secondary and tertiary education went up slightly but steadily from 72% in 2009, to 75% in 2013, then to 78% in 2018. In the same period, the share of population with an upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary educational attainment remained stable at around 45% of the population aged 25-64 years old, while the share of EU population with less than primary, primary and lower secondary education decreased from 28% in 2008 to 25% in 2013 and to 22% in 2018. Although this general pattern concerns most EU Member States, there are significant differences across countries.

The available data shows that there was a decline in European countries' public investment in education over the years considered in the analysis (2009-2018), despite the need for a more skilled labour force. Indeed, as shown in Figure 1, total general government expenditure on education and training, as a percentage of GDP, increased from 5% in 2005 to 5.2% in 2010, but then decreased in the aftermath of the economic recession, reaching 4.6% in 2017. This reduction concerns especially secondary and tertiary education while public spending on primary education remained stable.

**Figure 1 Education attainment levels and government expenditure on education**

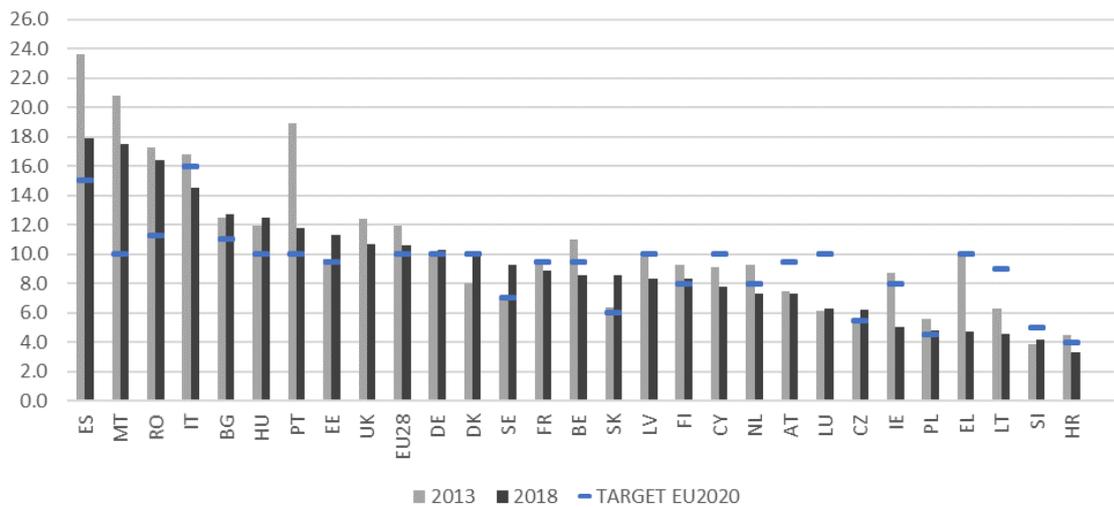


Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat\_lfse\_03 and gov\_10a\_exp)

**Early school leaving rate falls but is higher among males, while cross-country disparities in basic skills remain significant (Investment Priority 10.i)**

The share of early school leavers has fallen continuously across the EU, from **15.7% in 2005 to 11.9% in 2013, down to 10.6% in 2018**, although it has plateaued in recent years and has still not reached the EU 2020 target (below 10%). The share of early school leavers is systematically higher among males and this gender disparity is not showing any signs of reduction over time. Rates of ESL vary significantly across Member States. A total of 17 Member States were below the overall EU target of 10% in 2018, and 16 of them already achieved it in 2013, but reductions can be observed in almost all Member States. However, despite a considerable improvement in the Member States that at the start of the period had a particularly unsatisfactory performance (e.g. Spain, Malta, Italy, Portugal, UK), there are still 11 Member States that are not reaching the EU target. These include those that have been just mentioned as well as Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Estonia, Germany, and Denmark. In 60 European regions, out of 281 NUTS2 regions considered in the analysis, the ESL performance improved during the current programming period, while the majority (170) show a relative stability. In 51 regions, the ESL performance deteriorated over the period. The challenge of reducing and preventing early school leaving is still particularly important in several Mediterranean and eastern European regions (see details in Annex 1.1.).

**Figure 2 Early school leavers across European countries (% of 18-24 years old population)**



Source: Eurostat (online data code: T2020\_40)

The share of pupils between age four and the starting age of compulsory education, participating in pre-primary education, increased from 88% in 2005, to 94% in 2013, and to over 95% in 2017. The pattern is exactly the same for males and females. The share of pupils between age four and the starting age of compulsory education, participating in pre-primary education, increased from 88% in 2005 to over 95% in 2017, which is the EU benchmark for early childhood education and care (ECEC)<sup>21</sup>. However, there are important cross-country differences, as the share of pupils participating in pre-primary education varies from around 100% of the total in Ireland, France and the UK, to 78% in Slovakia. There was a generalised increase in several of the 'newer' Member States between 2013 and 2017, such as in the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Croatia, Estonia and Slovakia, while a drop was recorded in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Malta and the Netherlands. Nonetheless, it is worth highlighting that access of disadvantaged groups lag behind in several Member States.

The OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests 15-year-old students from all over the world every three years in reading, mathematics and science. The tests are designed to gauge how well the students master key subjects in order to be prepared for real-life situations in the adult world. The EU28 performance in PISA tests worsened in reading and science at the start of the current programming period compared to previous years. For example, the share of underachievers in science increased from 16.6% in 2012 to 20.6% in 2015. This deterioration was particularly visible, for example, in Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Croatia, Italy, Austria, Czech Republic, Netherlands, Germany and Poland. Only Portugal, Denmark and Sweden record a moderate improvement. The results of PISA 2018 provide a mixed picture which highlights that there are considerable country differences. A group of countries score consistently below EU average in all fields (i.e. maths, reading and science). This

<sup>21</sup> Council Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems, adopted by the Education Ministers at the Council meeting in Brussels on 22 May 2019.

group includes Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Romania and Slovak Republic. Spain has a lower than average score in maths and science, Latvia underperforms in reading. In other cases, there was a partial recovery (for a more detailed analysis see Annex 1.1). Overall, the most recent PISA results confirmed that the lack of basic skills is a serious bottleneck in several Member States, that performance in the tests is influenced by socio-economic backgrounds, and that inequalities at all level, e.g. between schools as well as between urban and rural areas, remain strong in the EU.

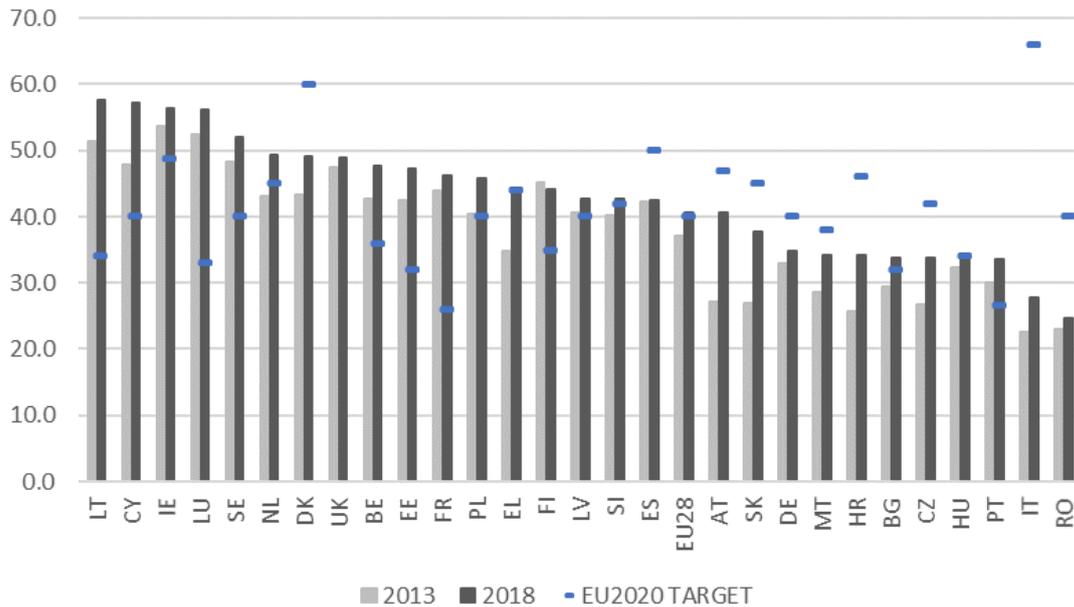
***Steady growth in tertiary education attainment but skills mismatches as well as widening gender and regional disparities (Investment Priority 10.ii)***

**Tertiary education (levels 5-8) attainment experienced a steady growth from 28.0% in 2005, to 37.1% in 2013, then to 40.7% in 2018.** At the same time, the over-qualification rate (or vertical skills mismatch), which can be measured by the percentage of people aged 20-64 with tertiary education and low-middle skill occupations (i.e. working in ISCO 4-9<sup>22</sup>), increased from 21.6% in 2013 to 22.7 in 2018 in the EU 28. There is a widening gender gap across the EU: the share of females with tertiary education has grown much faster than that of males, to the point where there was a gap of 10 percentage points in 2018. It is also worth noting that there are significant gender imbalances in tertiary education enrolment in specific subjects, as women are underrepresented in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). The data shows that 18 Member States had already achieved the EU target of 40% for tertiary education attainment in 2018 compared to 16 Member States that had achieved it in 2013. All countries have made significant progress, most notably some eastern European countries such as Slovakia and the Czech Republic that, nonetheless, are still below the EU target. With respect to tertiary education, there are still several European countries where further efforts are needed in moving towards the EU2020 target. These include 'newer' Member States such as Malta, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary, as well as 'older' Member States, such as Portugal and Germany.

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<sup>22</sup> International standard classification of occupations including the following major groups: Clerical support workers, Service and sales workers, Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers, Craft and related trades workers, Plant and machine operators, and assemblers, Elementary occupations.

**Figure 3 Tertiary education attainment by country, age group 30-34 (% of population)**



Source: Eurostat (online data code: T2020\_41)

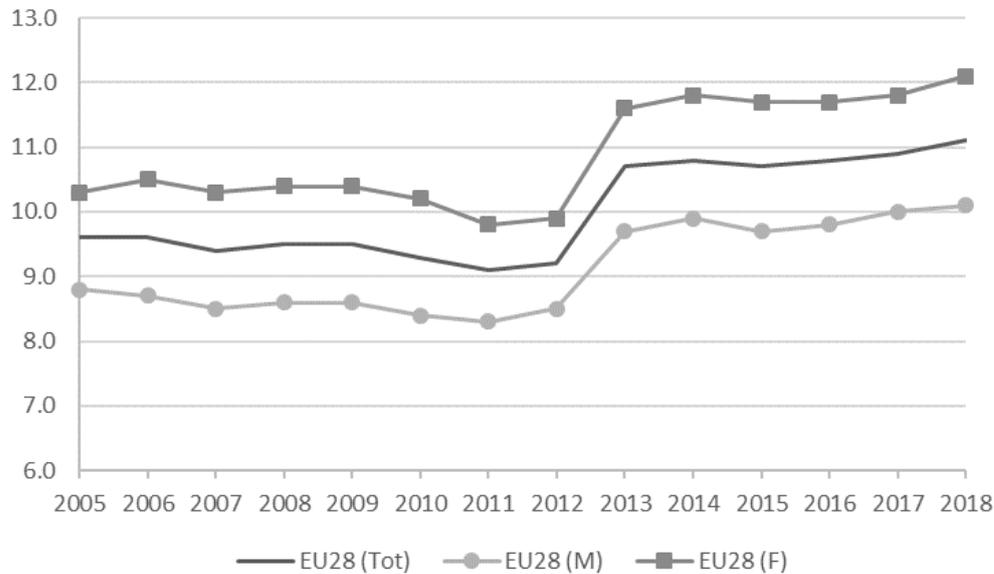
The percentage of the population aged 30-34 who have successfully completed tertiary studies, a measure of human capital endowment, varies considerably in the EU, although in the majority of countries, there was some increase in 2018 compared to 2013.

Data on tertiary educational attainment at NUTS2 level show that there are considerable regional disparities in the EU and that the challenge of improving the quality and efficiency of, and access to, tertiary education is still very important in several central and eastern European regions in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania, in the Italian Mezzogiorno, as well as in several east German regions. Overall, in 40 regions, out of 284 for which comparable data are available, the tertiary education attainment rate improved between 2013 and 2018. 184 regions remained relatively stable while the performance of 52 regions decreased (see Annex 1.1 for more details).

**Challenge of enhancing equal access to lifelong learning for all age groups still very important in several EU regions (Investment Priority 10.iii)**

Adult (25-64 years old) participation in education and training increased over time from 9.6% in 2005 to 11.1% in 2018. This reflects an increase of participation in education and training of adults with primary and lower secondary educational attainment, which was higher than the increase of participation of adults with secondary and tertiary education. In the same period, the disparities between female and male participation increased (in 2018: male participation was 10.1% vs. 12.1% for women).

**Figure 4 EU28 participation rates in education and training (last 4 weeks) by sex (% of 25-64 years old population)**



Source: Eurostat (online data code: trng\_lfse\_03)

**Focusing on the current programming period, the number of adults participating in education remained relatively stable across all education levels between 2013 and 2018.** Adult participation in learning varies considerably across the EU with more than half of the countries showing a performance which is below the EU average for any education level. The participation of employed persons in education and training had fallen to 9.7% in 2011, in the midst of the economic recession, and then recovered, reaching 11.8% in 2018. The participation of unemployed and inactive persons also increased and, during the current programming period, went up from 10.3% and 8% respectively, in 2013, to 10.7% (unemployed) and 8.7% (inactive) in 2018.

Disparities in adult participation by employment status remain significant across countries. More than half of EU Member States show an adult participation rate lower than the EU average, regardless of the employment status. The countries with the best performance in adult participation in education and training include Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Netherlands and France.

The participation rate of employed persons is particularly low, under 5%, in Greece, Slovakia, Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania. The participation in education and training of inactive and unemployed is also relatively low in these countries, as well as in Italy, Poland, Greece, Lithuania and Hungary.

Data on adult participation in learning at NUTS2 level confirms that there are significant regional disparities. 60 European regions have improved their relative performance between 2013 and 2018, 155 regions remained relatively stable while the performance of 69 regions deteriorated.

The challenge of enhancing equal access to lifelong learning for all age groups and promoting flexible learning pathways is still very important in several regions such as Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Slovakia, Poland and Greece.

***Employment of recent graduates rises, but not reaching yet the peak achieved before the crisis or making up the gender gap (Investment Priority 10.iv)***

**The employment rate of those completing upper secondary and post-secondary education increased from 66.3% in 2013, at the start of the current programming period, to 74.3% in 2018.** The employment rate of recent graduates in tertiary education also grew from 80.7% in 2013 to 85.5% in 2018, although at a slower pace, and without reaching the peak, which was recorded before the economic crisis (i.e. 86.9% in 2008). The employment rate of recent graduates in tertiary education grew in all countries except for Austria, while it remained stable in Germany and in the UK. There is a persistent gender gap in these employment rates, reflecting an advantage for males in entering work. This gap slightly increased between 2013 and 2018 in relation to the employment of graduates in upper secondary and post-secondary education. The gender gap concerns also recent graduates in tertiary education but, in this case, it is narrowing: from 5.7 percentage points in 2013 to 3.5 percentage points in 2018.

Across the EU Member States, the employment rate of recent graduates in general upper secondary and post-secondary education increased in nearly all countries during the current programming cycle. Only France, Luxembourg and Belgium experienced a drop.

In relation to vocational education, the employment rate of recent graduates in vocational upper secondary and post-secondary education increased in the EU on average from 70.5% in 2014 to 77.6% in 2018. All countries experienced an increase except for Malta, Estonia and Bulgaria.

In the EU, the share of students enrolled in vocational education is very high in post-secondary (91.5% in 2017) and short-cycle tertiary levels (86.4%). In upper secondary education there is a substantial and persistent equilibrium between students in general and vocational education (49.3% in 2017) while in lower secondary education, the share in vocational education is lower (7.4%) but growing.

The share of lower secondary level students in vocational education increased from 2013 and 2017 in several Member States including Germany, Estonia, Spain, Croatia, Lithuania, Slovakia and the United Kingdom. In the remaining countries it remained relatively constant or slightly decreased (e.g. in Portugal and the Netherlands). The proportion of upper secondary level students in vocational programmes increased considerably in Estonia, Cyprus, Malta, Luxembourg, Slovenia and the UK. On the contrary, a significant drop took place in Czech Republic, Romania, Sweden and Portugal.

The proportion of post-secondary non-tertiary level students in vocational programmes increased substantially in the Czech Republic and France while, in most of the other Member States, the rate remained stable. The share of short-cycle tertiary level

students in vocational programmes dropped in the UK and in Malta, increased in Sweden and remained largely stable in the other countries.

## 2.2. EU support to education & training

The ESF support to education and training via Thematic Objective 10 sits within the context of the wider EU support to education and training. In this section, we set out an overview of the role of education and training within the wider EU strategy, as well as the other EU policies and tools which provide support to education and training.

### 2.2.1. Education and training within the wider EU context

In developing an integrated response to the global financial crisis of 2007-08 and the longer-term challenges of globalisation, pressure on resources and ageing, the **Europe 2020 Strategy**<sup>23</sup> (EU 2020) put forward three mutually reinforcing priorities:

- Smart growth: developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation;
- Sustainable growth: promoting a more resource efficient, greener, and more competitive economy;
- Inclusive growth: fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion.

Europe 2020 captures the importance of education and training in achieving all of these goals. Two of the EU 2020 headline targets focus specifically on education and training: reducing early school leaving to below 10%<sup>24</sup> and 40% of 30-34 year olds having completed tertiary education<sup>25</sup>. Europe 2020 also captures the interrelationships between strong education and training systems and the achievements of targets set for other fields including employment, research & development (R&D), climate change and energy, the reduction of poverty, and social exclusion.

The **European Pillar of Social Rights** also affirms the importance of education and training for every European citizen stating that:

*'Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions to the labour market'*<sup>26</sup>.

The Pillar of Social Rights sets out 20 key principles for delivering new and more effective rights for citizens, including the first principle, which reaffirms that 'everyone has the

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<sup>23</sup> European Commission (2009). Europe 2020 – A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLETE%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%20007%20-%20Europe%202020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> The indicator on early leavers from education and training is expressed as the percentage of people aged 18 to 24 who have completed at most lower secondary education and are not involved in further education or training out of the total population aged 18 to 24

<sup>25</sup> Europe 2020. A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, COM (2010)2020; more information on [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm)

<sup>26</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en)

right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions to the labour market<sup>27</sup>.

This key principle further underlines the link between the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning and citizens' ability to make successful transitions to and within the labour market, create and hold quality jobs and fully participate in society. EU education and training policies are instrumental for developing the European labour force, supporting our businesses and industries, ensuring their competitiveness, and providing people with the tools to be independent, understand and participate in the societies they live in. They also contribute to active citizenship and European integration by promoting mutual understanding and increased awareness.

### *2.2.2. EU education and training policies and tools*

Title XII (articles 165 and 166) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union<sup>28</sup> sets out the specific aims and competences of the European Union in the fields of education, vocational training, youth and sport. In line with the provisions of article 6 of the Treaty, the EU has competence to implement actions to support, coordinate or supplement the actions of Member States.

The European Union thus plays a strong supporting and coordinating role in the field of education through a range of tools and measures, including policies, programmes, working groups, benchmarking, peer learning activities, peer counselling, peer reviews and funding mechanisms. These tools and measures are defined within a comprehensive framework that spans all sectors of education and training, from early childhood education and care (ECEC) to lifelong learning.

The current **Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020)** was put in place in 2009<sup>29</sup> and sets out four strategic objectives for education and training, in line with the overall vision and aims of the Europe 2020 strategy:

- (1) Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality;
- (2) Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training;
- (3) Promoting equity, social cohesion, and active citizenship; and
- (4) Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training<sup>30</sup>. Complementary to the EU 2020 Strategy, the ET 2020

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<sup>27</sup> The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en)

<sup>28</sup> Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:02016E/TXT-20200301>

<sup>29</sup> Council of the EU (2009). Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020'). Available at: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52009XG0528\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52009XG0528(01))

<sup>30</sup> European Policy Cooperation (ET2020 framework) [https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/european-policy-cooperation/et2020-framework\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/european-policy-cooperation/et2020-framework_en)

expands on the EU 2020 education targets to further areas including early childhood education, adult learning, and student mobility.

ET 2020 also supports the achievement of the following benchmarks at European level by 2020:

- At least 95% of children should participate in early childhood education;
- Fewer than 15% of 15 year-olds should be under-skilled in reading, mathematics and science;
- The rate of early leavers from education and training aged 18-24 should be below 10%;
- At least 40% of people aged 30-34 should have completed some form of higher education;
- At least 15% of adults should participate in learning;
- At least 20% of higher education graduates and 6% of 18-34 year-olds with an initial vocational qualification should have spent some time studying or training abroad;
- The share of employed graduates (aged 20-34 with at least upper secondary education attainment and having left education 1-3 years ago) should be at least 82%.

In addition to this, in the Strategic Framework, the Member States agreed they would work around adopting benchmarks for mobility, employment and language learning. Over the years, the following goals were adopted in these areas:

- Mobility: at least 20% of higher education graduates and 6% of 18-34 year-olds with an initial vocational education and training (iVET) qualification should have spent some studying or training abroad;
- Employment: the share of employed graduates (aged 20-34 years old with at least upper secondary education attainment and having left education at least 1-3 years ago) should be at least 82%;
- Language learning: with the adoption in May 2019 of a Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of foreign languages<sup>31</sup>, the Commission set the ambitious vision that, by 2025, speaking two languages, in addition to one's mother tongue should become the new standard<sup>32</sup>.

In addition, the **New Skills Agenda for Europe**<sup>33</sup>, adopted by the Commission in 2016, seeks to make the right training, skills and support available to EU citizens through 10

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<sup>31</sup> Council of the EU (2019). Council Recommendation on A comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of foreign languages. Available at: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.C\\_.2019.189.01.0015.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AC%3A2019%3A189%3ATOC](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.C_.2019.189.01.0015.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AC%3A2019%3A189%3ATOC)

<sup>32</sup> It needs to be noted, however, that this 'vision' on language learning is not a 'fixed' benchmark as such.

<sup>33</sup> European Commission (2016). A New Skills Agenda for Europe – Working together to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52016DC0381>

complementary actions<sup>34</sup>. The implementation of the Agenda is shared by the EU, the Member States, and stakeholders, including public authorities, employer associations, trade unions, and industry, whose shared efforts should contribute to shape a stronger European economy. One important action of the Agenda is related to the modernisation of vocational education and training (VET), to promote VET opportunities and benefits, including making VET a first career choice.

Under the **EU Open Method of Coordination (OMC)**, the EU promotes exchanges of good practices, peer review, mutual and peer learning with the aim of enhancing national education and training systems and supporting the Member States in their progress towards the shared European education and training policy objectives. The implementation of the OMC is based primarily on the following instruments and tools:

- **ET 2020 Working Groups** involve experts appointed by Member State authorities, coordinated by the Commission and supported by contractors. Under the 2018-2020 mandate of the Working Groups, activities were supported in seven fields: early childhood education and care, school education, higher education, digital education, common values and inclusive education, VET, and adult learning;
- **Peer Learning Activities (PLAs)** hosted by Member States to present their good practices or to discuss common challenges with other Member States;
- **Peer reviews** involve a group of Member States providing guidance to other Member States related to a particular issue or topic;
- **Peer counselling** involves representatives of national administrations advising peers from other Member States on a specific national challenge;
- **Education and Training Monitor**<sup>35</sup>, an annual milestone publication monitoring EU Member States' progress towards achieving the ET 2020 benchmarks (see above), and taking stock of and analysing policy developments and trends in the Member States<sup>36</sup>; Volume 2 of the Education and Training Monitor provides an analysis of Member States' education and training systems.
- **Common reference tools** and approaches developed through activities of Working Groups, or as part of mutual learning activities<sup>37</sup>;
- **Consultation and cooperation** activities with stakeholders (e.g. civil society, the European Education Summit, and the Education, Training and Youth Forum, etc.); and

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<sup>34</sup> Overview of and progress on 10 actions to make the right training, skills and support available to people in the EU: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223>

<sup>35</sup> e.g. European Commission (2018). Education and Training Monitoring. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/et-monitor\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/et-monitor_en)

<sup>36</sup> The Monitor is based on Eurostat data, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) studies and surveys and the analysis of education systems by the Eurydice network. It also provides insights into measures taken to address education-related issues as part of the European Semester process, and offers suggestions for policy reforms that can make national education and training systems more responsive to societal and labour market needs.

<sup>37</sup> e.g. High-performance apprenticeships & work-based learning: 20 guiding principles <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/8f010ea2-265b-11e7-ab65-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

- **Funding** for policy support activities and innovative projects provided by the Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 programmes<sup>38</sup> (see below) as well as from the European Structural Funds.

Key transversal principles promoted through a series of EU education and training policies (see Table 2) are: support to mobility and multilingualism, international cooperation, and the inclusion of students with disabilities and from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds (e.g. low-income families and migrants). These principles are reiterated by the Council recommendation on Common Values, Inclusive Education and the European Dimension of Teaching<sup>39</sup>.

Table 2 below sets out an overview of the main recent processes, policies, tools and instruments that the EU is implementing to pursue its overarching strategies to support education and training.

**Table 2 Main EU education and training policies since 2016**

<b>Main processes</b>	European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and Bologna Process (since 1999) <sup>40</sup>
	European Education Area <sup>41</sup> (since 2017)
<b>Key policy documents</b>	Communication on A New Skills Agenda for Europe (June 2016) <sup>42</sup>
	Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals (June 2016) <sup>43</sup> (includes priorities for education and vocational training)
	Communication on Investing in Europe's youth (December 2016) <sup>44</sup>
	Communication on Improving and modernising education (December 2016) <sup>45</sup>
	Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults (December 2016) <sup>46</sup>
	Communication on a renewed EU agenda for higher education (May 2017) <sup>47</sup>
	Council Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, replacing the 2008 Recommendation (May 2017)
	Towards a European Education Area by 2025 (since 2017) <sup>48</sup>
	Communication on School development and excellent teaching for a great start in life (May 2017) <sup>49</sup>
	Communication on Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture (November 2017) <sup>50</sup>

<sup>38</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/european-policy-cooperation/et2020-framework\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/european-policy-cooperation/et2020-framework_en)

<sup>39</sup> COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 22 May 2018 on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching (2018/C 195/01)

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.ehea.info/>

<sup>41</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area_en)

<sup>42</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52016DC0381>

<sup>43</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52016DC0377>

<sup>44</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52016DC0940>

<sup>45</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2016/EN/COM-2016-941-F1-EN-MAIN.PDF>

<sup>46</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ%3AJOC\\_2016\\_484\\_R\\_0001](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ%3AJOC_2016_484_R_0001)

<sup>47</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52017DC0247>

<sup>48</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area_en)

<sup>49</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2017%3A248%3AFIN>

<sup>50</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-strengthening-european-identity-education-culture\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-strengthening-european-identity-education-culture_en.pdf)

	Informal meeting of heads of state or government, 17 December 2017 <sup>51</sup>
	Council Recommendation on tracking graduates (November 2017) <sup>52</sup>
	Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (March 2018) <sup>53</sup>
	Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on a common framework for the provision of better services for skills and qualifications (Europass), replacing the 2004 Decision (April 2018);
	Communication on Building a stronger Europe: the role of youth, education and culture policies (May 2018) <sup>54</sup>
	Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching (May 2018) <sup>55</sup>
	Council Recommendation on promoting automatic recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad (November 2018) <sup>56</sup>
	Communication on the Digital Education Action Plan (December 2018) <sup>57</sup>
	Council Recommendation of on key competences for lifelong learning (May 2018)
	Council Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems (May 2019) <sup>58</sup>
	Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of foreign languages (May 2019) <sup>59</sup>
	Resolution on further developing the European Education Area to support future-oriented education and training systems (November 2019) <sup>60</sup>
<b>Principal tools and programmes</b>	The Erasmus+ programme
	Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) under the Horizon 2020 programme
	ET 2020 Working Groups
	Peer learning activities, Peer Reviews, Peer counselling
	Education and Training Monitor
	Common reference tools and approaches and consultation and cooperation activities

### ***Other EU funding instruments to support education and training***

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2017/11/17/>

<sup>52</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32017H1209%2801%29>

<sup>53</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0502\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0502(01)&from=EN)

<sup>54</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2018/EN/COM-2018-268-F1-EN-MAIN-PART-1.PDF>

<sup>55</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32018H0607%2801%29>

<sup>56</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1568891859235&uri=CELEX%3A32018H1210%2801%29>

<sup>57</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2018%3A22%3AFIN>

<sup>58</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CONSIL%3AST\\_9014\\_2019\\_INIT&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CONSIL%3AST_9014_2019_INIT&from=EN)

<sup>59</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.C\\_.2019.189.01.0015.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AC%3A2019%3A189%3ATOC](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.C_.2019.189.01.0015.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AC%3A2019%3A189%3ATOC)

<sup>60</sup> <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13298-2019-INIT/en/pdf>

In addition to the financial support provided by Thematic Objective 10 of the European Social Fund, the EU provides funding for education and training through other key programmes and instruments.

Through its **Erasmus+ programme**<sup>61</sup>, one of the EU's flagship initiatives, the European Commission supports individuals and organisations across the EU and Partner Countries to achieve the EU's policy objectives in the fields of education, training, youth and sport. The programme is structured around three key actions<sup>62</sup>:

- (1) Key Action 1 – Mobility of individuals: under this action, the Commission supports the mobility of learners and educational staff, Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees and the Erasmus+ Master Loan Scheme.
- (2) Key Action 2 – Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices: under this action, the Commission funds a range of different cooperation projects between educational institutions, universities and other organisations to support innovation and the exchange of good practices in the field of education, training and youth. The main initiatives supported are: Strategic Partnerships, Sector Skills Alliances, Knowledge Alliances, and capacity-building projects for Partner Countries.
- (3) Key Action 3 – Support for policy reform: this action funds evidence-based policy making through, amongst other, support for knowledge exchange and policy innovations in the fields of education, training, and youth.

In addition, it funds activities under two further areas, less directly related to education and training:

- (4) Jean Monnet activities: here, the Commission aims to strengthen and deepen the teaching on European integration through funding of networks, projects, associations and Jean Monnet Chairs.
- (5) Sport: the Erasmus+ programme also includes a dedicated strand of funding for projects and studies related to sport.

As part of Horizon 2020, the **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)**<sup>63</sup> provide support to researchers at all stages of their careers, regardless of age or nationality. The MSCA support the following activities:

- (1) Innovative training networks (ITN): support for universities, businesses, and other organisations to come together and organise training for doctoral students.
- (2) Individual Fellowships (IF): opportunities for experienced doctoral researchers to boost their career by going on mobility abroad.
- (3) Research and Innovation Staff Exchange (RISE): funding for short-term staff exchanges between academia, industry, and commercial organisations across the world.

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<sup>61</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/node\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/node_en)

<sup>62</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/programme-guide/part-a/what-is-the-structure-of-the-programme\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/programme-guide/part-a/what-is-the-structure-of-the-programme_en)

<sup>63</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/research/mariecurieactions/msca-actions\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/research/mariecurieactions/msca-actions_en)

- (4) Co-funding of regional, national, and international programmes (COFUND): additional funding for existing schemes at regional, national or international level which aim to train researchers.
- (5) European Researchers' Night: each year, in September, the Commission supports a Europe-wide event dedicated to popular science and fun learning. Around 30 countries and 300 cities are involved in the event.

The **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)** supports activities which help to modernise education and training systems, including investments in educational infrastructure.

The **Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP)** provides support to all EU countries for institutional, administrative and growth-enhancing reforms and can cover education and training reforms.

### ***The transformation of education and training***

The way teaching and learning takes place is being transformed by a range of factors, including digitisation. The new channels through which learners can access educational programmes affect their delivery - innovative pedagogies and tools have been emerging, and teachers' role is changing, as is that of the learners. A 2017 report for the European Commission by the European Political Strategy Unit provides ten trends which are 'transforming education as we know it'<sup>64</sup>. Understanding these trends helps policymakers to anticipate what elements future policy programmes should incorporate to optimise education and training outcomes. These trends have been accelerated in recent times by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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<sup>64</sup> European Commission. 10 Trends Transforming Education as we know it. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/epsc/sites/epsc/files/epsc\\_-\\_10\\_trends\\_transforming\\_education\\_as\\_we\\_know\\_it.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/epsc/sites/epsc/files/epsc_-_10_trends_transforming_education_as_we_know_it.pdf)

**Figure 5 Ten trends – transforming education as we know it**



Source: EPSC, 2017

### **3. FINANCIAL AND OPERATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION OF ESF TO10**

This section provides an overview of the financial and operational progress of TO10 operations, based on detailed analysis of programme monitoring data.

#### **3.1. Scope of investments**

The ESF contribution represents the lion's share of all the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) budgets earmarked for investment in education and training<sup>65</sup> in the period 2014-2010. The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) will invest additional EUR 8.4 billion in this priority, with the aim of improving education infrastructure in the EU. An additional EUR 1.7 billion will be contributed to this priority by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). As seen in section 2.2 above, while avoiding duplications and seeking synergies between objectives, actions and target groups, other European programmes and funds such as Erasmus +, the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), Horizon 2020, Marie Curie Actions, and the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) will also contribute to making progress towards the EU education and training targets.

Focusing on 'investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning', Thematic Objective 10 is closely linked to the targets set in ET 2020 across the different levels of education. This comprehensive approach, covering all levels of education, allows Member States to invest in specific priority policy areas through the ESF and other related EU funding instruments. According to the ESF Regulation 2014-2020<sup>66</sup>, T010 is to be delivered through four interlinked priorities which reflect the EU education policy vision by covering all stages of education and targeting a wide range of potential groups. The Investment Priorities are as follows:

- IP10.i: Reducing and preventing early school leaving and promoting equal access to good quality early-childhood, primary and secondary education including formal, non-formal and informal learning pathways for reintegrating into education and training;
- IP10.ii: Improving the quality and efficiency of, and access to, tertiary and equivalent education with a view to increasing participation and attainment levels, especially for disadvantaged groups;
- IP10.iii: Enhancing equal access to lifelong learning for all age groups in formal, non-formal and informal settings, upgrading the knowledge, skills and competences of the workforce, and promoting flexible learning pathways, including through career guidance and validation of acquired competences;
- IP10.iv: Improving the labour market relevance of education and training systems, facilitating the transition from education to work, and strengthening vocational education and training systems and their quality, including through mechanisms for skills anticipation, adaptation of curricula and the establishment

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<sup>65</sup> Educational & Vocational Training: EU Budget by Fund (daily update): Educational & Vocational Training 78%, compared to 19% by ERDF and 3% by EAFRD <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/themes/10>

<sup>66</sup> European Commission (2013) Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of 17 December 2013

and development of work-based learning systems, including dual learning systems and apprenticeship schemes.

Intervention logics have been articulated for each of the Investment Priorities as well as one for Thematic Objective 10 overall, as set out in Annex Four. Specifically, they set out a high-level understanding of the rationale, inputs, activities, outputs, results and impacts across the Investment Priorities and Thematic Objective 10. The overall intervention logic has been informed by the 'general' intervention logic presented in the Impact Assessment accompanying the proposal for the ESF 2014-2020 Regulation.

The total amount of planned funding (EU and national co-financing) in the current 2014-2020 programming period for TO10 is EUR 39.2 billion which is equivalent to 32% of total planned funding for ESF. The amounts of total ESF funding vary in the EU from a maximum of EUR 17,417 million in Italy to a minimum of EUR 40.1 million in Luxembourg. The absolute amounts planned on TO10 vary also considerably across Member States from EUR 5,472.8 million in Italy to EUR 8 million in Luxembourg and zero in the Netherlands (where TO10 operations are not funded).

Table 3 provides information on planned TO10 expenditure by Investment Priority and type of region. Overall, in the EU28, there is around EUR 7.97 billion (29.1% of total TO10) of planned funding on IP10.i in the current programming period. There is also planned funding of EUR 4.72 billion (17.3% of total TO10) on IP10.ii, EUR 7.5 billion (27.4%) on IP10.iii and EUR 7.16 billion (26.2%) on IP10.iv. The table shows that the majority of planned funding under TO is in less developed regions (EUR 16.27 billion) with EUR 7.0 billion in more developed and EUR 3.8 billion in transitional regions.

**Table 3 ESF TO10 planned expenditure (only EU resources), by IP, country and type of region**

Type of region	10.i	10.ii	10.iii	10.iv	TO10
EU28	7,969,548,029	4,724,135,817	7,500,195,730	7,155,001,727	27,348,881,303
Less developed	4,814,832,140	3,849,669,408	3,484,145,697	4,117,500,153	16,266,147,399
More developed	1,850,836,282	571,489,945	2,707,048,302	1,835,614,146	6,964,988,674
Transition	1,174,893,852	296,088,281	1,110,742,237	1,173,540,366	3,755,264,736
NA	128,985,755	6,888,183	198,259,494	28,347,062	362,480,494

Source: Contractor's processing of cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu

The EU funding for the Investment Priorities under TO10 can be summarised as follows:

- **IP10.i – Reducing and preventing early school leaving and promoting equal access to education.** In the period 2014-2020, approximately 90 Operational Programmes across 19 EU Member States fund this Investment Priority. The largest beneficiaries are the less developed regions in Europe, for which approximately 60% of the EU contribution to this priority is planned. For the more developed regions and regions in transition, shares are respectively 23% and 15%.
- **IP10.ii - Improving the quality and access to tertiary and equivalent education and training.** Investing in tertiary education under this specific

funding mechanism has been covered by 55 Operational Programmes across 17 EU Member States. Similar to IP10.i, the largest share of funding is planned for less developed regions (81%). The rest of the funding is allocated to more developed regions (12%) and regions in transition (6%).

- **IP10.iii - Enhancing equal access to lifelong learning for all age groups.** This Investment Priority has been addressed with significant attention by almost all EU Member States, with operations funded under 109 Operational Programmes covering all categories of regions in 26 EU Member States. The share of funding planned for more developed regions under this IP (36%) is higher compared to the shares allocated to more developed regions under IP10.i and IP10.ii, but still lower in comparison to less developed regions (46%).
- **IP10.iv – Improving the labour market relevance of education and training systems.** Over 90 Operational Programmes fund operations in 22 EU Member States under this IP. More than half of the EU contribution planned for the IP was allocated for less developed regions 58%, compared to 25% for more developed regions and 16% for regions in transition.

### 3.2. Types of supported operations

#### Types of supported operations – key findings

An analysis of the operations financed by ESF under TO10 highlighted that **secondary and post-secondary education and training** is the most important area of intervention in financial terms. Overall, 28.3% of total eligible costs are related to operations supporting vocational secondary education and training, and a similar share, 27.4% of the total supports general secondary education and training.

As regards the **other areas of intervention**, 21.2% was allocated to non-formal job-related and 4.3% to non-formal non job-related education and training; 15.4% of the total went to tertiary education and 3.5% was allocated, altogether, to pre-primary and primary education.

The distribution of funds by area of intervention **varies considerably across Member States**. For example, more than 50% of the funds are allocated to vocational secondary and post-secondary education and training in Austria, Cyprus and Portugal while the focus is on general secondary education and training in Bulgaria, Estonia, Italy, Latvia, Romania, Slovenia and Spain. Non-formal job-related education and training prevail in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Slovenia and the UK while non-formal not job-related education has an important role in Ireland. Tertiary education is central in Croatia, Lithuania, Malta and Poland, while pre-primary and primary education are significant in Czech Republic.

The **distribution of funds by area of intervention varies also across Investment Priorities**. Under IP10.i, 68.2% of total resources were used to support general secondary and post-secondary education and training. 20.1% of total allocations went to vocational secondary and post-secondary education and training and 8.6% to primary education. Under IP10.ii, the largest majority of resources, 86.7%, went to tertiary education operations, followed by non-formal job-related education and training (9.1% of the total).

Under IP10.iii, funds are concentrated on non-formal job-related education and training (53.8%), while 31% went altogether to vocational and general secondary and post-secondary education and training, and 13% to non-formal not job-related education and training. As

regards IP10.iv, funds were mostly used for vocational secondary and post-secondary education and training (72.1% of total). 14.6% was used for non-formal job-related education and training, and 4.9% for tertiary education.

### ***Approach for analysing operations***

Comparable data on ESF operations supporting education and training are not available at a higher level of detail than the IPs and, hence inevitably, detailed financial data needs to be reconstructed or estimated. In order to quantify the financial importance of the TO10 areas of operation, several methodological approaches were explored and their feasibility was assessed by the evaluation team. The approach adopted in this analysis relies on the lists of operations that the Managing Authorities (MAs) are obliged to publish<sup>67</sup> and requires classifying them by area of intervention in order to calculate the financial resources' breakdown. Full details on the options explored and methodology adopted are set out in Section 7 of Annex 1.1.

In order to analyse the types of operations financed under Thematic Objective 10 (TO10), a typology of interventions based on a number of relevant sources was used to ensure consistency with available statistical classifications/definitions and make it possible to compare data across time and different geographical areas. The taxonomy of ESF-related operations used in this and in the following analysis, in coherence with existing international statistical classifications designed to organise financial and non-financial data about education systems at international level, notably the ISCED<sup>68</sup> and COFOG<sup>69</sup> classifications, is shown in Table 4. Full detail on the taxonomy is provided in Annex 1.1.

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<sup>67</sup> Article 115-2 of the Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32013R1303>

<sup>68</sup> ISCED = International Standard Classification of Education, [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/International\\_Standard\\_Classification\\_of\\_Education\\_\(ISCED\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/International_Standard_Classification_of_Education_(ISCED))

<sup>69</sup> COFOG = Classification of the functions of government, [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Classification\\_of\\_the\\_functions\\_of\\_government\\_\(COFOG\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Classification_of_the_functions_of_government_(COFOG))

**Table 4 Typology of ESF related operations**

Education and training sectors		Types of support
Formal education & training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-primary</li> <li>• Primary</li> <li>• General secondary and post-secondary education and training</li> <li>• Vocational secondary and post-secondary education and training</li> <li>• Tertiary education and training</li> <li>• (when possible to distinguish) Short-cycle tertiary vocational education and training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct financing of participation in education and training programmes</li> <li>• Indirect support to education and training (Subsidiary services, education, R&amp;D, system actions and other)</li> </ul>
Non formal education & training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job-related (non-formal) education and training</li> <li>• Not job-related (non-formal) education and training</li> </ul>	

**Key findings of the analysis of eligible costs of operations by type of operation**

Overall, 118,935 ESF-supported education and training operations were considered in the analysis<sup>70</sup>. These are 63% of the total number of TO10 operations recorded in the SFC (System for Fund Management in the European Union) portal. The eligible costs of the analysed operations (total ESF and national co-financing allocated to selected operations) are approximately EUR 24.7 billion; that is 92% of total TO10 allocations to selected operations recorded in the SFC (Table 5).

**Table 5 Coverage of the analysis: operations and financial resources**

A	B	A/B
	In SFC	Covered in the analysis*
No. of operations	187,584	118,935
Eligible costs (EUR)	26,862,521,637	24,743,754,828
		%
		63%
		92%

\*situation as of April 2020.

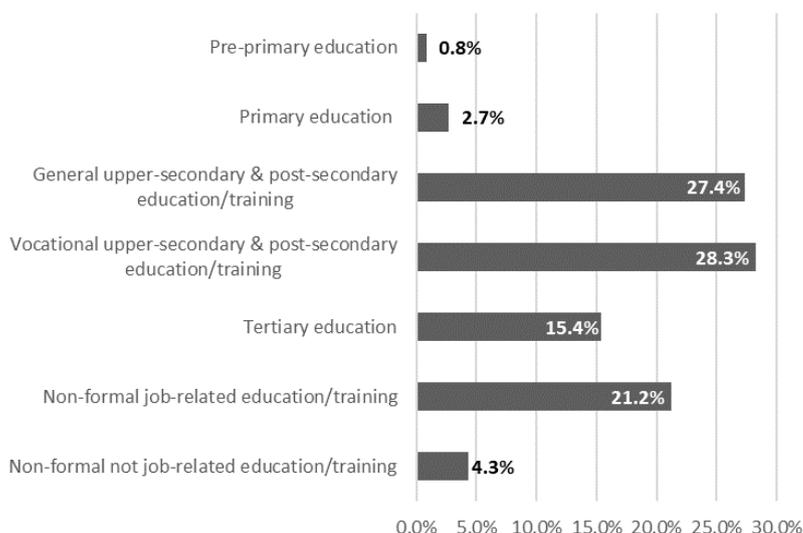
Source: Contractor's processing on list of operations published by Member States

The total TO10 amounts allocated to selected operations are distributed across areas of intervention as shown in the following graph. In pre-primary and primary education, 0.8% and 2.7% respectively of the total was allocated to selected operations. Vocational upper secondary and post-secondary education and training obtains 28.3% of the total. General upper secondary and post-secondary education and training has a similar share,

<sup>70</sup> The lists of operations were downloaded in December 2019; these lists are updated with different frequency across MS and MAs; however, as mentioned in the text, most of the lists of operations used in the analysis were updated in the second half of 2019. Operations financed in all Member States have been considered, excluding Sweden and Germany for which data could not be retrieved. Considering that 63% of total operations financed are covered, representing 92% of overall eligible costs, the analysis can be considered representative of the total. For more information on the methodology see methodological annex.

with 27.4% of total allocations. 15.4% was allocated to selected operations in tertiary education, 21.2% to non-formal job-related education and training and 4.3% to non-formal not job-related education and training.

**Figure 6 Distribution of T010 eligible costs by area of operation in the EU\***



\*excluding Sweden and Germany for which data on operations could not be retrieved.

Source: Contractor's processing on list of operations published by Member States

The distribution of resources allocated to T010 operations, by area of intervention and across Member States, is displayed in

Table 6. It can be seen that pre-primary and primary education are very important in Czech Republic where, overall, they account for 34.8% of allocations to selected operations. There is a focus on general upper-secondary and post-secondary education and training in Bulgaria (62.3% of total allocations to selected operations), Estonia (50.4% of total), Italy (48.5%), Latvia (54.7%), Romania (71.7%), Slovenia (43%) and Spain (50%). Most funds are allocated to vocational upper-secondary and post-secondary education and training in Austria (63.7% of total allocations to selected operations), Cyprus (55.2%) and Portugal (59%). Job-related non-formal education and training is important in Belgium (67.2%), Denmark (67.2%), Finland (51.4%), Ireland (48%), Slovenia (32.6%) and the UK (59.4%). Not job-related non-formal education and training has an important role in Ireland (52% of total allocations to selected operations).

**Table 6 Distribution of total T010 allocations to selected operations by area of intervention and Member State\***

MS	Pre-primary	Primary	General upper-secondary & post-secondary	Vocational upper-secondary & post-secondary	Tertiary	Job-related (non-formal)	Not Job-related (non-formal)	Total EUR million
AT	0.0%	0.8%	5.8%	63.7%	0.0%	3.6%	26.0%	184.6

Study for the Evaluation of the ESF support to Education and Training (T010)

MS	Pre-primary	Primary	General upper-secondary & post-secondary	Vocational upper-secondary & post-secondary	Tertiary	Job-related (non-formal)	Not Job-related (non-formal)	Total EUR million
BE	0.0%	1.2%	10.0%	7.6%	8.9%	67.2%	5.1%	535.8
BG	0.0%	0.0%	62.3%	4.2%	22.5%	11.0%	0.0%	229.4
CY	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	55.2%	0.0%	39.9%	4.9%	28.8
CZ	10.3%	24.5%	31.4%	4.4%	20.8%	6.2%	2.3%	1,040.3
DK	0.0%	0.0%	1.1%	27.0%	4.7%	67.2%	0.0%	95.4
EE	0.9%	0.4%	50.4%	22.9%	0.0%	18.7%	6.6%	200.6
ES	0.0%	0.4%	31.2%	50.0%	9.4%	6.5%	2.6%	2,870.7
FI	0.0%	0.3%	17.5%	13.5%	9.9%	51.4%	7.4%	190.6
FR	0.0%	0.6%	9.5%	33.4%	0.8%	49.0%	6.7%	2,012.0
GR	0.8%	11.1%	50.5%	19.5%	15.3%	0.6%	2.1%	1,035.4
HR	0.3%	1.1%	31.5%	5.4%	37.7%	16.2%	7.9%	294.1
HU	0.7%	0.4%	35.7%	9.2%	19.7%	26.5%	7.8%	1,409.4
IE	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	48.0%	52.0%	192.5
IT	0.2%	0.6%	48.5%	17.9%	21.6%	10.8%	0.4%	3,268.5
LT	0.4%	0.1%	21.4%	15.6%	27.9%	29.9%	4.7%	384.2
LU	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	7.9
LV	0.0%	0.0%	54.7%	16.7%	0.1%	28.5%	0.0%	238.8
MT	0.0%	0.0%	20.7%	20.5%	30.3%	28.5%	0.0%	40.6
PL	1.9%	1.6%	18.8%	32.3%	30.1%	9.1%	6.1%	3,826.0
PT	0.0%	0.0%	11.1%	59.0%	18.9%	7.2%	3.8%	3,925.6
RO	1.3%	2.6%	71.7%	2.0%	8.7%	13.7%	0.0%	484.6
SI	0.6%	2.1%	43.0%	6.1%	13.7%	32.6%	1.9%	251.1
SK	0.0%	24.5%	30.3%	21.0%	0.0%	17.4%	6.7%	212.6
UK	0.4%	7.9%	28.1%	4.2%	0.0%	59.4%	0.0%	1,784.3
EU	0.8%	2.7%	27.4%	28.3%	15.4%	21.2%	4.3%	24,743.

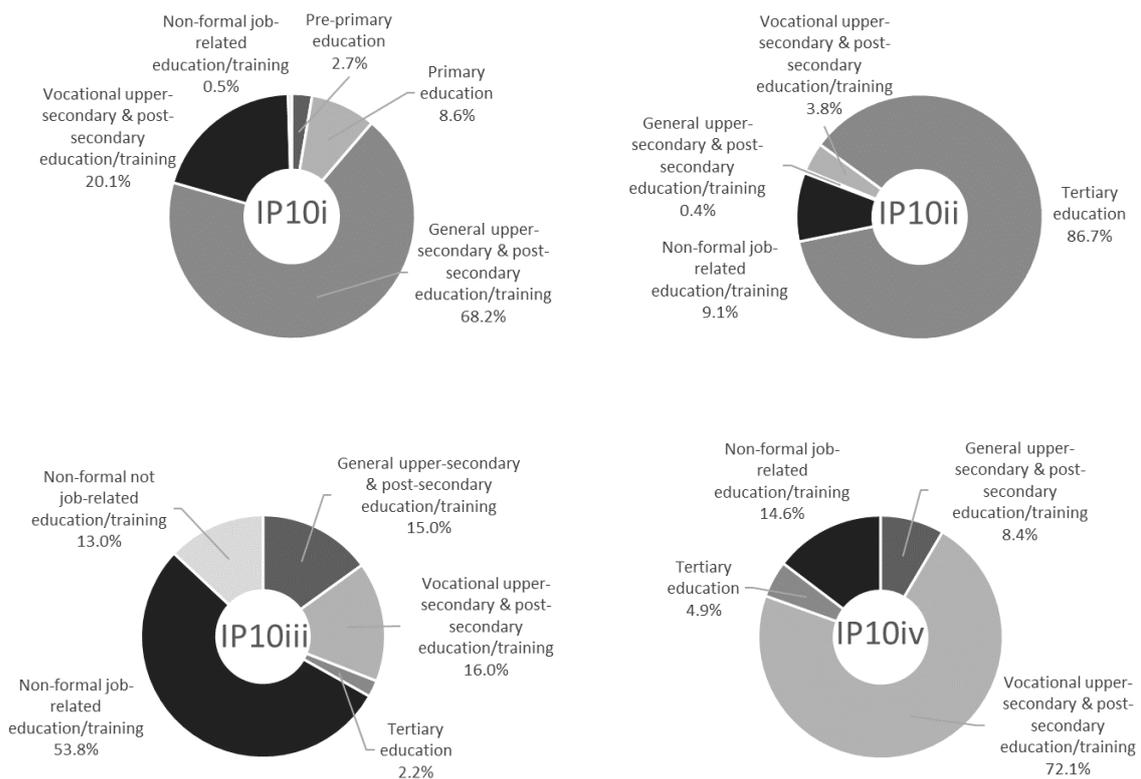
\* excluding Sweden and Germany for which data on operations could not be retrieved.

Source: Contractor's processing on list of operations published by Member States

The distribution of total TO10 allocations to selected operations, under each IP, is shown in Figure 7. Under **IP10.i (reducing and preventing early school leaving and promoting equal access to education)**, 68.2% of the allocations went to support general upper-secondary and post-secondary education and training. 20.1% of allocations to selected operations support vocational upper-secondary and post-secondary education and training, 8.6% went to primary education while 2.7% to pre-primary education and 0.5% to non-formal job-related education and training. In relation to **IP10.ii (tertiary education)**, 86.7% of total allocations to TO10 operations went to tertiary education operations. This is followed by non-formal job-related education and training (9.1% of the total allocations), and vocational upper-secondary and post-secondary education and training (3.8% of total). As regards **IP10.iii (lifelong learning)**, most of the allocations, 53.8%, are concentrated in non-formal job-related education and training. 16% went to vocational upper-secondary and post-secondary education and training, 15% was allocated to general upper-secondary and

post-secondary education and training, and 13% went to operations concerning non-formal not job-related education and training. Under **IP10.iv (labour market relevance)**, 72.1% of allocations went to operations concerning vocational upper secondary and post-secondary education and training. 14.6% of the total was used to support non-formal job-related education and training. 8.4% went to general upper-secondary and post-secondary education and training, while 4.9% was allocated to operations concerning tertiary education.

**Figure 7 Distribution of T010 eligible costs by area of intervention in each IP, in the EU\***



\* excluding Sweden and Germany for which data on operations could not be retrieved.  
 Source: Contractor's processing on list of operations published by Member States

### 3.3. Financial implementation

#### Financial implementation – key findings

**Total planned expenditure on T010 in the current programming period is approximately EUR 39.2 billion (including EU and national co-financing).** This corresponds to nearly one third of total ESF (32%).

**Planned expenditure on T010 is significant with respect to public spending on education in several EU countries.** For example, total T010 expenditure is 7.1% of general government expenditure on education in Portugal, 4.2% in Romania and 4.1% in Poland. T010 is also important in the Baltic countries, Croatia, Hungary, Greece, Bulgaria, and Slovakia.

More than half of the total TO10 funds, 51.4%, went to less developed regions, 34.8% was allocated to more developed regions and 13.7% to transition regions. Looking at Investment Priorities, around 29.1% (EUR 7.97 billion) was planned on IP10.i, 17.3% (4.72 billion) was planned on IP10.ii, 27.4% (7.5 billion) went to IP10.iii and 26.2% (7.16 billion) were planned on IP10.iv.

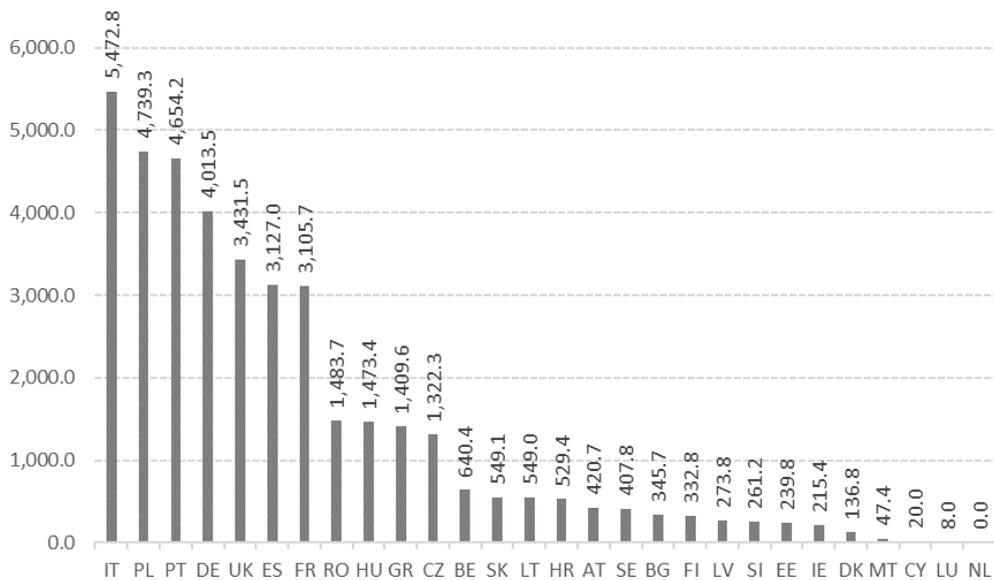
**Total expenditure (declared by beneficiaries) as of end of 2018, was 27% of total planned allocation to TO10.** Overall, this absorption is in line with the total EU28 ESF expenditure rate. However, in some cases such as Slovakia, Romania, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, and Latvia, TO10 expenditure rate is lower than total ESF expenditure. On the contrary, in several countries such as Austria, Germany, Estonia, Spain, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Slovenia, TO10 expenditure performance is above overall ESF performance. Reasons behind the delays in starting TO10 operations are various, including late approval of some OPs and overlapping with 2007-2013 programming closure, lack of or weak administrative capacity, contextual factors, reforms and political cycle, as well as later reporting of some operations (e.g. those lasting for several years).

**The expenditure rate varies considerably also across Investment Priorities.** IP10.iv has the best performance (33% of TO10 spent), as of the end of 2018. This is followed by IP10.i (28% of funds spent), IP10.iii (24%) and IP10.ii (21%). **There were no significant differences in the expenditure between more developed, transition and less developed regions**, even though the first group is performing slightly better (28% vs. 26%). Looking at individual countries, there were no clear expenditure patterns linked to the type of regions. In some Member States, less developed regions seem to be faster from an expenditure point of view than more developed regions (e.g. in the UK, Spain) while the opposite holds in other cases (e.g. Italy).

### ***ESF planned on TO10 across EU Member States***

In the EU28, the total amount (EU and national co-financing) planned for TO10 was EUR 39.2 billion in the current programming period. This is 32% of total ESF funding, where the total ESF budget is equal to approximately to EUR 120.7 billion. The amounts of total ESF planned in 2014-2020 vary in the EU from a maximum of EUR 17,434.4 million in Italy to a minimum of EUR 40.1 million in Luxembourg. The absolute amounts planned on TO10 vary also considerably across Member States from EUR 5,472.8 million in Italy to EUR 8 million in Luxembourg and zero in Netherlands where TO10 was not selected.

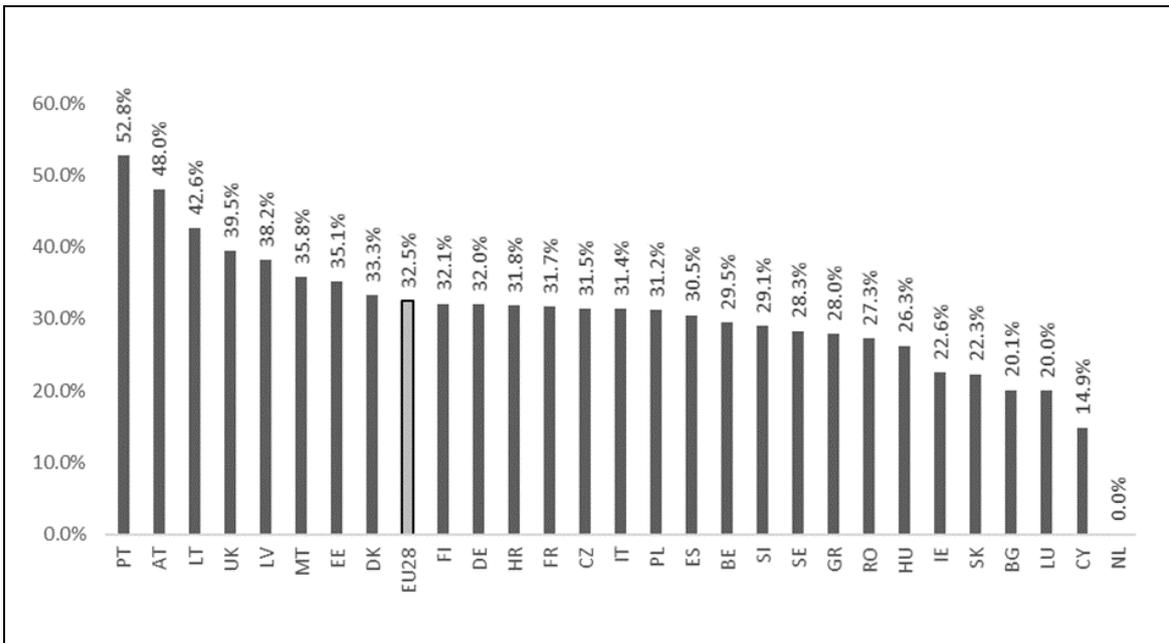
**Figure 8 Total planned expenditure on TO10 across EU Member States (EUR million, 2014-2020)**



Source: CONTRACTOR'S processing of cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu

The total amounts planned on TO10 as percentage of total ESF are presented in Figure 9. These range from a maximum of 53% in Portugal, to a minimum of 15% in Cyprus, excluding Netherlands. In some countries, funds planned on TO10 are significant with respect to general government expenditure on education Table 5-1 in Annex 1.1. (For instance, in Portugal, the total TO10 funding is, annually, 7.1% of general government expenditure on education. In Romania, this share is 4.2%, and in Lithuania it is 3.9%. Also, in other Member States, although the amount of funds received is relatively small in absolute value, TO10 represents a significant share of public expenditure for education. This is the case, for example, in the Baltic countries (total TO10 funding is 2.7% of general government expenditure on education in Estonia and Latvia, 3.9% in Lithuania), in Croatia (3.4%), Hungary (3.9%), Greece and Bulgaria (2.8% in each case), as well as in Slovakia 2.5%.

**Figure 9 Total T010 planned financial allocation as % of total planned ESF (2018, EU and national co-financing)**



Source: Contractor's processing of cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu

Overall, in the EU28, nearly EUR 60 billion of total ESF were planned on less developed regions, approximately EUR 44.4 billion on more developed regions and, around EUR 16.3 billion on regions in transition. Focusing on T010 only, about EUR 20.2 billion (51.4% of total T010) went to less developed regions, 13.7 billion (34.8% of total T010) was planned in more developed regions and 5.4 billion (13.7% of total T010) went to transition regions. The amounts allocated to T010 represented a share of 34% of the total ESF planned for less developed regions, 31% of total ESF in more developed regions and 33 % of total ESF in transition regions.

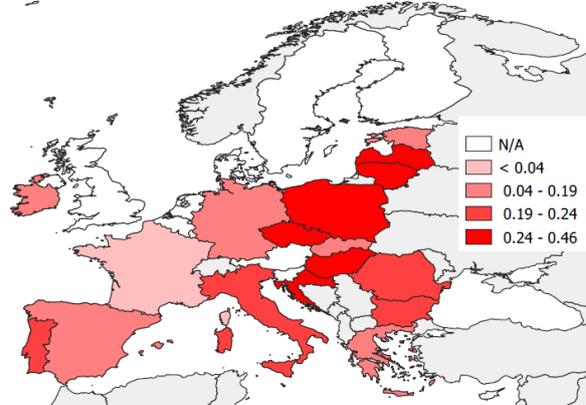
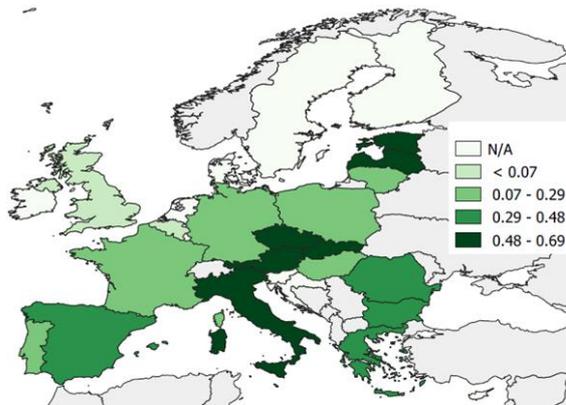
Overall, in the EU28, around EUR 7.97 billion (29.1% of total T010) were planned on IP10.i in the current programming period. Roughly EUR 4.72 billion were planned on IP10.ii (17.3% of total T010). EUR 7.5 billion went to IP10.iii (27.4% of total T010). Around EUR 7.16 billion were planned on IP10.iv (26.2% of total T010). Under IP10.ii, the great majority of ESF amounts went to less developed regions (81%), 12% to more developed and 6% to transition regions. In IP10.i and IP10.iv, about 60% of the ESF was planned on less developed regions and around 25% on more developed areas. Under IP10.iii, the distribution of resources across type of regions is slightly more balanced: 46% of ESF went to less developed, 36% went to more developed and 15% to regions in transition.

The distribution of planned resources by IP varies significantly across countries (see Figure 10 and the Annex 1.1 for more details). Several Member States have selected all Investment Priorities, but only a few have a fairly equal distribution of funds across IPs (e.g. Portugal). Many Member States decided to concentrate on a limited number of IPs. For instance, France focused on IP10.iii and IP10.i, UK on IP10.iii and IP10.iv, Belgium, Slovenia and Sweden on IP10.iii, Czech Republic on IP10.i and IP10.ii.

**Figure 10 Distribution of T010 funds by Investment Priority (% of total T010 in each MS)**

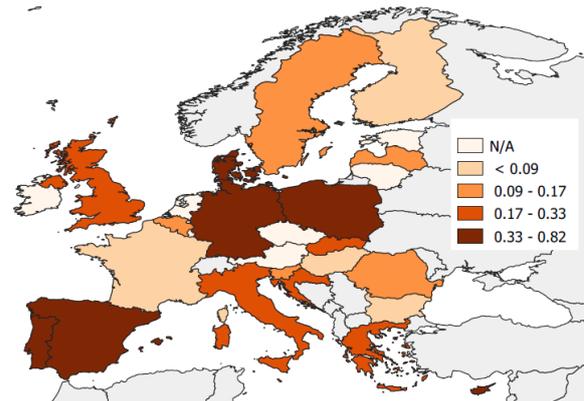
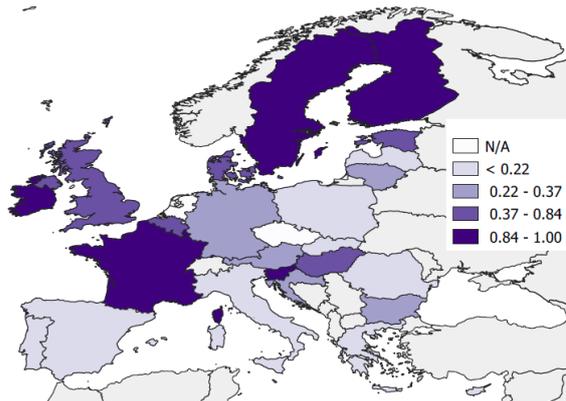
IP10.i: Reducing and preventing ESL and promoting equal access to education

IP10.ii: Improving quality/efficiency, access to tertiary education and training



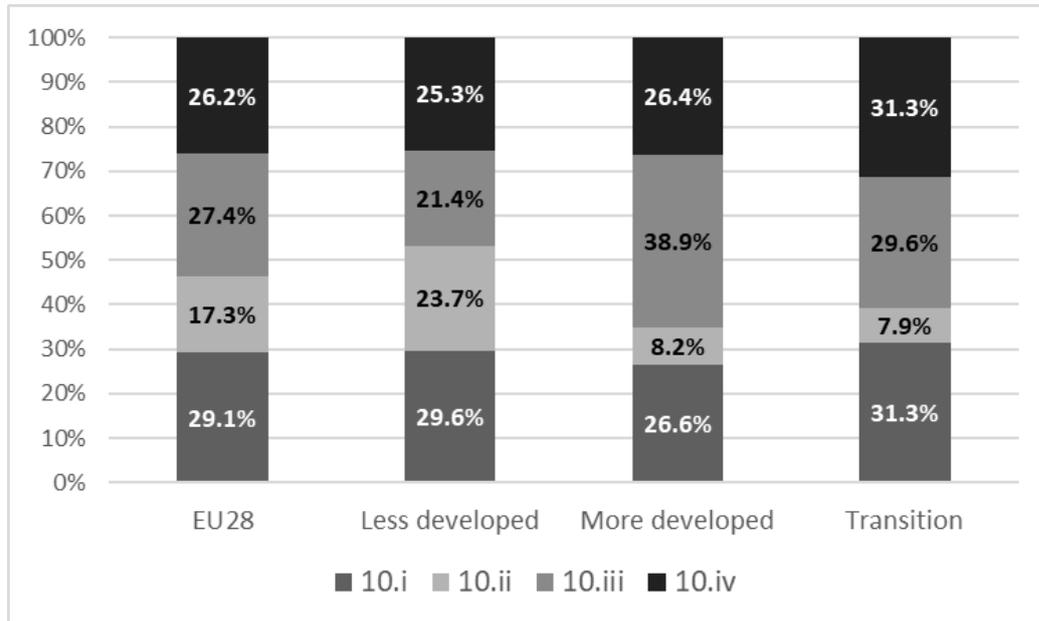
IP10.iii: Enhancing equal access to lifelong learning for all age groups

IP10.iv: Improving labour market relevance of education and training



Source: Contractor's processing of [cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu](http://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu)

**Figure 11 Distribution of ESF planned on TO10 (only EU resources) in the EU28 by IP and type of region**



Source: Contractor's processing of cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu

The amounts of ESF TO10 planned expenditure by Operational Programme and Investment Priority are shown in Annex 1.1, covering the 147 relevant OPs financed in the current programming period. The relevant national OPs are 29, out of 147 OPs that invest in education and training, with planned resources on TO10 equal to EUR 19,352,881,270. National OPs account for approximately 49% of the total TO10 amount (EU and national co-financing) planned in the EU. Regional OPs are more numerous (118) but their relative weight is similar to the national OPs. Regional OPs represent EUR 19,857,477,104 equivalent to 51% of the total TO10 amount planned in the EU in the current programming period.

Changes in ESF resources planned under TO10, which took place between 2016 and 2018, are presented in Annex 1.1 (Table 5.6). Overall, in the EU, there was a 0.1% increase in total planned resources (EU and national co-financing). Looking at the ESF component only, the positive change between 2016 and 2018 was +262.6 million (+1%). However, considering that the total net increase (EU and national co-financing) was much smaller and amounted approximately to 55 million between 2016 and 2018, the observed positive change in planned ESF (i.e. 262.2 million) was clearly compensated by a reduction in national resources.

In absolute values, the biggest increases (considering both EU and national co-financing) took place in Spain (+300.7 million) and Greece (+182.3 million) while the largest reductions were recorded in the UK (-322 million) and Italy (-116.4 million) where, however, there was a 32.6 million increase in EU resources planned under TO10.

In percentage terms, the most significant changes which can be observed between 2016 and 2018 are those concerning Cyprus, where there was a 34.6% reduction, and to a lesser extent Denmark (-8.9%) and the UK (-8.6%). Conversely, in Greece there was a 14.9% increase and in Spain a 10.5% increase.

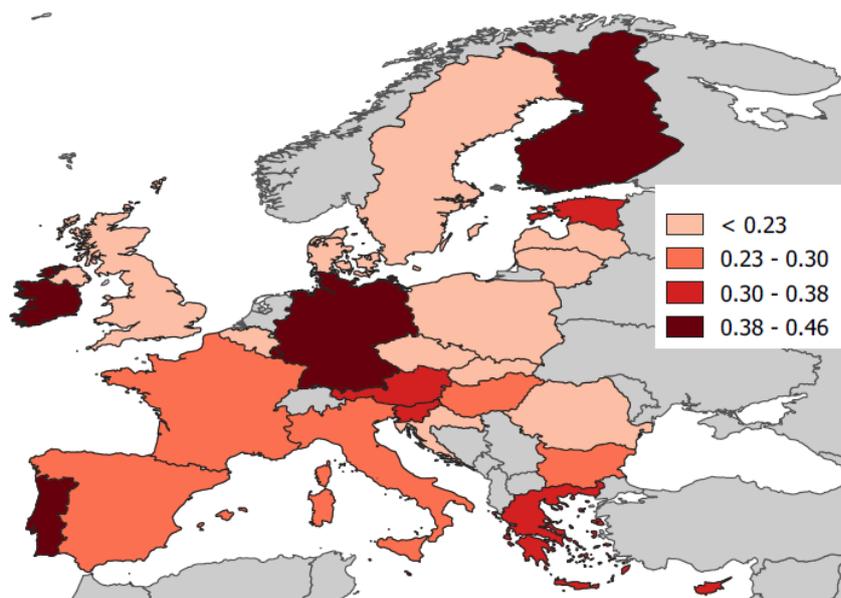
The changes in programmed funds by IP are presented in Annex 1.1 (Table 5.7). Overall, the distribution of funds across IPs does not vary considerably. The share planned for IP10.i decreased from 30% to 29%. The share planned for IP10.ii decreased from 19% to 17%. The share planned for IP10.iii did not change compared to the beginning of the period while IP10.iv, which accounted for 25% of the total in 2016, increased to 26% in 2018.

Looking at the countries in which we observed the largest percentage reductions, in Cyprus the drop particularly concerned IP10.iii (from 33% to 18% of the total). In Denmark, the distribution of funds across IP did not change, showing that the reduction was equally distributed among Investment Priorities. This is also the case for the UK, where there was only a very slight increase in IP10.i and a small reduction in the weight of the other IPs. Greece and Spain recorded the largest increases in programmed funds. In Greece, there was an overall 14.9% increase in T010. The funds programmed to IP10.i went up from 40 to 45% of total T010 while the share going to IP10.iv was reduced from 40 to 32%. In Spain, there was a 10.5% increase in T010. The priority that benefited most from this raise was IP10.iv whose share went up from 35 to 39% of total T010.

### **Financial execution of T010**

The total expenditure (declared by beneficiaries) as of end of 2018, was 27% of total T010 planned. Overall, this absorption can be considered reasonable and in line with the total ESF expenditure rate (Figure 12). Reasons behind the delays in starting operations are various, including late approval of some OPs and overlaps with 2007-2013 programming closure, lack of or weak administrative capacity, contextual factors, reforms and political cycle, later reporting of some operations (e.g. those lasting for several years) etc.

**Figure 12 Total Expenditure (declared by beneficiaries) as % of total planned T010, end of 2018**

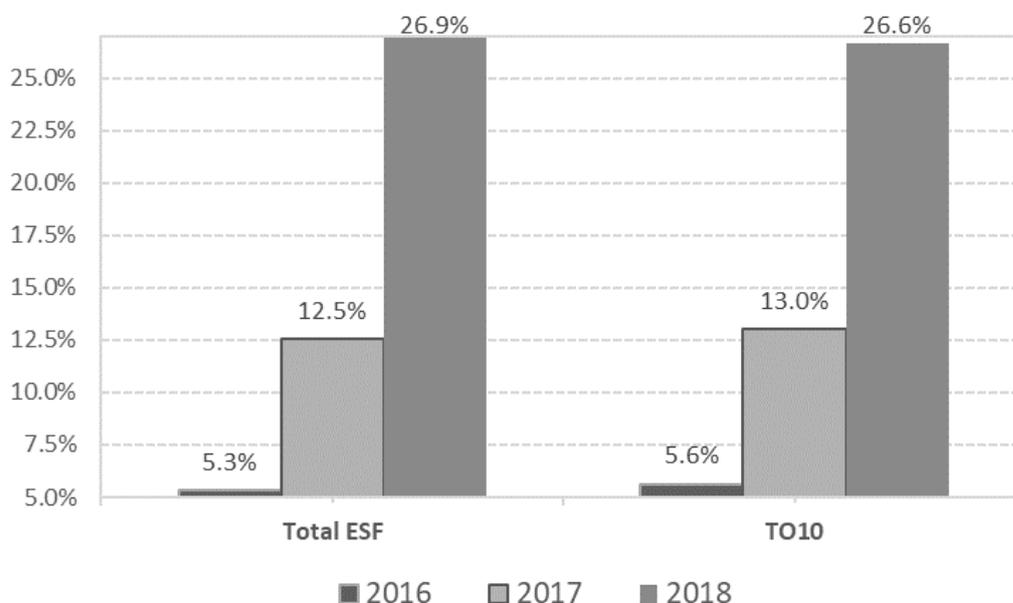


Source: Contractor's processing of [cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu](http://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu)

Looking at the expenditure trends of the last three years in which data are available (Figure 13), we observe a substantial increase from 6% in 2016 to 13% in 2017, then to 27% in 2018. Based on the historical experience of the European Structural and Investment Funds, the amounts spent tend to follow an exponential rather than linear curve, meaning that there is an initial delay and then an acceleration as the programming period nears its end.

The introduction of the N+3 rule<sup>71</sup> in the current programming cycle, instead of the previous N+2 rule, may have further extended the time from allocation to expenditure. This feature is one of the differences among programming periods which makes it difficult to compare expenditure progress over time. More importantly, any attempt to compare expenditure progress across programming cycles for TO10, is hampered by the change in spending categories across the periods and by the fact that financial data by category of operation are available only in cumulative form (end of the 2007-2013 period) rather than yearly.

**Figure 13 TO10 expenditure as % of total ESF planned (2016-2018)**



Source: Contractor's processing of cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu

As can be seen in Table 7, the situation in relation to TO10 expenditure varies substantially across countries, ranging from 6% of planned funds in Romania and

<sup>71</sup> Cohesion Policy allocations must be spent within three years. This rule is known as 'N+3', with N being the start year when the money is allocated. Any annual amount which is not claimed by the Member State within that period, is automatically decommitted from their allocation and goes back into the overall EU budget. Art. 86 and Art. 136 of the CPR define the arrangements for decommitment. According to art. 136 (1) 'The Commission shall decommit any part of the amount in an Operational Programme that has not been used for payment of the initial and annual pre-financing and interim payments by 31 December of the third financial year following the year of budget commitment under the Operational Programme or for which a payment application drawn up in accordance with Article 131 has not been submitted in accordance with Article 135.'. According to art. 88 (1) 'The Commission shall inform the MS and the managing authority in good time whenever there is a risk of application of the decommitment rule'.

Slovakia, to 45% in Portugal. In several countries, more than 40% of the planned resources were spent; this is the case of Ireland, Germany, Luxembourg and Malta.

**In most Member States there is a steep growth in the TO10 expenditure rate between 2016 and 2018** which reflects the growth in total ESF expenditure and is in line with the historical experience of European Structural and Investment Funds. According to past experience, the amounts spent tend to follow an exponential rather than linear curve, meaning that there is an initial delay and then an acceleration as the programming period nears its end. The reasons behind the delays in starting operations are various, including late approval of some OPs and overlapping with 2007-2013 programming closure, weak administrative capacity, contextual factors, reforms and political cycle, later reporting of some operations (e.g. those lasting for several years). The introduction of the N+3 rule<sup>72</sup> in the current programming cycle, instead of the previous N+2 rule, may have further extended the time from allocation to expenditure. **In some cases, though, there is no correspondence between the performance in total ESF and TO10 financial execution.** For example, in Slovakia and Romania, the TO10 expenditure rate (6% in 2018 for both countries) is significantly below the total ESF (25% and 16% respectively). TO10 expenditure is considerably lower than total ESF performance also in Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Latvia. On the contrary in several countries such as Austria, Germany, Estonia, Spain, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Slovenia, TO10 expenditure performance is above overall ESF performance.

**Table 7 Financial progress (expenditure as % of planned) of ESF and TO10 by Member State (end of 2016, 2017 and 2018)**

Countries	Total ESF (EU + national co-financing)			Total TO10 (EU + national co-financing)		
	2016	2017	2018	2016	2017	2018
AT	0%	8%	26%	0%	11%	32%
BE	1%	11%	26%	0%	4%	18%
BG	6%	12%	28%	1%	9%	26%
CY	4%	5%	47%	0%	0%	35%
CZ	5%	14%	27%	0%	3%	17%
DE	12%	24%	39%	11%	24%	40%
DK	5%	12%	25%	2%	6%	15%
EE	6%	15%	29%	8%	17%	33%
ES	1%	5%	20%	1%	8%	23%

<sup>72</sup> Cohesion Policy allocations must be spent within three years. This rule is known as 'N+3', with N being the start year when the money is allocated. Any annual amount which is not claimed by the Member State within that period, is automatically decommitted from their allocation and goes back into the overall EU budget. Art. 86 and Art. 136 of the CPR define the arrangements for decommitment. According to art. 136 (1) 'The Commission shall decommit any part of the amount in an operational programme that has not been used for payment of the initial and annual pre-financing and interim payments by 31 December of the third financial year following the year of budget commitment under the operational programme or for which a payment application drawn up in accordance with Article 131 has not been submitted in accordance with Article 135.'. According to art. 88 (1) 'The Commission shall inform the MS and the managing authority in good time whenever there is a risk of application of the decommitment rule'.

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FI	10%	23%	38%	11%	24%	39%
FR	8%	17%	38%	3%	13%	26%
GR	13%	22%	31%	18%	28%	36%
HR	0%	3%	13%	1%	6%	13%
HU	1%	9%	27%	0%	3%	26%
IE	0%	0%	11%	0%	0%	44%
IT	2%	8%	20%	2%	8%	23%
LT	11%	17%	25%	2%	7%	17%
LU	6%	24%	44%	5%	20%	40%
LV	4%	11%	22%	0%	3%	12%
MT	2%	10%	32%	5%	22%	40%
NL	11%	36%	46%	0%	0%	0%
PL	4%	11%	23%	2%	8%	21%
PT	13%	22%	35%	21%	33%	45%
RO	0%	1%	16%	0%	0%	6%
SE	5%	13%	27%	3%	10%	22%
SI	4%	1%	27%	2%	1%	33%
SK	6%	15%	25%	0%	1%	6%
UK	2%	7%	23%	3%	9%	21%
EU28	5%	13%	27%	6%	13%	27%

Source: Contractor's processing of cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu

On average there are no significant differences in the regional expenditure between more developed, transition and less developed regions, even though the first group is performing slightly better (28% vs. 26%). Looking at individual countries, there are no clear expenditure patterns linked to the type of regions. In some Member States, less developed regions seem to be faster from an expenditure point of view than more developed regions (e.g. in the UK and in Spain). In several countries, performance across different types of regions is similar (France, Greece, Poland, Slovenia, Denmark). In Italy, less developed and transition regions perform significantly worse than more developed areas (see Annex 1.1 for detailed information on financial progress by type of region).

**In the EU, 68% of planned T010 funds were allocated to selected operations and the performance is nearly similar across IPs, although lower for IP10.ii**, where some Member States have allocated nearly nothing (e.g. Estonia, Romania, Slovakia). The majority of Member States (21 out of 28) had allocated more than 60% of funds to selected operations by the end of 2018. In relation to IP10.i, the countries with the highest shares of funds allocated to selected operations are Hungary (113%), Latvia (92%), the UK (86%) and Estonia (82%). These are followed by countries that allocated a % ranging between 70% and 80% to selected operations (e.g. Germany, Spain, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal). As regards IP10.ii, the outstanding countries include Malta (155%), Hungary (88%), Spain (85%) and Germany (80%). Under IP10.iii, the Member States with the highest allocations to selected operations are Cyprus (162%), Ireland (112%), Luxembourg (98%), Latvia (94%) and Slovenia (90%), followed by a

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group of countries with more than 80% allocated (e.g. Belgium, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta). As regards IP10.iv, the outstanding countries include Cyprus (140%), Hungary (180%), Malta (128%), Slovenia (100%), Portugal (99%), Germany (97%), Latvia (94%).

**Table 8 Financial implementation by Investment Priority (end of 2018)**

	MS		Allocated to selected planned			Spend as % of planned				
	10.i	10.ii	10.iii	10.iv	TO10	10.i	10.ii	10.iii	10.iv	TO10
AT	66%		57%		63%	34%		28%		32%
BE	50%		84%	89%	81%	17%		20%	7%	18%
BG	38%	55%	10%	30%	32%	35%	48%	2%	16%	26%
CY			162%	140%	144%			43%	33%	35%
CZ	64%	61%			63%	18%	13%			17%
DE	75%	80%	65%	97%	82%	38%	13%	27%	51%	40%
DK			44%	65%	55%			15%	15%	15%
EE	82%	0%	84%		79%	37%	0%	32%		33%
ES	74%	85%	44%	56%	66%	24%	7%	14%	27%	23%
FI			76%	66%	76%			39%	13%	39%
FR	68%	51%	77%	25%	76%	26%	6%	26%	17%	26%
GR	74%	56%	49%	53%	63%	65%	12%	11%	11%	36%
HR		46%	57%	11%	43%		9%	25%	2%	13%
HU	113%	88%	85%	180%	98%	38%	21%	22%	8%	26%
IE			112%		100%			49%		44%
IT	72%	70%	31%	57%	65%	24%	26%	10%	21%	23%
LT	78%	59%	83%		62%	20%	21%	18%		17%
LU			98%		98%			40%		40%
LV	92%	62%	94%	94%	85%	18%	1%	7%	13%	12%
MT	66%	155%	89%	128%	101%	51%	87%	20%	0%	40%
PL	65%	67%	79%	61%	66%	27%	10%	25%	23%	21%
PT	79%	70%	48%	99%	80%	34%	50%	19%	59%	45%
RO	40%	3%	29%	15%	26%	4%	0%	23%	0%	6%
SE			68%	47%	66%			22%	26%	22%
SI			90%	100%	92%			33%	33%	33%
SK	35%	3%	70%	29%	31%	7%	1%	14%	6%	6%
UK	86%		62%	41%	58%	29%		23%	13%	21%
EU	70%	64%	67%	71%	68%	28%	21%	24%	33%	27%

Source: Contractor's processing of [cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu](https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu)

Looking at expenditure rates by IP (right side of above table), we can observe that IP10.iv has the best performance, considering that 33% of TO10 was spent, by the end of 2018. This is followed by IP10.i (28% of funds spent), IP10.iii (24%) and IP10.ii (21%). It was noted before that the expenditure rates vary considerably across countries but this variation is further magnified when we look at differences across IPs. For example, there are cases of IPs whose expenditure rate is very low (e.g. IP10.ii in Estonia, Romania, Slovakia and Latvia; IP10.iv in Romania, Croatia and Malta) which may signal delays and obstacles in the implementation. Detailed data on TO10 financial implementation by OP and Investment Priority is provided in the Annex 1.1.

### 3.4. Operational implementation

#### Operational implementation – key findings

Overall, in the EU, **approximately 9.5 million participations in education and training operations (35% of total ESF participations)** were reported as of the end of 2018; 47% under IP10.i, 29% under IP10.iii, 19% under IP10.iv and the smallest share, 5%, under IP10.ii.

**Nearly half of the participations in T010 operations were recorded in the first four countries for total ESF amounts planned in 2014-2020 that, altogether, represent 46% of total planned ESF.** These countries are: Italy (approx. 1.67 million participations), Spain (1.43 million), Poland (1.36 million), and Germany (0.90 million). Approximately 50% of total participations, 4.42 million, are from less developed regions, mostly in Poland; 1.54 million (17% of the total) are from transition regions and 3.05 million (33%) from more developed regions.

In line with expectations and with the horizontal principle of promotion of equality between men and women and non-discrimination, referred to in article 7 of the Common Provisions Regulation, **50% of total participants in T010 operations were women;** the share of women is higher under IP10.ii, strengthening tertiary education, and lowest under IP10.iv, labour market relevance of education and training.

As it can be expected from the distribution of ESF across T010 Investment Priorities, approximately **66% of total participants were below 25 years old, 26% are working age population, between 25 and 54 years old and the 8% are over 54 years old.** More than 63% of total participants, are inactive; employed participants represent 23%, while unemployed are 9% of the total.

**Overall, the level of achievement of targets set in relation to common output indicators is medium-high in nearly 32% of the cases, while it is low in 68% of the cases.** The main reasons for underperformance include late approval of some OPs, overlapping with 2007-2013 programming period, limited administrative capacity, reforms and political cycle, late reporting of operations lasting for several years. The achievement rate of target set in relation to programme-specific output indicators is slightly better as a medium-high achievement level was recorded for about 36% of targets, while a low achievement level was recorded for 64% of the targets. The progress in output performance is more positive for IP10.i and IP10.iii while activities progress more slowly under IP10.ii and IP10.iv.

Upon leaving support, **over 4.34 million participants (46% of total) in T010 operations have achieved positive results:** engaged in job searching or found a job, including self-employment; entered education/training; or gained a qualification. In the other ESF TOs, the share of total participants that achieved positive results upon leaving support was 32% and hence lower than T010. 50% of T010 participants that have experienced an improvement in their situation are women. 630 000 disadvantaged participants (31% of total disadvantaged participating in T010), upon leaving an intervention have improved their personal situation.

Six months after leaving support, more than half a million people (580 500 or 6.1% of total participants) in the EU found a job or experienced an improved labour market situation. In the other ESF TOs, the share of participants that achieved positive results after six months is higher (24%). This can be expected as longer-term common result indicators are oriented towards employment and measure the extent to which the situation of participants in employment has

improved. On the other hand, TO10 supports mostly skills' development and, to some extent, labour market relevance of education and training.

The level of achievement of the targets set in relation to common result indicators is medium-high for 11.2% of the cases, while it is low (<65% of target achieved) for 88.8% of the targets. In relation to programme-specific result indicators, the level of achievement of targets set is medium-high for 13.5% of these targets and low in 86.5% of the cases. On the basis of the results data, IP10.i and IP10.iv appear to be the best performing Investment Priorities.

### **Participants<sup>73</sup> by age, gender, education, labour market status and other socio-economic features**

Total participations in TO10 initiatives are shown in Table 9 by country and IP. Overall, in the EU, around 9.5 million participations, 35% of total ESF participations (approximately 27.2 million), were recorded as of the end of 2018, 47% under IP10.i, 29% under IP10.iii, 19% under IP10.iv and the smallest share, 5%, under IP10.ii (see Annex 1.1 for more information on output indicators as well as on limitations of available monitoring data). **The greatest numbers of participations were recorded in Italy (approx. 1.67 million), Spain (1.43 million), Poland (1.36 million) and Germany (0.90 million).** Altogether, they represent nearly half of the total.

**Table 9 Total participants in TO10 by Investment Priority (end of 2018)**

MS	Number of participations (end of 2018)					% of participations by IP			
	10.i	10.ii	10.iii	10.iv	Total	10.i	10.ii	10.iii	10.iv
AT	81,885	-	15,979	-	97,864	84%	0%	16%	0%
BE	6,907	-	313,208	0	320,115	2%	0%	98%	0%
BG	451,498	23,414	144,695	53,745	673,352	67%	3%	21%	8%
CY	-	-	732	0	732	0%	0%	100%	0%
CZ	29,916	2,411	-	-	32,327	93%	7%	0%	0%
DE	326,473	4,836	154,379	417,135	902,823	36%	1%	17%	46%
DK	-	-	4,149	6,862	11,011	0%	0%	38%	62%
EE	7,735	0	34,940	-	42,675	18%	0%	82%	0%
ES	870,601	5,979	256,211	293,156	1,425,947	61%	0%	18%	21%
FI	-	-	86,525	0	86,525	0%	0%	100%	0%
FR	79,829	1,680	403,684	14,615	499,808	16%	0%	81%	3%
GR	29,251	11,029	15,661	66,670	122,611	24%	9%	13%	54%
HR	-	16,224	25,222	2,545	43,991	0%	37%	57%	6%

<sup>73</sup> These are the persons benefiting directly from an ESF intervention, who can be identified and asked for their characteristics, and for whom specific expenditure is earmarked. Indicators collect observation data on participation records, i.e. characteristics and results (ESF monitoring and evaluation guidance, August 2018). The monitoring data does not allow differentiating between unique participants and individuals who participated in ESF multiple times. Throughout this report, 'Participants' refer to the number of participations that are reported, thus possibly including the same participant multiple times. Participations are measured upon entry of the individual in the ESF or YEI support.

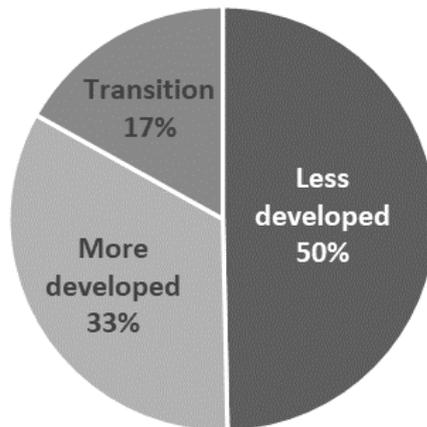
## Study for the Evaluation of the ESF support to Education and Training (T010)

MS	Number of participations (end of 2018)					% of participations by IP			
HU	147,930	10,838	233,020	5,019	396,807	37%	3%	59%	1%
IE	-	49,182	165,750	-	214,932	0%	23%	77%	0%
IT	1,282,936	69,023	30,631	288,110	1,670,700	77%	4%	2%	17%
LT	160,297	19,372	32,897	-	212,566	75%	9%	15%	0%
LU	-	-	5,882	-	5,882	0%	0%	100%	0%
LV	8,134	28	0	6,852	15,014	54%	0%	0%	46%
MT	1,755	829	4,074	0	6,658	26%	12%	61%	0%
PL	732,252	103,233	208,682	313,286	1,357,453	54%	8%	15%	23%
PT	83,917	187,455	122,261	240,680	634,313	13%	30%	19%	38%
RO	64,433	0	117,412	671	182,516	35%	0%	64%	0%
SE	-	-	83,444	0	83,444	0%	0%	100%	0%
SI	-	-	62,356	11,987	74,343	0%	0%	84%	16%
SK	92,420	1,265	3,174	4,921	101,780	91%	1%	3%	5%
UK	23,391	-	262,839	45,139	331,369	7%	0%	79%	14%
EU	4,481,560	506,798	2,787,807	1,771,393	9,547,558	47%	5%	29%	19%

Source: Contractor's processing on data provided by EC, December 2019.

Overall, 4.42 million participants (or 50% of the total) are from less developed regions, 1.54 million (17%) are from regions in transition and 3.05 million (33%) from more developed regions (Figure 14). Participants from less developed regions are concentrated in Poland (1.19 million), while the highest number of participants from more developed regions are from Italy, Germany, Spain and France. T010 participants from regions in transition are most numerous in Spain (0.63 million).

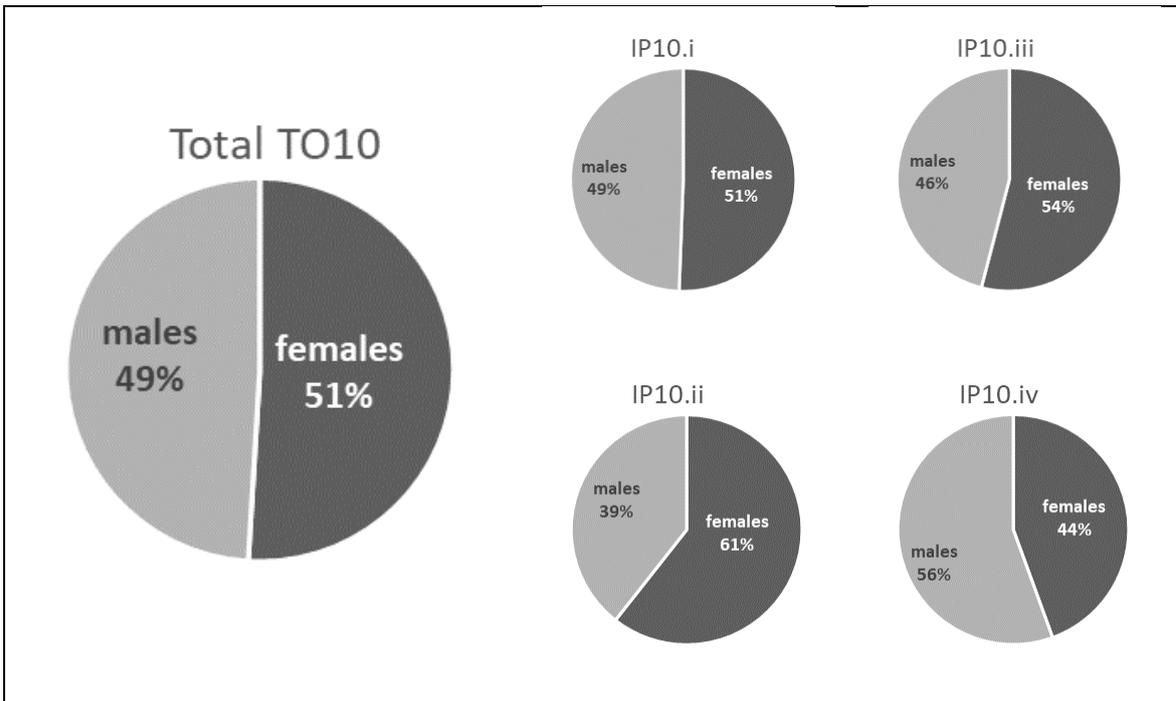
**Figure 14 Distribution of T010 participants by type of regions**



*Source: Contractor's processing on data provided by EC, December 2019.*

Women participating in T010 initiatives are half of the total number of participants at EU level, as shown in Figure 15. Among Member States, the share of female participants is very low in Luxembourg (6%), followed by Germany (40%), Romania (41%), Denmark (42%), Belgium (43%) and France (45%), while it is very high in Czech Republic (85%), followed by Latvia (73%) and Sweden (71%). The share of women is higher under IP10.ii, which concerns tertiary education and lowest under IP10.iv on vocational training.

**Figure 15 Participants (end 2018) – women as % of total and by Investment Priority**

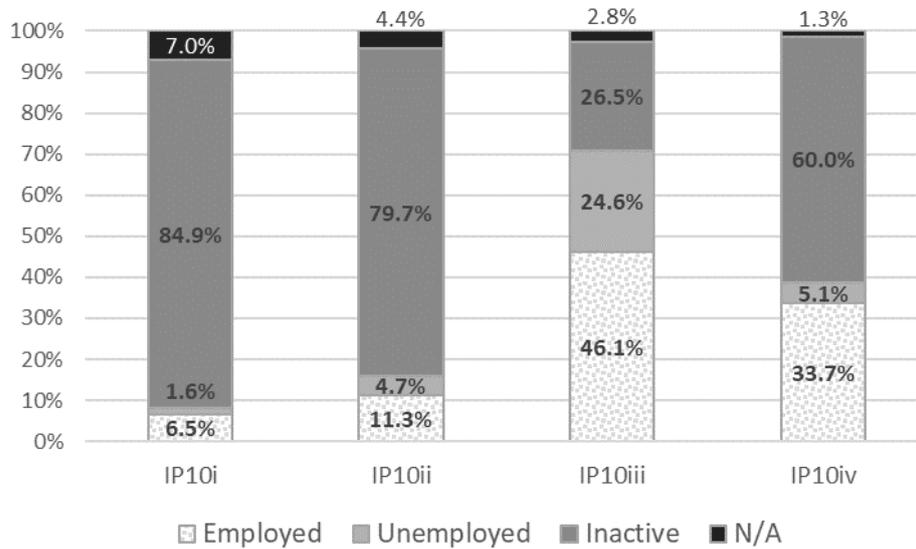


Source: Contractor's processing on data provided by EC, December 2019.

Figure 16 presents TO10 participants by employment status for each Member State. **Overall, 63% of total participants (more than 6 million) are inactive. Employed participants are 23% of the total, while unemployed are 9%.** There is a strong orientation towards employed people in Cyprus (employed are 90% of the total), Czech Republic (98%), Luxembourg (98%), Latvia (66%), Malta (93%), Sweden (99%), Slovenia (72%) and UK (88%).

Overall, in the EU, most of participants under IP10.i and IP10.ii are inactive (84.9% and 79.7% respectively), as we can expect considering that these two Investment Priorities support mostly students. In relation to operations financed under IP10.iii, 46.1% of participants are employed and 24.6% unemployed. Participants under IP10.iv are 60% inactive and 33.7% employed.

**Figure 16 Distribution of T010 participants by employment status and IP in the EU28 (end of 2018)**

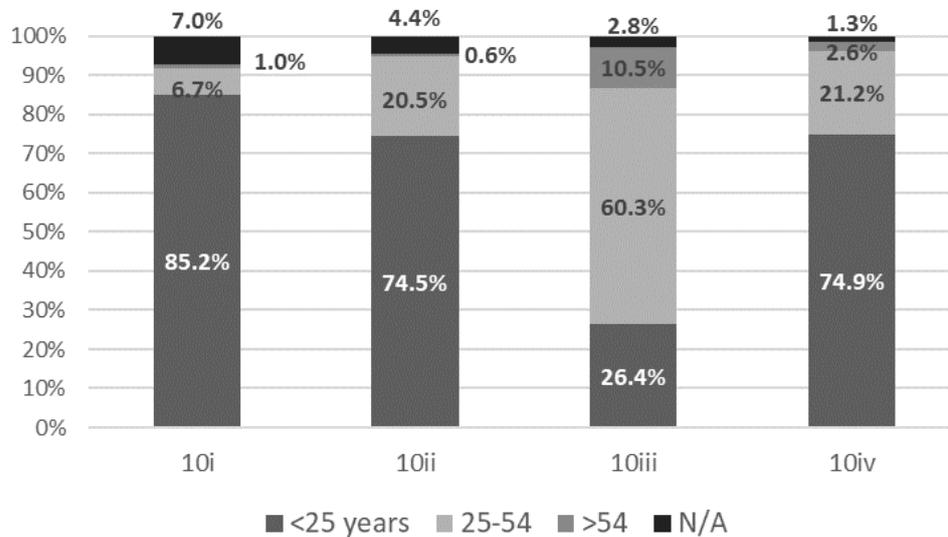


\*N/A= participants for whom personal information on employment status is not available  
 Source: Contractor's processing on data provided by EC, December 2019.

In the EU, approximately **6.26 million of T010 participants are below 25 years old (66% of the total)**. Around 2.46 million (26%) are of between 25 and 54 years old, and 0.39 million are over 54 years old. Most of the participants under 25 years of age are from three countries: Italy (1.37 million), Spain and Poland (around 1 million each). Other countries with a relatively high number of young participants are Germany (0.74 million), Bulgaria (0.62 million) and Portugal (0.49 million). Differently from these Member States, in other countries, most participants are 25-54 years old or older. For instance, in Romania, people aged 25-54 years represent 96% of the total T010 participants. High shares of participants belonging to this age range are also recorded in Luxembourg (87%), Malta (78%), Sweden (71%), Slovenia (61%), Cyprus (69%), Czech Republic (79%) and Estonia (70%).

As shown by Figure 17, 85% of participants in initiatives financed under IP10.i are below 25 years old. 74% of participants under IP10.ii are also in this age bracket while 22% are over 25. In relation to IP10.iii, 70% of participants are over 25 and 26% under 25. As regards participants in initiatives supported under IP10.iv, 75% are under 25, and 24% are over 25 years old.

**Figure 17 Distribution of T010 participants by age and IP in the EU28 (end of 2018)**

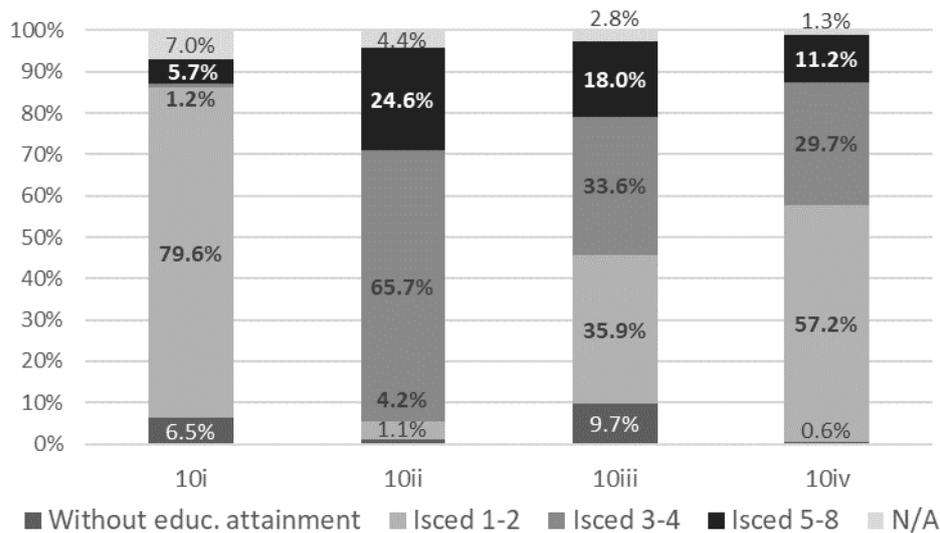


Source: Contractor's processing on data provided by EC, December 2019.

T010 participants by education attainment can be distinguished between ISCED 1 and 2 (primary and lower secondary education), ISCED 3 and 4 (upper secondary and post-secondary education), and ISCED from 5 to 8 (tertiary education). **Overall, in the EU, 59% of total participants belong to the ISCED 1-2 group.** 19% are ISCED 3-4, 11% are ISCED 5-8. Participants without education attainment are 6% of the total while those for whom information is not available are 5% of the total. The share of participants without education attainment is very high in Romania (96%) and Slovakia (40%). It is also considerable in Belgium (20%) and in the UK (18%).

As shown in the following figure, 80% of participants in operations financed under IP10.i are ISCED 1-2, 6% are ISCED 5-8 and 1% ISCED 3-4. The rest is either without education attainment or the information is not available. As regards IP10.ii, 66% of participants are ISCED 3-4, 25% are ISCED 5-8, and 4% ISCED 1-2. Under IP10.iii, there is a fairly equivalent weight of ISCED 1-2 (36% of participants) and ISCED 3-4 (34%), while ISCED 5-8 are 18% of the total. In relation to operations financed under IP10.iv, 57% of participants are ISCED 1-2, 30% are ISCED 3-4 and 11% are ISCED 5-8.

**Figure 18 Distribution of T010 participants by education level and IP in the EU28 (end of 2018)**

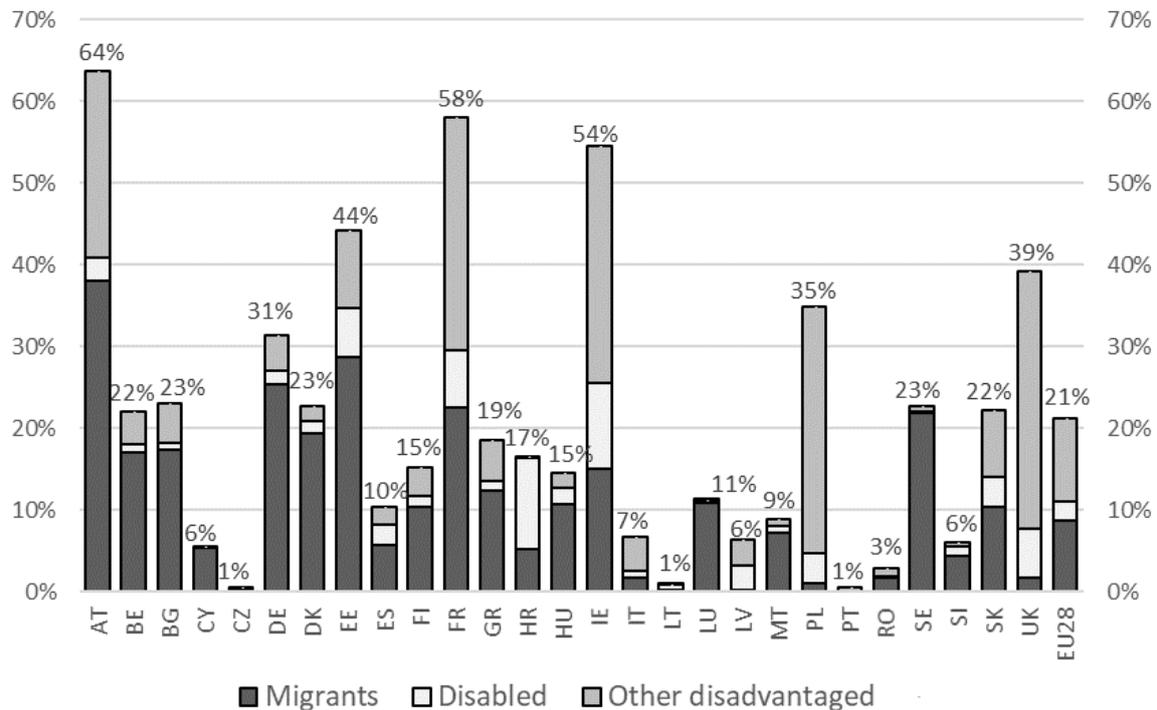


\*N/A= participants for whom personal information on employment status is not available  
 Source: Contractor's processing on data provided by EC, December 2019.

Figure 19 shows the distribution of T010 participants with some socio-economic disadvantage, distinguishing between migrants, people with disabilities, and other disadvantaged people. Migrants are approximately 0.83 million or 9% of total T010 participants; disabled persons are 228 442 (2% of total participants); and other disadvantaged people are 0.96 million (10% of the total). Overall, the total disadvantaged share on T010 total participants is 21%, below the share of total disadvantaged on ESF participants (31%). Migrants are 14% of total ESF participants, disabled persons are 7% of total ESF participants and other disadvantaged are 17% of total ESF participants.

Migrants are a large share of the total in Austria (38% of T010 participants), Germany (25%), Estonia (29%), France (23%) and Sweden (22%). The Member States where there is a stronger focus on people with disabilities are Croatia and Ireland (11% of participants in each). Other disadvantaged people are a high share of T010 participants in the UK (31%), Poland (30%), Ireland (29%), France (28%) and Austria (23%).

**Figure 19 Participants with socio-economic disadvantages as % of total T010 participants by country (end of 2018)**



\*N/A= participants for whom personal information on employment status is not available  
 Source: Contractor's processing on data provided by EC, December 2019.

**Achievement of targets set in relation to outputs indicators**

In the analysis of the extent to which targets set have been achieved, three levels of achievements are considered, in line with the percentages of achievement of milestones and targets indicated in the implementing regulation no. 215/2014<sup>74</sup>:

- <65% of target achieved: less than 65% of the cumulative quantified target values set for 2023 was achieved;
- 65-85% of target achieved: a percentage equal or greater than 65% and lower than 85% of the cumulative target set for 2023 was achieved;
- >85% of target achieved: at least 85% of the cumulative target set for 2023 was achieved.

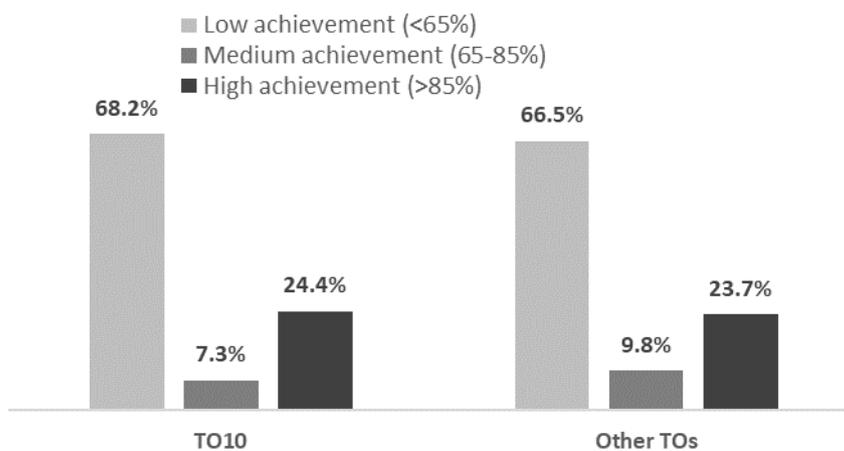
While for common and programme-specific output indicators the baseline shall be set to zero, according to the ESF Regulation, the targets may be set following different approaches by the administrations and hence they can be under- or over-estimated. This lack of coherence in target-setting approaches limits the comparability of data on

<sup>74</sup> Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 215/2014 of 7 March 2014 laying down rules for implementing Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council (Common Provisions Regulation) with regard to methodologies for climate change support, the determination of milestones and targets in the performance framework and the nomenclature of categories of intervention for the European Structural and Investment Funds, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32014R0215>

achievements. Another issue is the pace of reporting, meaning that some Member States report earlier while in others, data verification takes longer. As a consequence, monitoring data should be handled carefully, with the mentioned caveats in mind, when assessing the extent to which objectives were reached.

Overall, the level of **achievement of targets set in relation to common output indicators** is medium-high in nearly 32% of cases (medium achievement: 7.3% + high achievement: 24.4%). Approximately 68% of the targets have been achieved at a level of less than 65%. TO10 performance is by and large in line with other TOs. Indeed, for other TOs, the level of achievement was low in 67% of the cases and medium-high for approx. 33% of the targets.

**Figure 20 Level of achievement of common output indicators under TO10 and other TOs**



Source: Contractor's processing on data provided by EC, December 2019

Only low achievement levels (less than 65% of targets achieved) were recorded in Hungary, Sweden, and the UK in relation to TO10. On the contrary, according to these data on achievements of targets, the best performing countries are Austria, Belgium and Finland where over 60% of the targets were achieved at a level of 85% or more.

In comparison with the level of expenditure (27% of planned ESF on average), these ratios seem to suggest that the planned actions are progressing at a satisfactory level, however this can only be interpreted as an indication of progress as there is no direct link between targets and spending.

Table 10 compares the level of achievement across Member States with other Thematic Objectives under ESF.

**Table 10 Level of achievement of Common Output Indicators<sup>75</sup>**

MS	T010				OTHER TOs			
	Low achievement (<65%)	Medium achievement (65-85%)	High achievement (>85%)	Total	Low achievement (<65%)	Medium achievement (65-85%)	High achievement (>85%)	Total
AT	40.0%	0.0%	60.0%	100%	66.7%	8.3%	25.0%	100%
BE	25.0%	12.5%	62.5%	100%	14.8%	3.7%	81.5%	100%
DE	80.6%	0.0%	19.4%	100%	48.1%	19.0%	32.9%	100%
ES	69.6%	7.2%	23.2%	100%	69.9%	8.3%	21.8%	100%
FI	20.0%	20.0%	60.0%	100%	66.7%	13.3%	20.0%	100%
FR	54.0%	13.8%	32.2%	100%	70.8%	14.6%	14.6%	100%
HR	0.0%	66.7%	33.3%	100%	78.9%	5.3%	15.8%	100%
HU	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%	42.9%	28.6%	28.6%	100%
IT	73.6%	5.0%	21.4%	100%	73.3%	6.7%	20.0%	100%
PL	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	100%	44.7%	20.4%	35.0%	100%
SE	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
UK	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%	88.2%	8.8%	2.9%	100%
Total	68.2%	7.3%	24.4%	100%	66.5%	9.8%	23.7%	100%

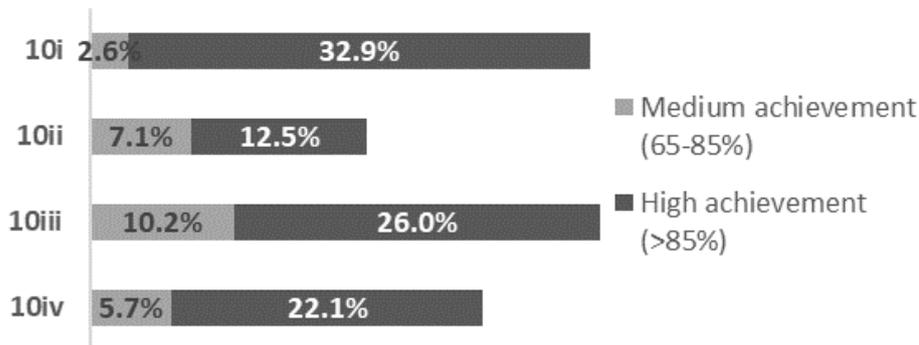
Source: Contractor's processing on data provided by EC, December 2019

As shown in Figure 21, in relation to IP10.i, the level of achievement was medium-high for a fairly considerable share of targets (2.6% + 32.9%). The situation of the other IPs is significantly worse. As regards IP10.ii, 80.4% of the targets are characterised by a low achievement level (less than 65%).

Under IP10.iii, approximately 64% of the targets recorded a <65% achievement rate while 36.2% show a medium-high achievement level. In relation to IP10.iv, 72.1% of the target show a low achievement level and 27.8% have reached a medium-high level of achievement.

<sup>75</sup> Only 12 countries have identified targets in relation to the common output indicators: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Germany, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the UK. A wider coverage is provided by the specific output indicators. However, specific output indicators are by definition different across countries and across different OPs within the same countries. This limits greatly the possibility of using them for comparing the performance of the programmes.

**Figure 21 Level of achievement of common output indicators by Investment Priority**

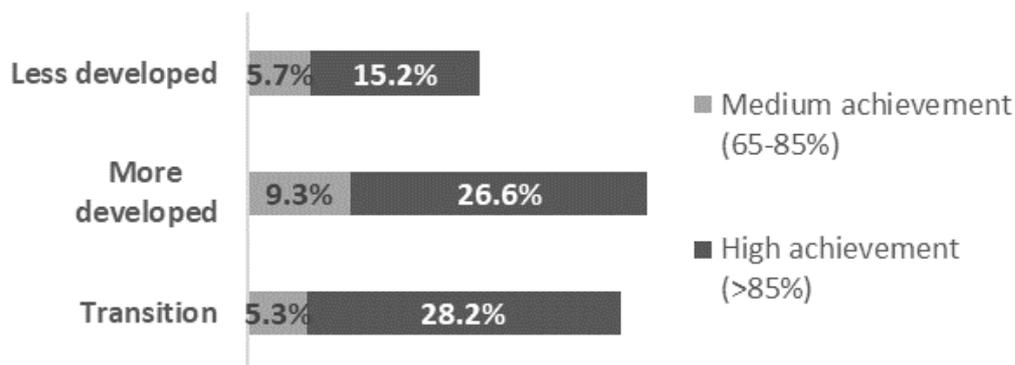


Source: Contractor's processing on data provided by EC, December 2019

Statistics on the level of achievement of targets were calculated also for the different typologies of regions. The performance of less developed regions is worse than those of transition regions, as well as more developed regions. Less developed regions achieved <65% of targets in 79% of the cases. On the contrary, 64% of targets set in more developed regions and 66.4% of targets set in transition regions are characterised by a low achievement level.

In less developed regions, 20.9% of the targets set show a medium-high level of achievement. In more developed regions, 35.9% of the targets have been reached at a medium-high level of achievement and 33.5% of the targets have a medium-high level of achievement in transition regions.

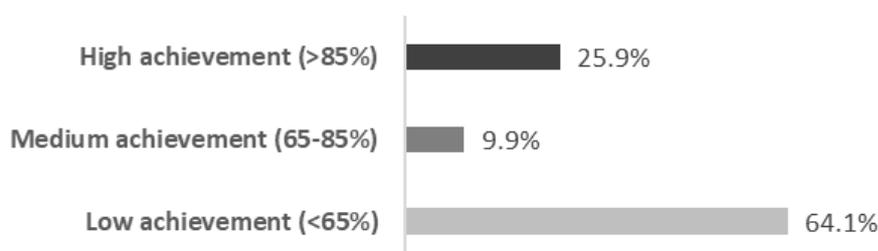
**Figure 22 Level of achievement of common output indicators by type of region**



Source: Contractor's processing on data provided by EC, December 2019

The average performance in the **achievement rate of targets set in relation to programme-specific output indicators** is slightly better than in relation to common outputs. Overall, 64% of programme-specific targets were achieved at a low achievement level (<65%). A medium-high achievement level (65-85% and 85%+) was recorded for about 36% of programme-specific targets.

**Figure 23 Rate of achievement of programme-specific output indicators**



Source: Contractor's processing on data provided by EC, December 2019

The performance of some countries that had very low levels of target achievement in relation to common output indicators (e.g. Hungary and Sweden) improves considerably when target set for programme-specific indicators are considered (Table 11).

**Table 11 Level of achievement of specific output indicators**

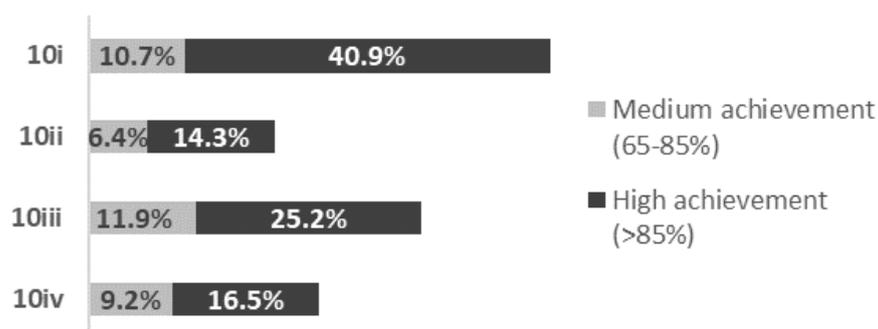
MS	Low achievement (<65%)	Medium achievement (65-85%)	High achievement (>85%)	Total
AT	44.4%	22.2%	33.3%	100%
BE	27.3%	9.1%	63.6%	100%
BG	85.7%	3.6%	10.7%	100%
CY	66.7%	33.3%	0.0%	100%
CZ	68.9%	11.1%	20.0%	100%
DE	68.1%	17.0%	14.9%	100%
DK	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
EE	40.0%	33.3%	26.7%	100%
ES	71.7%	6.7%	21.7%	100%
FI	25.0%	0.0%	75.0%	100%
FR	75.0%	7.1%	17.9%	100%
GR	54.9%	12.7%	32.4%	100%
HR	87.0%	0.0%	13.0%	100%
HU	65.4%	15.4%	19.2%	100%
IE	0.0%	50.0%	50.0%	100%
IT	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%	100%
LT	74.1%	7.4%	18.5%	100%
LU	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%	100%
LV	66.7%	0.0%	33.3%	100%
MT	60.0%	10.0%	30.0%	100%
PL	59.5%	8.5%	32.0%	100%
PT	61.4%	13.6%	25.0%	100%

RO	93.8%	0.0%	6.3%	100%
SE	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100%
SI	30.0%	30.0%	40.0%	100%
SK	72.0%	12.0%	16.0%	100%
UK	90.2%	4.9%	4.9%	100%
EU	64.1%	9.9%	25.9%	100%

Source: Contractor's processing on data provided by EC, December 2019.

Overall, **output performance to date in general and in relation to the specific IPs has been mixed, reflecting delays and obstacles in the implementation** (see section 4 on responses to evaluation questions and lessons learnt for more information on factors affecting performance). There was more positive progress for IP10.i (early school leaving and access to learning pathways) and slower progress under IP10.ii (tertiary education). In relation to IP10.i, the level of achievement was low for 48.8% of the targets and medium-high for 51.6% of the targets set. As it was observed for targets set in relation to common output indicators, the situation of other IPs is worse. As regards IP10.ii, 79.3% of the targets are characterised by a low achievement level (less than 65%). In IP10.iii, 62.9% of the targets recorded a <65% achievement rate while 37.1% show a medium-high achievement level. In relation to IP10.iv, 74.2% of the target show a low achievement level and 25.8% have reached a medium-high level of achievement.

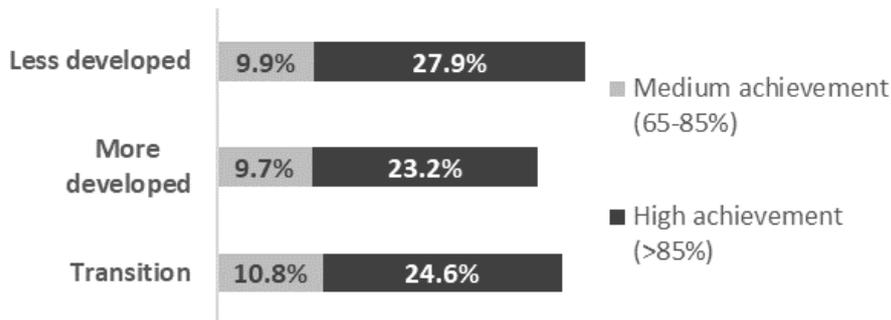
**Figure 24 Rate of achievement of targets set for specific output indicators by IP**



Source: Contractor's processing on data provided by EC, December 2019.

Unlike common results indicators, the performance of less developed regions in achieving targets set in relation to programme-specific output indicators is more or less in line with transition and more developed regions. Less developed regions achieved <65% of targets in 62.2% of the cases. On the contrary, 67.1% of targets set in more developed regions and 64.6% of targets set in transition regions are characterised by a low achievement level. In less developed regions, 37.8% of the targets set show a medium-high level of achievement. In more developed regions, 32.9% of the targets have reached a medium-high level of achievement and 35.4% of the target have a medium-high level of achievement in transition regions.

**Figure 25 Rate of achievement of targets set for specific output indicators by type of region**



Source: Contractor's processing on data provided by EC, December 2019.

### ***Achievement of targets set in relation to result indicators***

**Common results indicators** are also established in the ESF Regulation, in which immediate result indicators are distinguished from longer-term result indicators. Immediate results are measured in terms of participants whose situation, in education, job market etc., improved upon leaving the support<sup>76</sup>. Longer-term results are measured in terms of participants whose situation has improved six months after leaving support<sup>77</sup> (for more information on result indicators and the list of immediate and longer-term indicators see Annex 1.1).

Full details on **immediate common results indicators** by Member State are provided in Annex 1.1 (Table 6.18). Overall, in the EU, 155,347 inactive participants engaged in job searching upon leaving, 801,096 participants in education/training upon leaving, 3.15 million participants gaining a qualification upon leaving, 230,243 participants were in employment, including self-employment, upon leaving. The sum of these is over 4.34 million participants and 50% are women. The number of disadvantaged participants engaged in job searching, education and training, gaining a qualification, in employment, including self-employment, upon leaving was 629,939.

<sup>76</sup> Immediate result indicators: inactive participants engaged in job searching upon leaving; participants in education/training upon leaving; participants gaining a qualification upon leaving; participants in employment, including self-employment, upon leaving; disadvantaged participants engaged in job searching, education/ training, gaining a qualification, in employment, including self-employment, upon leaving.

<sup>77</sup> Longer-term result indicators: participants in employment, including self-employment, six months after leaving; participants with an improved labour market situation six months after leaving; participants above 54 years of age in employment, including self-employment, six months after leaving; disadvantaged participants in employment, including self-employment, six months after leaving.

Full details on **longer term common results indicators** by Member State are provided in Annex 1.1 (Table 6.19). Across the EU, the participants in employment, including self-employment, six months after leaving were 365,628. Participants with an improved labour market situation six months after leaving, were 214,874. Overall, in the EU, more than half million people (580,502) found a job or experienced an improved situation six months after leaving support. These are positive results but relatively small numbers to make meaningful comparisons with population and employment data at country level. Women are 52% of the total participants who found employment or improved their situation. Disadvantaged participants who were in employment, including self-employment, six months after leaving are 23% of the total participants.

The level of achievement is medium-high for 11.2% of the targets set in relation to common result indicators, while it is low (<65% of target achieved) for 88.8% of the targets. Low achievement levels (less than 65% of targets achieved) were recorded in Germany, Hungary, Sweden and the UK in relation to T010. On the contrary, according to these data on achievements of targets, the best performing countries are Belgium and Finland where 50% of the targets were achieved at a level of 85% or more.

**Table 12 Level of achievement of common result indicators<sup>78</sup>**

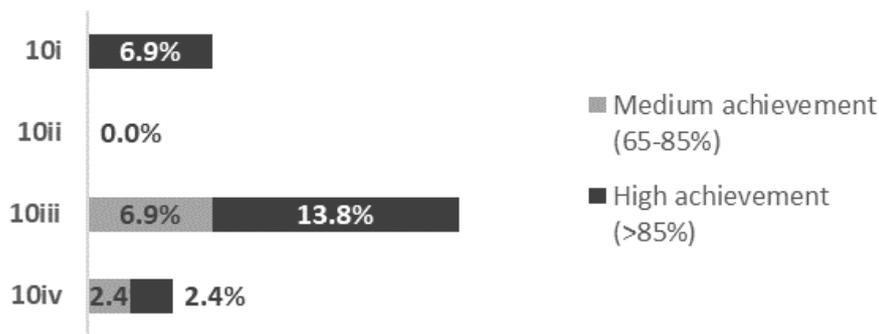
MS	Low achievement (<65%)	Medium achievement (65-85%)	High achievement (>85%)	Total
BE	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%	100%
DE	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
ES	88.7%	1.9%	9.4%	100%
FI	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%	100%
FR	77.8%	11.1%	11.1%	100%
HU	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
IT	98.4%	0.0%	1.6%	100%
SE	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
UK	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
Total	88.8%	3.6%	7.6%	100%

Source: Contractor's processing on data provided by EC, December 2019.

In relation to IP10.i, the **level of achievement** of common result indicators was medium-high only for 6.9% of set targets. As regards IP10.ii, 100% of the targets are characterised by a low achievement level (less than 65%). IP10.iii is characterised by the best performance according to these data. 79.3% of the targets recorded a <65% achievement rate while 20.7% show a medium-high achievement level. In relation to IP10.iv, 95.2% of the target show a low achievement level and 4.8% have reached a medium-high level of achievement.

<sup>78</sup> The table presents results only for the nine countries for which common results indicators have been used.

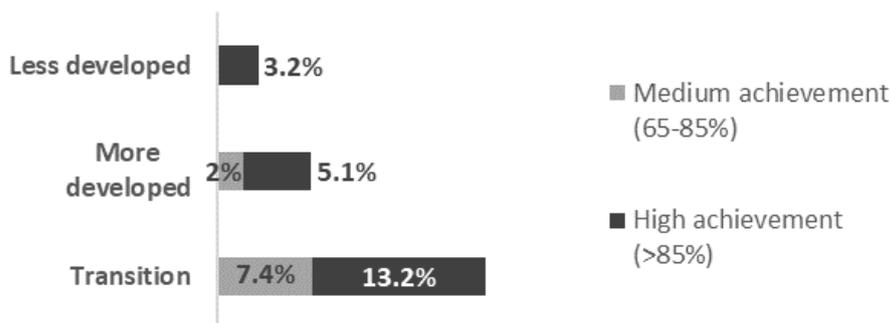
**Figure 26 Level of achievement of common result indicators, by IP**



Source: Contractor's processing on data provided by EC, December 2019.

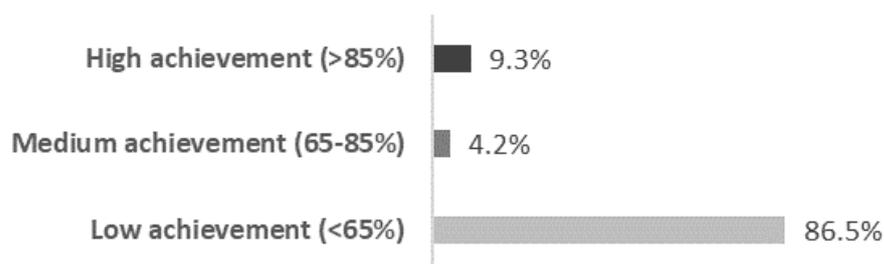
In the case of results, as for the outputs, the performance of less developed regions is worse than those in transition as well as than more developed regions. Less developed regions achieved <65% of targets in 96.8% of the cases. 92.9% of targets set in more developed regions and 79.4% of targets set in transition regions are characterised by a low achievement level. In less developed regions, 3.2% of the targets set show a medium-high level of achievement. In more developed regions, 7.1% of the targets have been reached at a medium-high level of achievement. This percentage is significantly higher, 20.6% for regions in transition.

**Figure 27 Level of achievement of common result indicators, by category of region**



Source: Contractor's processing on data provided by EC, December 2019.

In relation to the level of achievement of targets set in relation to **programme-specific result indicators**, this was medium-high for 13.5% of these targets and low in 86.5% of the cases. The best performance is recorded in Malta (100% of targets achieved at >85% level), Ireland (50% of targets achieved at medium-high level), Finland (33.3% of targets achieved at >85% level) and Spain (28.6% of targets characterised by a high level of achievement).

**Figure 28 Rate of achievement of programme-specific result indicators**


Source: Contractor's processing on data provided by EC, December 2019.

**Table 13 Level of achievement of specific result indicators**

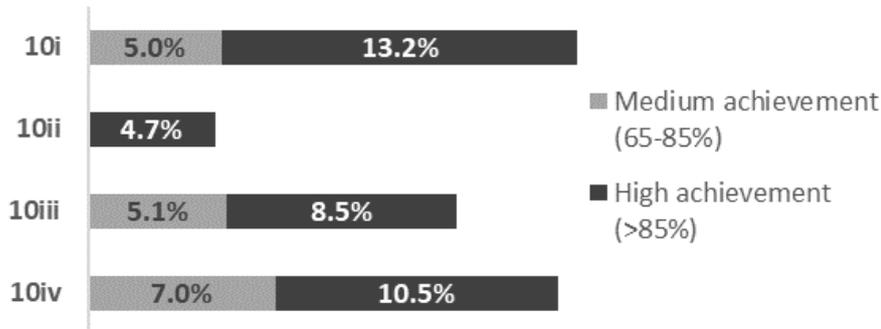
MS	Low achievement (<65%)	Medium achievement (65-85%)	High achievement (>85%)	Total
BE	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
BG	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
CY	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
CZ	77.8%	0.0%	22.2%	100%
DE	80.8%	11.5%	7.7%	100%
EE	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
ES	71.4%	0.0%	28.6%	100%
FI	66.7%	0.0%	33.3%	100%
FR	97.1%	0.0%	2.9%	100%
GR	80.0%	0.0%	20.0%	100%
HR	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
HU	70.6%	11.8%	17.6%	100%
IE	50.0%	25.0%	25.0%	100%
IT	91.4%	6.9%	1.7%	100%
LT	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100%
LU	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
LV	78.9%	5.3%	15.8%	100%
MT	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100%
PL	83.3%	5.0%	11.7%	100%
PT	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
RO	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
SE	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
SK	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
UK	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
EU	86.5%	4.2%	9.3%	100%

Source: Contractor's processing on data provided by EC, December 2019.

In relation to the level of achievement of programme-specific result indicators, IP10.i and IP10.iv are the best performing Investment Priorities. As regards IP10.i, the level of achievement was medium-high for 18.2% of set targets. In IP10.iv, 17.5% of the targets are characterised by a medium-high level of achievement. Under IP10.ii, 95.3% of the targets are characterised by a low achievement level (less than 65%), while the level of achievement is high for 4.7% of the targets. In relation to IP10.iii, 86.3% of the

targets recorded a <65% achievement rate, while 13.6% show a medium-high achievement level.

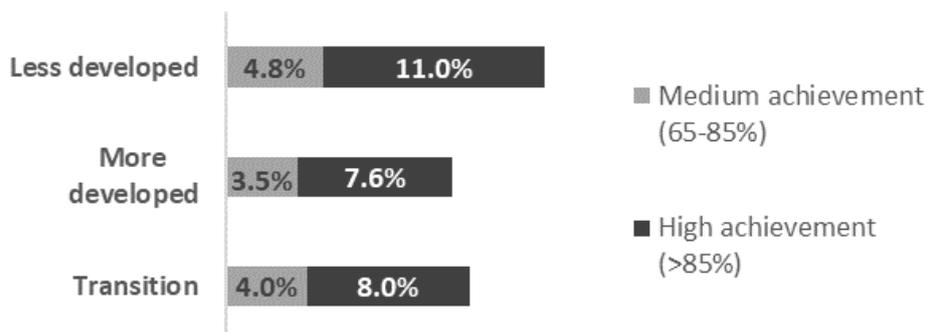
**Figure 29 Level of achievement of specific result indicators by Investment Priority**



Source: Contractor's processing on data provided by EC, December 2019.

Unlike outputs and common result indicators, in the case of programme-specific results, the performance of less developed regions is better than regions in transition and more developed regions. Less developed regions show a low level of achievement (<65% of targets) in 84.3% of the cases. In more developed regions, 88.8% of targets are characterised by a low level of achievement. In transition regions, 88% of targets are achieved at <65% level. 15.8% of target show a medium-high level of achievement in less developed regions. This percentage is 11.1% in more developed regions and 12% for regions in transition.

**Figure 30 Level of achievement of specific result indicators by category of region**



Source: Contractor's processing on data provided by EC, December 2019.

## 4. RESPONSES TO EVALUATION QUESTIONS

This section of the report provides a detailed presentation of the specific answers to each evaluation question and sub-question, based on the judgment of the research team, with reference to evidence collected from across all the evaluation tasks. Specific sub-sections address the key evaluation criteria as follows:

- Effectiveness;
- Efficiency;
- Relevance;
- Coherence;
- EU added value.

### 4.1. Effectiveness

#### ***Evaluation question 1: How effective is the ESF in achieving the objectives of Thematic Objective 10?***

##### Key findings on effectiveness

Overall, the evaluation evidence generally shows the **positive progress of ESF T010 education and training Investment Priorities** however there are **large differences in performance across countries, Ops, and IPs**. Overall, 27% of total planned resources under T010 were spent in the EU as at the end of 2018, rising from 6% in 2016 to 13% in 2017. The rate of expenditure at the end of 2018 is generally **in line with expectations for this stage of the programme period based** on historical experience of European Structural and Investment Funds<sup>79</sup>. The extent to which planned financial spend has been achieved varies substantially however, ranging from a minimum of 6% in Romania and Slovakia to a maximum of 45% in Portugal at the end of 2018. There are also significant differences in financial performance across regions within Member States.

**Output performance under T010 is broadly in line with other ESF TOs.** There were 9.5 million participations by the end of 2018 with 47% under IP10.i, 29% under IP10.iii, 19% under IP10.iv and 5%, under IP10.ii. Most participations were in four countries: Italy (approx. 1.67 million), Spain (1.43 million), Poland (1.36 million), and Germany (0.90 million). 4.42 million participants (50% of total) were in less developed regions.

The financial and output data suggests that there has been more **positive progress under IP10.i (early school leaving and access to learning pathways)** while activities have been slower to progress under IP10.ii (tertiary education). Overall Member States have been relatively effective in their use of ESF funds to support national and regional strategic priorities in the area of early school leaving. For tertiary education initiatives, Member States have found it more challenging to use ESF funds to support national and regional strategic priorities and to harmonise ESF operations with existing national approaches.

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<sup>79</sup> Based on the historical experience of European Structural and Investment Funds, the amounts spent tend to follow an exponential rather than linear curve, meaning that there is an initial delay and then an acceleration as the programming period nears its end. The introduction of the N+3 rule in the current programming cycle, instead of the previous N+2 rule, may have further extended the time from allocation to expenditure. This feature is one of the differences among programming periods which makes it difficult to compare expenditure progress over time.

Key **success factors** in the overall performance of OPs are identified as: management capacity to deliver ESF education and training programmes on the scale required; strong strategic approach at programming level; strong coordination processes involving the Managing Authority, local and regional authorities and key partners such as NGOs and social partners from design stage; and building the capacity of staff in beneficiary organisations on how to access, implement and monitor the funds.

Key **challenges** faced include: overlaps with the ongoing implementation of the previous ESF programme; management capacity in MA and beneficiary organisations to deliver against the T010 targets; and barriers in adjusting the OP to address emerging training and education needs.

There have been notable contributions to Europe 2020 education and training targets identified: based on the available data, **over 4.34 million participants have achieved positive results** from participation in T010-funded operations, of which 50% were women. The majority of positive results related to gaining a qualification upon leaving or engaging in education and training. The number of disadvantaged participants achieving positive results was 630,000 (31% of participants compared to 23% for other ESF Thematic Objectives).

**Stronger results performance** is highlighted under IP10.i (early school leaving) and IP10.iii (lifelong learning). There are also some examples of positive impacts under both IPs based on counterfactual evidence to show what would have happened without ESF (for example in Spain and UK) however limited impact studies have been completed to date.

There is **potential for longer-term effects on progress towards education and training targets**, as highlighted by examples of operations that have led to systemic changes in government policy approaches. However, the evaluation has highlighted some particular challenges in achieving systematic change which largely relate to shifting national political priorities and the need to use ESF to provide support for longer-term objectives in some Member States.

The **modelling of ESF T010 impacts based** on RHOMOLO<sup>80</sup> simulations suggest that by 2023, European GDP is expected to increase by 0.16% (which amounts to roughly EUR 18 billion), with long-lasting effects generated by the structural policies and the change in productivity and around additional expected 170,000 jobs, as a final indirect macro-economic impact. The increase shows persistence in the long run (by 2033) where the GDP is still 0.14% higher relative to the baseline.

**Young people** are a key target group - approximately 6.26 million below 25 years old (66% of the total participations?). There is a range of evidence which shows the good progress of operations in addressing the needs of young people. Evidence is mixed however on the current effectiveness and potential of ESF T010 to address the needs of NEETs, low qualified adults, people in employment, and the unemployed.

Operations have faced **challenges in reaching disadvantaged groups** including refugees and migrants, the long-term unemployed and people with disabilities. **Common challenges** have included the eligibility criteria required for participants and administrative requirements facing smaller NGOs with stronger links to harder-to-reach groups, and the need for more integrated and follow-up actions.

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<sup>80</sup> RHOMOLO is the spatial computable general equilibrium model of the European Commission, see for details: <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/rhomolo>

**Successful operations** include: Local and regional action plans to address early school leaving; operations for the improvement of quality, efficiency or modernisation of education/training systems or establishments, including digital & technological innovations and new management approaches; dedicated counselling, tutoring and support services (implemented at all levels of education, mostly at secondary and tertiary level); training for educational staff to recognise and understand the potential problems faced by vulnerable groups; and targeted education/training for disadvantaged learners.

The evaluation evidence highlights a **variety of success factors and challenges** in relation to the specific Investment Priorities and types of operations. Key success factors were identified as: strong coordination and the involvement of local and regional stakeholders, who can tailor programmes to specific needs (early school leaving operations, lifelong learning); and the provision of intensive and tailored support to individuals over a longer-term period of time (early school leaving, lifelong learning).

***Evaluation Question 1.1 To what extent have the financial implementation and the achievement of the expected outputs progressed according to the output targets set in the programmes? What are the main factors involved (delays in implementation, ESF absorption...)?***

#### Key findings – EQ 1.1

Overall, the evaluation evidence generally shows the **positive progress of ESF T010 education and training Investment Priorities** however there are large differences in performance across countries, Ops, and IPs. In relation to common output indicators overall, however, **the level of achievement against output targets is broadly in line with other ESF Thematic Objectives**. On the basis of progress against common output indicators, activities under IP10.i (early school leaving and access to learning pathways) and IP10.iii (lifelong learning) have generally performed better than other IPs.

Key **success factors** in the overall performance of OPs, based on the evidence from the country reviews and case studies, are identified as: capacity to deliver ESF education and training programmes on the scale required; strong strategic approach at programming level; strong coordination processes involving the Managing Authority, local and regional authorities and key partners such as NGOs and social partners from design stage; and building the capacity of staff in beneficiary organisations on how to access, implement and monitor the funds. Key **challenges** faced include overlaps with the ongoing implementation of the previous ESF programme, management capacity in MA and beneficiary organisations to deliver the against the TO10 targets, and barriers in adjusting the OP to address emerging training and education needs.

As highlighted in Section Three, overall, 27% of total planned resources under TO10 had been spent in the EU as at the end of 2018, rising from 6% in 2016 to 13% in 2017. The rate at the end of 2018 is generally **in line with expectations for this stage of the programme period** based on historical experience of European Structural and Investment Funds. The analysis in Section 3 also showed that the extent to which planned financial spend has been achieved varies substantially across Member States ranging from a minimum of 6% in Romania and Slovakia to a maximum of 45% in Portugal at the end of 2018. The review of financial performance also shows that there have been **some significant differences in financial performance across regions**

in certain Member States (e.g. Italy, Portugal, Spain, UK). In Spain, for example, funding spent as a percentage of planned expenditure ranges from 8-9% in four regions to 45% in the best performing region (Extremadura). There is no suggestion from the country reviews that this variation is related to relative levels of economic prosperity within the regions as the evidence suggests that there are a complex range of factors (both internal and external) at play affecting the process of implementation, as explored further below.

Looking at expenditure rates by Investment Priority, IP10.iv (labour market relevance) has the best performance with an expenditure rate of 33%, as of the end of 2018. This is followed by IP10.i (early school leaving and access to learning pathways) (28% of funds spent), IP10.iii (24%) and IP10.ii (21%). It was noted before that the expenditure rates vary considerably across countries, but this variation is even magnified when we look at differences across IPs. For example, there are cases of IPs for which the expenditure rate is almost zero (for example IP10.ii in Romania, Slovakia and Latvia, or IP10.iv in Lithuania, Romania, Croatia and Malta). The main factors involved are explored further in the sub-section below.

### **Output performance**

The limitations of monitoring data on outputs and results relating to TO10 operations (detailed in Section Three) have created difficulties in verifying, assessing and comparing achievements within and between countries. In relation to common output indicators overall, however, **the level of achievement** against output targets is 'medium to high' in nearly 32% of the cases. This means that approximately 68% of the targets have been achieved at a level of less than 65%, which is broadly in line with other ESF Thematic Objectives. Lower levels of achievement were recorded in Hungary, Sweden and the UK in relation to TO10 while the best performing countries are Austria, Belgium and Finland with over 60% of the targets achieved at a level of 85% or more.

**On the basis of progress against common output indicators, activities under IP10.i (early school leaving and access to learning pathways) and IP10.iii (lifelong learning) have generally performed better than other IPs.** Evaluation question 1.7 examines the reasons for the relative performance levels of IPs. For IP10.i, only 49% of the targets for specific output indicators are categorised as low achievement (less than 65% of the target achieved) compared to 79% for IP10.ii (tertiary education).

The analysis of common output indicators has revealed some **notable differences in the scale of achievements across Member States as well as between regions within Member States.** The larger Member States are generally meeting expectations for participations. In Germany, for example, just over 900,000 participations have been secured under all the OPs (regional and national). The largest target group reached consists of people under 25 years (740,000 participations), which is in line with the national policy focus on young people. In Germany, initiatives undertaken under IP10.iv in particular (improving labour market relevance) have reached a large number of beneficiaries (437,000).

Supporting the analysis of output achievements by IP summarised above, the country reviews have reported largely positive progress under IP10.i (early school leaving and access to learning pathways):

- In Lithuania, for example, it was noted that 75% of the 213,000 participants to date were reached by operations aiming to reduce and prevent early school leaving under IP10.i.
- In Spain, 615,000 people have been reached under IP10.i; these are mostly inactive (70%), below 25 (71%), and with primary (ISCED 1) or lower secondary education (ISCED 2) (71%).

As suggested by the overall analysis of outputs, **activities have been slower to progress under IP10.ii (tertiary education) and IP10.iv (labour market relevance)**. Under IP10.ii (tertiary education), for example, only the Bulgaria, Hungary and Ireland reviews highlighted good participation outputs for operations under this priority, and a number of the country reviews, for example Malta and Spain, highlighted particular challenges (examined further under evaluation question 1.7).

### **Main factors involved**

The key **success factors** that are reported to have contributed to the effectiveness of programmes can be grouped as follows:

- **Capacity to deliver ESF education and training programmes on the scale required.** Capacity is broadly defined in terms of the technical skill levels and experience of programme management staff and the maturity of specific stakeholder networks involved in supporting effective delivery. For some OPs capacity is related to the continuation of structures and bodies which were already well established and geared to the requirements of the specific operations and their engagement approaches. Capacity was highlighted as a success factor in the following case studies: Federal Germany, Pomorskie (Poland), Employment, Education and Training (National OP Spain), Ireland, and West Wales and the Valleys (Wales).
- **Strong strategic approach at programming level** – good progress in some Member States and OPs was attributed to the strategic and targeted use of funding for key operations. Stakeholders highlighted Sweden as a good example of the strategic use of funding where, despite having a small T010 budget, the country had achieved important impacts through key operations on migrants and early school leaving. The case studies of Federal Germany and Lithuania highlighted the importance of using ESF to address specific priorities identified as part of wider national or regional strategic approaches to education and training.
- **Strong coordination processes/collaborative governance models involving the Managing Authority, local and regional authorities, and key partners such as NGOs and social partners from design stage.** The view is that involving stakeholders in this way allows operations to be more relevant to local realities, which in itself was identified as a success factor of operations. The importance of involving relevant stakeholders was highlighted

in the OP Research, Development, and Education (Czech), Human Capital national OP (Portugal) Employment, Education and Training National OP (Spain) case studies

- **Building capacity of beneficiaries:** training staff in beneficiary organisations on how to access, implement and monitor the funds. Social partners were mentioned several times as particularly in need of such support in order to be more effectively involved in the funds at design and implementation level. For example, in relation to the West Wales and the Valleys (UK) OP, a number of stakeholders praised the ESF MA in Wales - the Welsh European Funding Office – for the support and advice that it offers to organisations in running ESF operations.

Box 1 provides detail on an example of a programme where strong collaborative governance models have been important in supporting effective delivery.

### **Box 1 Portugal National Operational Programme – Strong financial and output performance**

#### Portugal National Operational Programme – Strong financial and output performance

The largest programme, in terms of total TO10 funding, is the Portuguese OP Human Capital, a national OP with planned expenditure on TO10 of EUR 3.5 billion. By 2018, the OP Human Capital (covering less developed regions in the continent: Norte, Centro and Alentejo) was the best performing OP in Portugal with 88% of planned funding for TO10 already allocated and 54% already spent. A key factor highlighted by interviewees in enabling this strong financial performance has been the collaborative governance models in place at the regional level that were considered to be well suited to the implementation approaches and monitoring and evaluation requirements of ESF. By the end of 2018, the OP had supported a total of 586,434 participations under TO10. The IPs with the higher share of participants were IP10.iv (38.1%) and IP10.ii (31%), reflecting financial progress. IP10.iii and IP10.i both had a comparatively lower share of participants (17.3% and 13.6%, respectively).

The analysis of financial performance above shows that over 40% of the planned resources have been spent in Ireland, Germany, Luxembourg and Malta. Case studies of the Germany and Ireland national OPs examined **particular factors in the strong financial performance of those countries**. The case study of the German national OP (41% of planned funding spent) showed that implementation has benefited from the continuation of management structures and types of operations supported by the previous ESF programme. A number of key operations were either already co-financed through the ESF in the former programming period or through national funding in the years before. Furthermore, the operations are well-embedded into national strategies, such as the intervention Integrated Education, which forms part of the national 'Education Links to Obtain a Training Qualification' initiative. Another success factor supporting progress has been **the flexibility and quick reaction of the MA against low engagement**, for example this was shown by the Continuing Education grant operation, where in order to increase the number of participants, communication tools were improved, and funding criteria adapted. A nationally commissioned mid-term

evaluation of the ESF programme in Ireland<sup>81</sup> produced in December 2018 concluded that structures and arrangements for programme management and delivery were generally appropriate and working effectively. The report commended the focused work on the part of the MA, Intermediary Bodies, and beneficiaries to reach this point.

The OP for Pomorskie Voivodeship (Poland) was the most advanced out of all OPs in Poland, both in terms of resources allocated (67%) and spent (34%). The good financial performance of the Pomorskie OP was attributed to continuity in the governance process in particular the role of dedicated and experienced regional departments (ESF, Education and Regional Development) that were responsible for the design and implementation of ESF programmes over successive programming periods and who have been able to facilitate effective governance structures that encourage good levels of cooperation with other actors of the educational system. A high level of involvement of entrepreneurs and employers in particular was highlighted as a key factor in the design and implementation of the OP.

Based on the country reviews and case studies (see Annex 1.4), a number of key factors were reported to have contributed to slower progress on expenditure and achievement of outputs at the initial phase of the programming period:

- **Overlaps with the ongoing implementation of the previous ESF programme** leading to constraints in the capacity needed to initiate the 2014-2020 programme as **highlighted** in the national OP (Slovenia), national OP (Romania) and Galicia OP (Spain) case studies.
- **Changes in the administrative/legislative framework**, which occurred during the implementation were highlighted by the country reviews for Bulgaria, Croatia, **France**, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Malta and the United Kingdom, and the OP Norte case study (Portugal). (ESF changed from a mono-fund national programme in 2007-13 to regional programmes managed within multi-fund OPs dominated by ERDF).
- **Ongoing reforms affecting education and vocational training** and related institutional **changes** complicating the planning and implementation stages, e.g. OP Knowledge Education Growth (Poland), national OP (Lithuania).
- **The capacity of the MAs** to deal with the challenges in the comprehensive management of the implementation of the programmes, due to the variety of different **content**/programming areas covered and the wide range of target groups involved.
- **Lack of management and administration skills** (organisation/coordination, monitoring, accounting) amongst the MA staff highlighted as a particular issue in the reviews of France, Germany, Italy, Malta, and Romania.
- Different levels of **management skills and competence in implementing programmes** amongst beneficiary organisations.

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<sup>81</sup> Mid-term evaluation of the ESF, December 2018. <https://www.esf.ie/en/information-centre/evaluation/evaluation-reports/peil%20mte%20and%20yei%20evaluation.pdf>

- **Barriers to the adjustment of the OP according to the emerging needs.** Although adjustments were able to be made in many OPs, a restrictive aspect of ESF highlighted by some stakeholders and in relation to a minority of regions or Member States is the inability to change certain targets or indicators set years in advance in **light** of changing circumstances, in addition to the limited flexibility in changing the design of provision once commissioned. One externally commissioned review of the ESF in London suggested that part of the ESF budget in future should be retained in order to respond changing economic contexts or local needs. In the Pomorskie region (Poland), for example, despite increasing inflows of migrants and refugees in the region over the past few years, it has not been possible to amend the scope of the OP to allow the introduction of new operations aimed at the provision of education support to refugees and migrants.
- **Challenges faced by new local and regional management structures in adapting quickly to the requirements of ESF.** In Portugal this was apparent in the contrasting progress of the thematic OPs (only covering less developed regions) which have benefited from a continuity of actions from the previous programming period, and regional OPs which have had to build 'structures from scratch' as there were no ESF programmes previously at the regional level. In the case of the England **OP** (UK) the move to a local partnership approach to funding allocation initially created some challenging issues in terms of the implementation of operations. Capacity had to be developed quickly in the newly formed Local Enterprise partnerships to understand the specific requirements of ESF.
- **Lack of IT infrastructure** to support the ESF management system requirements was **highlighted** in countries such as Czech Republic and Estonia.
- **Limited opportunities to support specific business-related project initiatives due** to the small number of businesses engaged (for example internships in the Świętokrzyskie Regional OP, Poland)
- **Weak cooperation between relevant national ministries** e.g. Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour. This link was further weakened when ESF Managing Authorities were located in Ministries of Labour.

The case study of the Romanian national OP provides insight on why Romania currently has one of the lowest expenditure rates, as highlighted in the analysis of financial expenditure above. The late launch of the calls, in the context of delayed fulfilment of ex-ante conditionalities, as well as insufficient staff capacity given the overlap of the two programming periods, were highlighted as particular factors in the programme's delay. Negotiations on how to use simplified cost options (which is still delaying the launch of certain calls) and the delayed adoption of the necessary legislation have also created difficulties for the programme.

**Evaluation Question 1.2: How and to what extent does ESF contribute to the investment in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning and education targets of Europe 2020?**

**Key findings – EQ 1.2**

The contribution of ESF in investment in education and training targets has been examined in the context of its role in supporting systemic change and the analysis of results and impacts achieved to date. Based on the overall evidence, the impacts ESF TO10 on **systemic change** appear to have greater potential under IP10.i (early school leaving) and IP10.iii (lifelong learning). The case studies have identified specific examples of operations supporting systemic change in Member States' policy approaches to education and training. It will be important to examine the contribution of such changes to education targets in the ex post evaluation. Particular challenges have also been highlighted relating to changing political contexts in some Member States.

Given the time lag between operations completing and full and comprehensive results data becoming available, it is too early to provide a meaningful comparison of results across Investment Priorities. The evaluation has nevertheless highlighted some **significant results achievements** - 801 096 participants engaged in education/training upon leaving and 3.15 million participants have gained a qualification upon leaving. The programme monitoring information, country reviews and case studies in particular (based on the views of interviewed stakeholders and wider evaluation studies) have also identified some notable achievements at the level of Investment Priorities in particular countries.

A large proportion of ESF participants who responded to the Public Consultation reported that the ESF support enabled them to **improve their situation** by taking part in activities that they would not have done without the funded projects. RHOMOLO simulations suggest that as a result of ESF TO10 operations, by 2023 the **European GDP is expected to increase by 0.16%** (which amounts to roughly EURO 18 billion), with long-lasting effects generated by the structural policies and the change in productivity and around additional expected 170 000 jobs, as a final indirect macro-economic impact. The increase shows persistence in the long run (by 2033) where the GDP is still 0.14% higher relative to the baseline.

It is possible to provide some initial analysis of how ESF has contributed to investment in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning and the Europe 2020 targets in the area of education and training, which are to specifically reduce early school leaving to below 10% and 40% of 30-34 year olds having completed tertiary education. Results data provides the most comprehensive measure of the outcomes and benefits of ESF support at the level of individuals. There are limitations however given the time lag between operations completing and full and comprehensive results data becoming available.

As the **share of ESF in overall Member States' education budgets** is on average around 1%, only limited contributions to the Europe 2020 targets can be seen in quantitative terms. There is significant variance in the share of ESF in overall budgets, however. Portugal has the highest annual average for ESF TO10 as a proportion of government education budgets at 7.1%. This relatively high proportion has led to significant results as TO10 operations have already supported 90,000 participants in Portugal to gain a qualification. The next highest shares are Romania, Lithuania and

Hungary at 4.2%, 3.9% and 3.7% respectively. Several national stakeholders also confirmed that ESF support to education and training has played a crucial role in their country in the context of limited state budgets as a result of the economic and financial crisis and many examples were cited of ESF being used to plug investment gaps for particular specialist provision.

Although it is impossible to disaggregate the impact of ESF TO10 funding from other influences on the progression towards the ET 2020 indicators, some stakeholders interviewed in target consultations did consider that ESF has played a key role in helping the EU to reach its headline targets in education, particularly around participation in higher education (as seen in section 2.1 of this report, participation in higher education has risen from 37.1% in 2013 to 40.7% in 2018). It can also be considered likely that ESF funding contributed to the rise in participation in adult learning (from 9.6% in 2005 to 11.1% in 2018) and the drop in early school leaving (from 15.7% in 2005 to 11.9% in 2013, then to 10.6% in 2018), which however has stagnated more recently.

While quantitative analysis is limited in showing the overall effects of ESF expenditure on Europe 2020 targets at this stage of the programming period, significant impacts can occur through ESF support for the development of sustainable innovative measures and system level changes (examples of how ESF TO10 funding has led to systemic change are considered below).

### **Potential longer-term impacts through systemic changes**

The majority of interviewed stakeholders at both the EU and national levels expressed the view that ESF TO10 has contributed to **structural changes and the development of reforms in education and training systems** at all levels. Based on the overall evidence, **the impacts ESF TO10 on systemic change have been stronger under IP10.i (early school leaving) and IP10.iii (lifelong learning)**.

In terms of **early school leaving**, particular examples given of the structural contribution of ESF TO10 operations were in the digital field: in Malta, the One Tablet Per Child operation (Box 2), was mentioned as an operation which creates sustainable change in digital approaches in education after EU funding has ended; in Croatia, the e-schools initiative was highlighted as another long-lasting contribution of ESF TO10.

### **Box 2 Malta National OP – Supporting systematic national approach to addressing ESL**

#### Malta National OP – Supporting systematic national approach to addressing ESL

The Maltese Government is implementing a strategic plan for the prevention of ESL, which sets an ambitious ESL target of 10% by 2020. In 2014 the Government established an ESL Unit responsible for ensuring an integrated systematic, sustained, cohesive and co-ordinated approach to address the challenge of ESL. The review of Malta's funded ESF activities has highlighted their targeted focus on improving school performance in line with the national strategic plan. The country review highlighted the 'One Tablet per Child' initiative which has required capacity building actions for school staff and teachers. At the end of 2018, the percentage of participants gaining a qualification/certification upon leaving in up-skilling and re-training programmes under IP10.i in Malta, was 84% against a target of 87%.

In several countries - Malta, Greece, Latvia, Belgium – **VET was particularly highlighted as an area in which ESF TO10 had a structural impact.** For example, the New Start programme for VET schools in Greece changed the VET landscape significantly, both in terms of adapting it to the needs of students from more vulnerable backgrounds, but also in terms of raising awareness of VET as a viable education option. In Cyprus, ESF is supporting the expansion of National Qualification Standards to evaluate and certify the ability to perform effectively at a specified level of qualification in real working conditions. The qualifications will also provide a framework for the training and development of the individual, enabling them to reach a satisfactory level and achieve this capability. The target group for the 2014-2020 programming period is all citizens.

Box 3 below shows an example of promising practice under IP10.iv (improving labour market relevance) in rolling out new pathways between types of education and training (e.g. VET to tertiary, etc.) in order to improve the labour market relevance of the curriculum.

### **Box 3 Croatia National OP – School for Life Initiative**

#### Croatia National OP – School for Life initiative

The Ministry of Science and Education published the public call for applications for the experimental programme, 'School for life' ('Škola za život'), in 2018. The subject and the aim of the call was to select up to 80 schools (primary and secondary education including vocational education) which would then join the experimental programme in the school year 2018/2019, developing a new curriculum. The experimental programme has been implemented in the first grade of vocational schools with a four-year programme, but only in general educational subjects. Additionally, there was an extensive programme of face-to-face and online training courses to prepare teachers and support staff to implement the new curriculum. A first round of face-to-face training covered 32 000 teachers, 26 000 in a second round and 29 000 in the third round. Supplementary online training took place at the same time.

Further evidence on the impacts of ESF TO10 on systemic changes is also provided under Evaluation Question 1.6 (Which types of operations are or were the most effective and most sustainable, for which groups and in which contexts?) and under Evaluation Question 5.3 (EU added value role effects).

The link between policy and funding appears to be a factor in determining the extent of ESF TO10's contribution to structural changes, according to stakeholders. Multiple stakeholders, particularly at the EU level, spoke of the Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) as examples of EU initiatives that were successful in initiating significant structural reforms on the national level. They cited the synergy between EU policy and funding, as well as political visibility of the two initiatives, as key reasons for this success. Furthermore, a few EU level stakeholders suggested that structural changes from ESF TO10 funding have been harder to achieve due to changing political contexts in some Member States, such as changes of government occurring in the midst of major planned reforms and halting any plans/changes. A few stakeholders also highlighted that structural reform in the area of education takes time, making it more challenging to assess the contribution of ESF TO10 to this type of long-term change. This is particularly the case when reforms are happening simultaneously, as

each reform requires 'appropriate change management to be effectively introduced into school life'.

### **Analysis of results**

An **analysis of common results indicators** provides an indication of the quantitative contribution of ESF TO10 although as noted above, quantitative results associated with ESF are limited in the context of overall movements against the Europe 2020 targets. As shown in Section Three, by the end of 2018, ESF TO10 had supported:

- 155,000 inactive participants to engage in job searching upon leaving;
- 801,096 participants to engage in education/training upon leaving;
- 3.15 million participants to gain a qualification upon leaving;
- 230,000 participants to find employment, including self-employment, upon leaving.

The sum of the above is over 4.34 million participants achieving results, of which 50% were women. The number of disadvantaged participants engaged in job searching, education/ training, gaining a qualification, in employment, including self-employment, upon leaving was 630,000. This was the equivalent of 31% of participants which compared to 23% for other ESF Thematic Objectives.

Given the time lag between operations completing and full and comprehensive results data becoming available, it is too early to provide a meaningful comparison of results across IPs. The programme monitoring information, country reviews and case studies in particular (which have examined evaluation evidence) have however identified some **notable achievements at the level of Investment Priorities in particular countries.**

The country reviews of Austria, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Lithuania, Malta and Spain all reported **good progress in implementing actions to prevent and reduce early school leaving under IP10.i.** Particular achievements highlighted through the country reviews and case studies include:

- In Estonia, despite some noted challenges<sup>82</sup>, IP10.i operations directed at reducing and preventing early school leaving have to date reached roughly 90% of the target for three of the four common results indicators, with the main beneficiaries of these activities being secondary school teachers.
- The common results indicators for IP10.i for the OP Pomorskie (Poland) indicate that 49% of learners acquired key competences and 7,210 teachers acquired **qualifications** or competences after completing the programme. The mid-term evaluation of the OP estimates that all results targets for the programme period will be surpassed under IP10.i.
- 90% of those participating in the 10th School Year operation funded through the OP **Mecklenburg**-Vorpommern (Germany) (almost 2,000 students with special

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<sup>82</sup> The Estonia country review concluded that the education system faces systemic challenges in intersectoral cooperation and in improving the transition to upper secondary education.

educational needs) achieved a school leaving certificate, in the context of a target of 50% (also see box 8 below).

The analysis of data on early school leaving revealed that certain Southern European Member States, in particular Portugal, Spain and Malta, experienced a significant reduction in rates of early school leaving between 2014 and 2018. In Spain there is evidence that ESF is making an important contribution to overall policy goals in this area shown by the overall participation figures. In Spain ESF TO10 supports the implementation of the Organic Law for the improvement of educational quality (LOMCE in Spanish), which is aimed at improving overall performance and reducing the ESL rate. Stakeholders believe that these operations have translated into a fall in the ESL rate, even though it still remains high, and above EU average. ESF provides co-financing for several components of the LOMCE, such as the implementation of basic VET and the introduction of new itineraries aimed at students in the third and fourth years of Obligatory Secondary Education (ESO).

Programmes to improve learning and school performance (*Programas de Mejora del Aprendizaje y del Rendimiento* - PMAR) in Spain under IP10.i have the ultimate objective of reducing the early school leaving rate. Galicia's Operational Programme (Spain) has funded many PMAR activities, which have had a visible impact on reduced early school leaving and aimed at reaching the most excluded rural areas. The case study of the Galicia OP (Spain) identifies illustrative counterfactual analysis<sup>83</sup> of the impacts of IP10.i operations designed to address early school leaving (see Box 4).

#### **Box 4 Galicia OP (Spain) – Impact of ESF contribution to reducing early school leaving**

##### Galicia OP (Spain) – Impact of ESF contribution to reducing early school leaving

Through operations supported under IP10.i in Spain, 615 000 people have been reached, most of whom are inactive (70%), below 25 years of age (71%), and with primary (ISCED 1) or lower secondary education (ISCED 2) (71%). The objective of the programmes to improve learning and school performance (*Programas de Mejora del Aprendizaje y del Rendimiento* – PMAR) is to support pupils, through a specific methodology, content organisation and alternative subject teaching, to reach the skills corresponding to the first cycle of compulsory secondary education. Using a Propensity Score Matching (PSM) technique, a study paired a treatment group of PMAR students supported under the Galicia Regional OP with the non-PMAR student control group, comparing data of the 4 313 non-PMAR students paired with the 4 313 PMAR students. In this homogeneous comparison, the percentage of students that progressed, i.e. passed all the subjects, was 77.7% for PMAR students and 60.7% for non-PMAR students, so that the relative increase for PMAR compared to non-PMAR students, was 22.4 (from -5.4 points to 17.0 points).

**Many countries have faced challenges in achieving positive results under IP10.ii (tertiary education).** The country reviews suggested that only Bulgaria, Hungary, Ireland and Portugal were on course to achieve their targets under this IP.

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<sup>83</sup> Evaluación De Los Programas De Mejora Del Aprendizaje Y Del Rendimiento (Pmar)', Xunta de Galicia, 2019.

The national OP for Portugal recorded a notable achievement however for its scholarship operation:

- Under IP10.ii the thematic Human Capital OP (Portugal), 50% of higher education students (ISCED5, ISCED6 and ISCED7) supported by social action scholarships completed the respective education level, with the target set for 2023 (65%) on track to being achieved. 82% of students on higher education technical courses (ISCED5) completed their certification, which is above the target of 65% set for 2023.

In the Balearic Islands in Spain, four surveys targeted beneficiaries of pre-doctoral and post-doctoral scholarships, as well as individuals who had not been able to obtain them. All pre-doctoral scholarship beneficiaries believed that the aid provided was essential to their research development, with 58% of them stating that they probably would not have been able to develop their research without it. As many as 90% of post-doctoral scholarship participants believed that the aid provided had an important effect on their research careers. Moreover, 38% believed that they would not have been able to gain work experience as researchers without this help<sup>84</sup>.

Since 2014 there has been a general improvement in the proportion of the population completing tertiary education and especially in some eastern European countries such as Czech Republic and Slovakia. There is limited evidence from the evaluation, however, that links general improvements in tertiary education participation with the role of ESF. In Austria, for example, improvements in tertiary completion in recent years are attributed to national measures already being implemented such as the reform of university funding and awareness-raising activities.

According to the country reviews, **lifelong learning operations (IP10.iii) are progressing well in a wide range of Member States** including Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, France, Ireland, Luxemburg, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Sweden and UK. Particular achievements highlighted through the country reviews and case studies include:

- Under IP10.iii (access to lifelong learning) in Ireland, the number of long-term **unemployed** participants with low education levels gaining a qualification was over 24 000, which is 50% higher than the set target.
- In Sweden 16 500 participants supported under IP10.iii operations had left six months ago or more. Of these, 36%, claimed that the operation had improved their labour market situation, for example either by gaining permanent employment passing from part-time to full-time employment or obtaining a qualification (certification of achieved knowledge or skills).
- For the Pays de la Loire OP (France), as regards qualifying training for job seekers, 78.7% of trainees have obtained a qualification and 35.4% are in employment at the end of the action. The rate of qualification obtained by

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<sup>84</sup> Evaluación de los objetivos / resultados del PO FSE de Baleares para el informe anual 2019 y de cumplimiento del Marco de Rendimiento, Mayo, 2019, Informe final

apprentices is 86.76% which is four percentage points above the expected value. IP 10.iii result indicators show that the 6-month employment rate is estimated at 45%.

- By the end of 2018, 28 513 participants were reached under IP10.iii of the **Pomorskie** OP (Poland). The mid-term evaluation revealed that 57% of the programme participants above the age of 25, 60% of the programme participants above the age of 50 and 53% of participants with low qualifications acquired qualifications or competences after completing the programme.
- Common result indicators under IP10.iii for the Slovenia national OP which include the share of participants that successfully completed the programme for obtaining the competences (target 98%), or counselling (target 75%) and **training** and/or prequalification (target 85%) have been achieved or overachieved.
- Data from the West Wales and the Valleys OP (UK) Participants Survey showed **that** 45% of those who participated in Priority Axis 2 (equivalent of IP10.i and IP10.iii) ESF-funded operations (who were employed on joining their ESF operation) had an improved labour market situation six months after completing the operation. Furthermore, over 80% of participants stated that they had been able to use the skills they learned on their ESF operation.
- In **Estonia**, the share of participants in adult continuing education who obtain a qualification or competence certificate upon completion is 93.8% which is 117% of the programme target (80%).

There is limited counterfactual evidence currently available on the impact of ESF support under IP10.iii however one particular study was identified which showed the positive effects of support to disadvantaged young people (Box 5).

#### **Box 5 West Wales and the Valleys OP (UK) – Traineeship programme counterfactual impact analysis**

##### West Wales and the Valleys OP (UK) – Traineeships programme counterfactual impact analysis

The traineeships programme is a large-scale pan-Wales programme focused on providing support to disadvantaged young people to access employment. A counterfactual impact assessment<sup>85</sup> used matched administrative data, specifically the Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) data which combines data on learning from the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR), administrative data from the Department for Work and Pensions on benefit receipt, and tax-related data covering earnings and employment.

Individuals who had been on the Traineeships programme were matched with similar individuals who had not participated in the Traineeships programme. The study showed that compared to individuals engaged in Entry Level or Level 1 further education who had not participated in the Traineeships programme, those participating in Traineeships achieved the following:

- 16 percentage point higher job entry
- 16 percentage point higher rate of three-month job sustainment

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<sup>85</sup> Learning & Work Institute Wavehill Research (2019) Evaluation of the Traineeships Programme: Final Report, Social Research and Information Division Welsh Government

- £642 higher earnings in the financial year following that in which they undertook their Traineeship
- £1,811 higher earnings in the financial year two years after that in which they undertook their Traineeship
- 33.7 more days in employment in the financial year following that in which they undertook their Traineeship
- 61.4 more days in employment in the financial year two years after that in which they undertook their Traineeship.

The country reviews and case studies have identified only a **limited number of significant achievements under IP10.iv (labour market relevance)**:

- In Bulgaria, the result indicator 'Proportion of students who have successfully completed practical training in real working environment' is currently 98.7%, while **the** 2023 target set is 90%.
- 11,987 participants were reached under IP10.iv of the national OP (Slovenia), mostly **inactive** and below 25 years of age. The result indicator for IP10.iv (proportion of mentors in companies and professionals who have successfully completed training with a target set at 90%) has been achieved by 76%.
- The country review of Spain showed that the significant amount of resources allocated to VET under IP10.iv are leading to positive results in selected regions. In relation to the Castilla-La Mancha OP, for example, among participants with low secondary or post-secondary education, 2,894 are expected to get a qualification after their participation. Currently, 1,795 are doing so, which accounts for 62% of the planned result. In relation to the Islas Baleares OP, among the participants under 25, a total of 2,154 are now gaining a qualification after their participation which accounts for 63% of the overall programme target.

As regards the **impacts for participants in ESF T010 operations**, a large proportion of ESF participants who responded to the Public Consultation (n=141) (see Annex 3) reported that the support made a positive difference to their situation, with over half (52.5%) of participants reporting that, without EU support, there would be less or no opportunities for people in their situation and 44% saying that there would not be enough money to pay for such actions without the ESF. Only a small minority (3.5%) of respondents believed that having ESF support did not make a real difference.

Across the ESF participants surveyed in the public consultation, the most frequently cited outcomes of the support received were learning new skills and/or getting a qualification (67.4% of respondents), feeling more confident (41.1%), and/or starting a new education or training course (22.7%). This was followed by improving employment conditions, such as increasing salary or receiving a promotion (21.3%), finding a job (13.5%) and 'other' changes (2.1%), while 0.7% of participants started a business. Organisations managing/ delivering ESF also reported that gaining new skills or a qualification and finding new jobs were the most frequent outcomes of the ESF support received.

As with individual respondents, responding organisations felt that the results of ESF operations were effective overall. Organisational respondents considered that the ESF's

contribution was either 'very effective' or 'mostly effective' in supporting a large number of activities, most prevalently the development of work-based learning systems, supporting learners to access work-based learning opportunities, improving access to lifelong learning opportunities, improving careers or vocational guidance provision, supporting those employed and the unemployed to up-skill and re-skill, and improving links between education/training institutions and businesses.

### **Impact analysis using the RHOMOLO model**

This section reports on the results of an exercise to evaluate the impacts of TO10 using a Dynamic Computable General Equilibrium RHOMOLO model<sup>86</sup>. The RHOMOLO analysis serves as complement to other evaluation methods as it provides an estimate of macroeconomic effects, with a particular focus on the regional dimension.

Types of operations under TO10 can lead to short run impacts (e.g. higher demand for goods and services) and potentially substantial medium and long-term impact. Overall, they can enhance the competitiveness of the economy (regional or national) and the benefits are spread over the longer term simply because the returns from investments in human capital and education need time to materialise. As usual in macroeconomic impact assessments, the main variables of interest are Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employment as deviations from the baseline year 2014. Regarding employment, three different education/skill levels (Low, Medium, High) are distinguished, following the International System of Classification of Education (ISCED).

The results presented below reflect the relative change in GDP and employment over a baseline year. They should be read in such a way that the effects on the variable of interest are always over the baseline, which assumes the counterfactual case without the supported interventions. Thus, the results should not be read as growth rates but as changes in the level of economic activity. It should be recalled though that TO10 follows a place-based approach aimed at tackling persistent social issues such as early schooling leaving, low educational attainment (among many others) in specific places and as expected TO10 investment varies considerably between regions.

**RHOMOLO simulations estimate that, by 2023, ESF interventions supporting education and training are expected to have a significant impact. They will add 0.16% to European GDP (which amounts to roughly 18 billion of euro) compared to the baseline, and around additional expected 170,000 jobs, as final macro-economic impact** generated by the human capital investments and the change on labour productivity. The impact shows persistence in the long run (by 2033) as the GDP is still 0.14% higher relative to the baseline.

The results also indicate that, despite the drop in employment documented in the first two years after the implementation, there was a speedy recovery from the third year onwards. This time pattern for employment effects is the expected one in human capital

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<sup>86</sup> RHOMOLO is the spatial computable general equilibrium model of the European Commission, see for details: <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/rhomolo>

interventions, as induced employment changes need some time to materialize.<sup>87</sup>: In the early years of the implementation, employment is mainly driven by short run demand effects but, as regional economies become more competitive due to productivity effects, this gives rise to demand for labour in the medium to long run. In other words, a short adjustment period is required before the full effects of the policy intervention start to become evident. The key element here is that **the productivity enhancing human capital investments ensure the actual creation of jobs in the medium to long run.**

Given the fact that ESF T010 operations are focused on particular regions, it is essential for the needs of the evaluation to dig more into the regional dimension, concentrating the analysis on the regions for which more significant impacts are expected. While T010 is expected to generate a positive impact for the whole EU, the uneven allocation of funds among regions determines different spatial patterns. The estimated effects on GDP and employment by category of regions (Less developed, Transition, More developed) show that, as expected, less developed regions will benefit the most from the implementation of the T010 interventions. Regions located in Portugal, Greece (Dytiki Ellada, Kentriki Makedonia), Spain (Andalucía, Castilla-La Mancha, Extremadura), Italy, East Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia and, to some extent, the UK (West Wales and the Valleys) gain the most in terms of GDP and employment.

The results indicate that for these particular regions there are significant gains not only in terms of GDP and total employment but also in terms employment per education/skill level. This is particularly so for the low or the medium skilled population groups which seem to score higher than high skilled.

Finally, the estimations reveal some interesting patterns. The correlation of the initial share of low skilled in the baseline year with the long-run GDP change is positive and much higher than the respective correlation of medium or high skilled groups. In plain terms, this means that regions with relatively higher shares of low skilled population will tend to benefit more in terms of GDP after the intervention<sup>88</sup>. In essence, the simulation results support and reinforce the fact that ESF support to education and training will be more beneficial for regions with more pressing educational needs.

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<sup>87</sup> The simulation scenario assumes that funding stops at 2018, since it simulates only the effects of this first round of implementation 2014-2018. In reality however, ESF program will operate after 2018.

<sup>88</sup> Similar correlation effects are found if it is used total employment instead of GDP.

***Evaluation Question 1.3: How were relevant national strategies and policy contexts and challenges translated into operations? What kind of efficiency-enhancing measures did ESF finance in higher education as part of Investment Priority TO10(ii)? To what extent have non-formal pathways been used to prevent and address early school leaving and support re-integration in education and training?***

#### Key findings – EQ 1.3

Drawing mainly upon the case study evidence and analysis of types of operations under each of the Investment Priorities, it can be seen that **ESF is used to address national strategies and policy contexts and challenges** in the following ways:

- The development and piloting of innovations to support long-term, sustainable changes relevant to the education and training system.
- Supporting specific initiatives that would largely remain unsupported or implemented with a very limited scope (for example transition from school to vocational education) and support for specific target groups for example people with low income and those with special needs).
- Supporting reform of the education system by plugging gaps in investment, for example for specialised teaching approaches.
- The diversification of educational offering to students with particular educational needs through inclusive education approaches.

There is **limited evidence to suggest that ESF funding is being used widely to support efficiency-enhancing measures in higher education as part of Investment Priority 10.ii**. It is difficult to address the question of precisely how far non-formal pathways have been used to prevent and address early school leaving and support re-integration in education and training on the basis of the sample of significant investments identified through the country reviews. However, the case studies have revealed notable examples of operations that have focused on developing non-formal pathways, as explored in the analysis of successful operations under evaluation question 1.6 below.

The analysis under this evaluation question mainly draws on systematic analysis of significant operations highlighted in the country mapping reviews. The country reviews highlighted examples of operations that have received significant funding under each of the TO10 Investment Priorities, based on any evidence included in the Annual Implementation Reports. The 125 examples of specific interventions provide useful insights into **how relevant contexts have been translated into operations**. Case study evidence is also used to provide illustrative examples of how relevant contexts are translated into operations.

Regarding **types of activities under Investment Priority 10.i**, in relation to primary and secondary education and training, the most frequent types of operations are the recruitment of specialised staff, staff development and training and those aimed at developing digital skills. These are followed by adult education and training courses (for example second chance schools to address early school leaving) and various combinations of actions aimed at reducing dropouts, as well as initiatives to diversify the educational offer and address inclusion considerations.

Support for staff development and training contributes to the strategic need for structural improvements in the quality of the education systems in order to address disparities in education performance across regions. There has been a strong focus on improvements in the curriculum and development and implementation of new forms of teaching organisation. The strategic need to improve the educational performance of specific groups is addressed through operations to improve schools' inclusion approaches. The operations of the OP Research Development and Education (Czech Republic), for example, address the strategic need to improve teaching systems for those at risk of early school leaving through supporting targeted assistance to pedagogical staff in order to build capacities in inclusive education and improve the quality of the education for those at risk of leaving school early. ESF support for longer-term training for teachers focusing on skills to cope with diverse classrooms is seen as crucial in addressing the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern's regional and national government's strategic objectives to improve inclusive approaches to teaching.

The Spanish context and challenges concerning education, training and human capital point to the need for structural reforms focused on strengthening the quality and inclusion of the Spanish educational system. A key area supported by ESF is the implementation of the Organic Law for the improvement of educational quality (LOMCE in Spanish), a 2013 law aimed at improving the quality of education services in Spain, where an additional 30% of the budget has been assigned, as defined under IP 10.i. in the OP. The Ministry of Education and the ESF co-financed several components of the LOMCE, such as the implementation of basic VET and the introduction of new itineraries aimed at students in the third and fourth years of Obligatory Secondary Education. The ESF has allowed a swifter implementation of the LOMCE, which was programmed with the European funds in mind.

ESF also supports the implementation of specific group-based activities to address the needs of disadvantaged groups. Through the operation on 'social inclusion and fight against social unease', the Italy national OP supports groups of students (at least 15 and maximum 20) with weaknesses, such as disabilities and socio-economic disadvantages. Concretely, the actions financed by this operation consist of education and training modules of at least 30 hours.

It is difficult to address the question of precisely **how far non-formal pathways have been used to prevent and address early school leaving and support re-integration** in education and training on the basis of this sample. The case studies provide evidence, however, of specific operations that are considered to be working effectively in this area (as addressed by the evaluation question on successful operations below).

Responding to the contextual situation in the Member States and the needs identified in the Partnership Agreements, of the three IP10.ii (tertiary education) policy areas (quality of Higher Education (HE), efficiency of HE, and access to HE), the predominant focus of operations to date has been the issue of access. The most frequent types of activities have included: scholarships and research grants, initiatives for setting qualification standards and recruitment of specialised staff or training of trainers. There has been a strong focus in certain countries on using ESF TO10 to address disparities in

access to tertiary education. In Croatia, for example, ESF TO10 is being used to support access to good tertiary education for young people from poorer education backgrounds rates. The Ireland national OP supports the Third Level Access (TLA) activity. This activity comprises two separate funds: The Fund for Students with Disabilities, and The Student Assistance Fund. The former provides financial and other supports to individuals who have a disability, while the latter provides financial assistance to students who are experiencing financial hardship. The overall purpose of both funds is to improve access to, and retention within, tertiary education. The TLA activity has 25 separate operations, each of which relates to an individual higher education institution (HEI). Approximately 25,000 students benefit from the assistance provided by the funds across those HEIs each year, although only approximately 9,000 of those students would be first-time beneficiaries in any year.

Through the identification of key operations in the country mapping reviews and the case studies it has been possible to identify any operations that aim to enhance the efficiency of higher education. There was also very little evidence of cross-education sector initiatives involving collaboration between higher education and schools, including secondary schools, and also vocational education which is a growing policy priority.

In relation to **job-related (non-formal) education and training**, the most important types of activities were: adult education and training courses, apprenticeships / on-job training, counselling, and orientation. Finally, in the context of not job-related (non-formal) education and training, the most important activities include: adult education and training, non-formal education action plans, recruitment of specialised staff / training of trainers. These are followed by counselling, digital skills development and initiatives to encourage/support volunteering.

Under the Pomorskie OP (Poland), ESF TO10 has enabled the Marshall Office of the region (as beneficiary) to respond to a strategic need to develop the vocational training capacity and systems of the region and to support the development a network of VET schools in the region. A group of operations implemented by the local authorities was financed to rationalise and improve the provision of VET in the region. It is implemented as part of IP10.iv operations and was awarded in the non-competitive mode. Its aim is to allow access to various forms of professional vocational training for current students. An overarching goal of the Federal ESF OP (Germany) is to address the strategic need to improve the vocational skills of the population. The largest operation, both in terms of allocated ESF funding (EUR 460m) and number of participations, is the Career Entry support. This operation aims at improving the transition from school to vocational education for young people, with a focus on the low-achieving and disadvantaged pupils. In England, operations developed under TO10 respond to the strategic need to need to improve basic skills amongst the most deprived populations and to address the skills shortages or needs in specific sectors. The OP has a strong focus on funding training operations targeted at increasing the employability of certain groups which have lower employment rates and face particular barriers to gaining employment. The OP also supports outreach activity, including taster courses to disadvantaged individuals to help improve take up and retention. This might include the cost of participation in summer schools or work-based access courses.

In Portugal ESF TO10 has played an important role in addressing national strategic priorities. The operation 'Professional Courses' funds upper secondary education and training courses providing both educational and professional certification to pupils wanting to pursue a vocational education path for completing secondary education after completing the 9th grade. Based on the interviews in the case study, it was concluded that the significant funding allocated to Professional Courses would not have been possible without EU funding. The funding contributed to meeting the national objective of turning these courses, which provide both educational and professional certification, into a mainstream pathway for attaining secondary education. It also addressed the lack of education and training offers ensuring adequate match to labour market needs and the low number of pupils in secondary education vocational paths.

As national budgets largely finance reoccurring costs of the education system, TO10-supported operations responding to strategic needs through the development and piloting of innovations in education and training systems and policy, particularly those aiming to increase links between education and the labour market, including in tertiary education, VET, and non-formal education and LLL. In Slovenia, for example, in its absence, most of the operations funded through ESF TO10 (such as Competence Centres for Human Resource Development, and several LLL programmes,) would largely remain unsupported or implemented with a very limited scope.

***Evaluation Question 1.4: Which changes (intended and unintended) did the ESF support bring to each specific target group, e.g. young people in initial education and training, NEETs, low qualified adults, people in employment, unemployed, inactive? In particular, did the ESF support impact equally on groups with advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds?***

#### Key findings – EQ 1.4

**Young people** are a key target group for ESF TO10 operations. Approximately 6.26 million participants in ESF TO10 operations are below 25 years old (66% of the total). There is a range of evidence available from the country reviews and across many of the case studies to show that the ESF TO10 operations are making good progress and have strong potential to support the education and training needs of young people by supporting them on to positive pathways.

Evidence is mixed however on the current effectiveness and potential of ESF TO10 to address the needs of **NEETs, low qualified adults, people in employment and unemployed**. People in employment and unemployment provide a relatively small proportion of the overall number of participations under ESF TO10 (as the majority are classed as inactive). The country reviews have highlighted specific examples of good practice in supporting these groups, however the stakeholder interviews and case studies also highlight particular challenges.

With the available data **it is not possible to compare quantitative impacts across specific groups**. The review of evaluation evidence and stakeholder interviews all highlight the challenges ESF TO10 operations have nevertheless faced in reaching disadvantaged groups. Specific disadvantaged groups such as refugees and migrants, the long-term unemployed and people with disabilities were identified as more challenging groups to engage more generally across all the IPs.

Particular **reasons given for the challenge in reaching these groups vary by country, by IP and by operation.** Common challenges related to the eligibility criteria required for participants and administrative requirements facing smaller NGOs with stronger links to harder-to-reach groups.

### ***Young people in initial education and training***

**Young people are a key target group for ESF T010 operations.** In the EU, approximately 6.26 million participants in ESF T010 operations are below 25 years old (66% of the total). Most of the participants under 25 years of age are from three countries: Italy (1.37 million), Spain and Poland (around 1 million each). Other countries with a relatively high number of young participants are Germany (0.74 million), Bulgaria (0.62 million) and Portugal (0.49 million). Young people are the main focus of operations under IP10.i (Early school leaving and access to learning pathways) and IP10.ii (Tertiary education). Across the EU as a whole, 85% of participants in initiatives financed under IP10.i are below 25. Further, 74% of participants under IP10.ii are also in this age bracket, while 22% are over 25. For IP10.iii, 70% of participants are over 25 and 26% under 25. In terms of participants in initiatives supported under IP10.iv, 75% are under 25, and 24% are over 25.

There is a range of evidence presented above in relation to evaluation question 1.2 'How and to what extent does ESF contribute to the investment in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning and education targets of Europe 2020?' that shows the effects of operations on young people in initial education and training. Particular evidence was highlighted in relation to programmes being delivered in Spain and the UK. There is evidence that ESF T010 operations have contributed to goals/objectives such as reducing ESL, supporting the achievement of school leaving qualifications, reducing the number of young people at risk of becoming NEET (also considered in the sub-section below) and helping young people to achieve qualifications that enable them to gain access to the labour market.

### ***Supporting NEETs***

T010 operations targeting young people have also focused on reducing their risk of becoming NEET. From the case studies, some regions and countries highlight NEETs as a priority target group. These include West Wales and Valleys (UK), where T10 operations aim to reduce the number of those at risk of becoming NEET, amongst 11-24-year olds. Accordingly, of 19,311 participations in IP10.i operations in this region, 18 709 were under the age of 25 and either inactive or not in education and training. The Portuguese national OP also includes a focus on NEETs, and one of its operations, Centres 'Qualifica' (CQ), provide adults and young NEETs with counselling, guidance and referral to learning pathways. Activities include the recognition, validation and certification of existing skills (RVCC) acquired throughout life, as well as the acquisition and development of skills through certified vocational training. By the end of 2018, nearly 183,000 people had registered in the centres, 80% of which were referred to RVCC or training.

Nevertheless, a number of the country reviews (for example Cyprus, Belgium) highlighted reaching NEETs as a particular challenge for ESF operations, as institutions have limited resources to implement outreach activity. In Romania, the Second Chance operation targets NEETs amongst other groups, although this operation is assessed as lacking in effectiveness. In the UK, ESF T010 operations are aimed at fulfilling local needs by providing educational services for NEETs. The country review highlighted that there had been challenges engaging NEETs. In general, identifying marginalised young people was often seen as less of a challenge than getting them to positively engage with provision and maintain that engagement, highlighting again that more intensive activity with longer-term interventions was needed.

Interviewees felt that the interventions focused on NEETs require more integrated operations and follow-up activities to improve their effectiveness and sustainability. Stakeholders reported that schools were not interested in applying for funding under ESF as they doubted the long-term potential.

### ***Supporting low-qualified adults***

Operations focusing on adults with low levels of qualifications target both those in employment and those who are unemployed or inactive. The case studies have highlighted successful examples of ESF operations in providing second-chance education opportunities for adults with low levels of qualifications. In Ireland, for example, the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) is aiming to increase the base of adults with upper secondary level education and/or qualifications at levels 3, 4, 5, and 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications and relevant or updated skills to meet the needs of the economy. BTEI offers a range of part-time learning opportunities that enable learners to reconcile participation in education with family and/or employment responsibilities. The part-time provision will be flexible in relation to timing (i.e. mornings, afternoons, evenings, block) and to facilitate progression to achievement of full awards over time. During the period 2015-2018 the number of completers was 95,157 with 67% of completers achieving certification.

Portugal, for example, is aiming to tackle the low average qualification levels of the Portuguese population by addressing high levels of school failure and ESL and the low levels of participation of adults in certified education and training. The training of adults within the scope of Centres Qualifica in Portugal, a major ESF-funded operation, was identified as effective by stakeholder interviewees in terms of its role in improving people's educational levels and situation in the labour market as they provide flexible learning paths and validation of existing skills. However, the case study of the Portugal Human Capital (national OP) found that certified courses for the least qualified adults were facing particular challenges. The dropout rate has been high and even for those who finish the course, employability rates remained low.

### ***People in employment, unemployed, inactive***

In terms of labour market situation (employed, unemployed, inactive), the overall analysis of outputs indicates a strong focus for ESF T010 on inactive groups, as 63% of total participants (more than 6 million) are in the inactive category. It is important to note however that large numbers of those classed as 'inactive' are in compulsory

schooling rather than being classed as inactive adults. Employed participants represent only 23% of the total, while unemployed participants represent 9%. There is, however, a stronger orientation towards support for those in employment in Cyprus (employed are 90% of the total), Luxembourg (98%), Latvia (66%), Malta (93%), Sweden (99%), Slovenia (72%) and UK (88%).

TO10-funded operations in England are directed primarily at people already in employment, and who have either no educational attainment or who are educated to a maximum of an upper secondary or post-secondary level (ISCED levels 3-4). By the end of 2018, 175,080 participations were achieved in IP10.iii operations. 166,906 of people taking part were employed or self-employed, and 65,787 were without educational attainment. 11,801 had a disability. Participants in such operations include unemployed people and those in precarious or low-skilled employment, for example in the care and tourism industries. There are some high skill level operations aimed at employees in ICT industries which are important to the local economy.

The Raising Excellence and Aspirations in Care and Health Skills Group is an employer-led initiative for the growing Health and Social Care sector in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly which aims to utilise the knowledge and experience of business to identify training needs, shortages and to co-design high-quality skills solutions. Over 600 individual students (employed and unemployed) have attended a course. The College has received excellent feedback on its courses consistently and business have also reported a positive impact.

Specific successful programmes targeting the unemployed include T010.iii programmes in Ireland, where the number of long-term unemployed participants with low education levels gaining a qualification or successfully completing the programme was 24,269, corresponding to 151% of the 2023 target.

### ***Disadvantaged groups***

Overall, migrants account for approximately 0.83 million or 9% of total TO10 participants, disabled people 0.23 million (2% of total participants), and other disadvantaged people 0.96 million (10% of the total). This participation of disadvantaged groups in ESF TO10 operations is below the share of disadvantaged people in total ESF, where migrants are 14% of total ESF participants, and other disadvantaged are 17% of total ESF participants.

The number of disadvantaged participants engaged in job searching, education/training, gaining a qualification, in employment, including self-employment, upon leaving an operation was 629,939 at the end of 2018 (31% of participants compared to 23% for other ESF Thematic Objectives). In the longer term, disadvantaged participants in employment, including self-employment, six months after leaving an operation are 23% of the total participants finding employment or improving their situation.

By Member State, migrants are a large share of the total in Austria (38% of TO10 participants), Germany (25%), Estonia (29%), France (23%) and Sweden (22%). The Member States where orientation towards people with disabilities is higher are Croatia and Ireland (11% of participants in each). Other disadvantaged people represent a high

share of TO10 participants in the UK (31%), Poland (30%), Ireland (29%), France (28%) and Austria (23%).

The responses to the Public Consultation (see Annex 3) provide evidence on TO10's **overall success in supporting specific target groups**. From the Public Consultation, organisational respondents felt that, overall, ESF actions were 'very' or 'mostly' successful in providing support to a large number of target groups. These respondents felt that the target groups most effectively reached were: individuals with no or low qualifications and skills, people with disabilities, older workers, the unemployed, teachers and trainers, students, children at risk of early school leaving or social exclusion, children living in poverty, young people unemployed and not looking for a job, and people in full-time employment looking to re-skill or up-skill. However, Roma or other minorities were often not seen to be successfully supported through the ESF.

The stakeholder consultations highlighted in particular that, although in general the operations planned were relevant to the needs of target groups, almost all stakeholders spoke of challenges in effectively engaging certain groups in ESF TO10 operations. The most frequently cited of these groups was individuals who are most disadvantaged – referred to as, for example, 'furthest from the labour market', 'hard-to reach' or 'vulnerable' groups. In terms of specific sub-groups within this cohort, older workers, the low-skilled, Roma, refugees and migrants, the long-term unemployed, and the disabled were all identified by multiple stakeholders on the EU and national level as insufficiently reached.

The country reviews and case studies (see Annex 1.4) also highlighted a **number of challenges in reaching target groups**. Some countries had to deal with low levels of interest of some of the target groups in their initiatives (e.g. unemployed and employed were said to be not interested in skills certification in Cyprus), found it difficult to reach and engage them (e.g. Roma in Hungary) or to engage entrepreneurs (e.g. Estonia). **Reasons given for the challenge in reaching these groups vary by country, by IP and by operation.** A large number of stakeholders spoke of eligibility criteria as an obstacle in reaching vulnerable groups. For example, in certain countries, individuals must be registered unemployed before being eligible for ESF operations, making operations inaccessible to the inactive. A similar obstacle was mentioned in relation to Roma individuals, who may not have identity papers, and thus will not be eligible to take part in ESF operations in some countries. Nevertheless, there have been some specific operations focusing on Roma people (see Box 6 below and Box A5-9 in Annex 5 for details). Administrative requirements for beneficiaries were also cited as hindering effectiveness as they discourage smaller beneficiaries such as NGOs - which are crucial for reaching vulnerable groups - from applying to calls for proposals. A related challenge mentioned is the lack of involvement of local NGOs and partners in designing operations. Other challenges were the additional funding required to target hard-to-reach groups, and the higher risk of targeting operations to vulnerable groups in terms of achievement of targets.

### **Box 6 Slovakia: inclusion of children from marginalised Roma communities**

#### Slovakia: inclusion of children from marginalised Roma communities

The 'Schools open to everybody' operation is based on a new educational model that promotes the inclusion of children from marginalised Roma communities. It aims to ensure that everyone has access to good quality education by training teachers, assistants and other educational professionals to recognise and understand the potential problems that children from alternative or travelling communities face when joining pre-school and mainstream school. Over the course of the operation, 50 pre-schools and 130 primary schools have benefitted, at least 50 pre-school assistant roles have been created and jobs for more than 120 educational experts and 130 primary school assistants. The operation's accredited programme has certified more than 2,500 trainees. The outcomes of the operation will be included in an evaluation report and recommendations for the development of Slovakia's country's educational system and related legislation.

### **Evaluation Question 1.5: To what extent was access to the different sectors of education (e.g. higher education) for underrepresented groups facilitated thanks to ESF?**

#### Key findings – EQ 1.5

Vulnerable groups have been a challenge to reach in terms of **tertiary sector operations** because of challenges faced in developing collaborative relationships between the tertiary sector and schools. This has contributed to difficulties in identifying suitable groups for support. The evaluation has nevertheless highlighted a number of examples of promising practice in improving access to higher education for vulnerable populations in selected Member States. In the area of **vocational education**, the evaluation has identified only a few examples of ESF TO10 operations focused on improving access to vocational education for underrepresented groups. These were mainly highlighted in the country reviews and were therefore not subject to detailed analysis assessment.

### **Tertiary education**

Overall, the evaluation evidence highlights the challenges in identifying vulnerable groups to support in terms of access to tertiary education. Several EU level stakeholders highlighted that vulnerable groups under IP10.ii (tertiary education) have been a challenge to reach since there are often fewer disadvantaged groups in higher education, and it is harder to reach disadvantaged groups when they are no longer 'easily accessible within schools/compulsory education'. There are also differing interpretations at local, regional and national levels of who might be considered as vulnerable, disadvantaged or under-represented. There were also restrictions in collecting sensitive personal data from students. Several national level stakeholders did also highlight that the focus of TO10 was not on 'vulnerable groups' *per se*, as this was covered more specifically under TO9 on social inclusion.

In terms of individual responses from Member States, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Ireland note some good results in operations improving the quality of tertiary education and facilitating access to university. In Estonia, the share of students who have benefitted from individual career information and/or individual counselling in the third level of basic

education and who are pursuing studies at the next educational level in the calendar year following the completion of lower secondary education is 94.19%, almost reaching the 2023 target of 96%.

There were examples of promising practice however in targeting vulnerable populations in Lithuania, Romania and Croatia. The Lithuania OP supports an operation to improve access to higher education for students with disabilities or special needs. Students receive a monthly allowance from the State Studies Foundation which they use to enable them to access higher education. 4,200 students are expected to benefit from the programme in the period 2015-2021.

Box 7 (and Box A5-13 in Annex 5) shows a successful example of support under IP10.ii with potential for positive impacts through the target number of scholarships provided.

### **Box 7 Croatia National OP - provision of scholarships to students from lower socio-economic backgrounds**

#### **Croatia National OP - Provision of scholarships to students from lower socio-economic background**

Using ESF funds the Ministry of Education and Science awards state scholarships to students based on socio-economic status. The aim of the operation is to increase the numbers entering tertiary education. Financial support is offered to any Croatian citizen or EU citizen residing in Croatia that is enrolled full-time in a higher education institution. In order to be eligible for this scholarship, students must fall under a number of categories relating to the socio-economic status of their family. Up to 22,000 scholarships will be provided over a 5-year period. The scholarship is HRK 1,200 and is paid monthly for nine months. The scholarships help students pay on average a third of their expenses in an academic year.

### **Vocational education and training**

In the area of vocational education and training, the evaluation has identified only a few examples of ESF TO10 operations focused on improving access to vocational education for underrepresented groups. These were mainly highlighted in the country reviews and were therefore not subject to detailed assessment. Hungary has focused on the provision of specific educational paths for the low-skilled population and by making VET institutions more responsive to economic changes. In 2016, Vienna established a college for young refugees aged 15-21 to ease their transition into the regular education and vocational training system. The college has been co-funded by the ESF. The training is based on a highly modular — and thus flexible — system on a monthly basis. In addition to career counselling, the syllabus includes German, English, mathematics and basic IT classes in small groups of 15 students. Since the start, around 2,000 young people have been trained and more than 700 have successfully integrated into a regular school, workplace, other form of education or training or a labour market programme. In Romania, TO10 focuses on increasing participation in initial vocational training programmes, especially for young people from disadvantaged communities.

The Career Entry Support operation supported by the Federal Germany OP aims at improving the transition from school to vocational education for young people, with a particular focus on the low-achieving and disadvantaged pupils. It is part of the federal

initiative 'Graduation and continuation – Education chains up to the vocational training qualification', which supports adolescents in finishing school, finding an apprenticeship placement, and successfully completing their vocational education and training. Young people are counselled by career start mentors with continuous, individual support from school through to the vocational training stage. This is the largest operation under ESF TO10 of the Federal Germany ESF Operational Programme, in terms of both budget and participants, with over 128,000 young people supported to date.

***Evaluation Question 1.6: Which types of operations are or were the most effective and most sustainable, for which groups and in which contexts?***

**Key findings – EQ 1.6**

The most successful types of operations **targeting young people** identified through the case studies were: local and regional action plans to address early school leaving in contexts where there has traditionally been a lack of integrated approaches; operations for the improvement of quality, efficiency or modernisation of education/training systems or establishments, including digital & technological innovations and new management approaches; group training modules; and, use of non-formal pathways to address early school leaving. The evaluation has identified only a limited number of successful operations aimed at reducing the risk of becoming **NEET** and **low qualified workers**. For **low-qualified adults**, the most successful operations were targeted education/training for individuals to return to education & training.

The most successful types of operations targeting **disadvantaged groups** identified through the case studies were: training for educational staff to recognise and understand the potential problems that children from alternative or travelling communities face, when joining pre-school and mainstream school; targeted education/training for disadvantaged learners within education and training systems and pupils with special needs; targeted education/training for (disadvantaged) learners within education & training systems for specific groups.

The case studies provide more specific evidence on the types of operations that have been most effective and most sustainable for particular groups.

***Young people***

The evaluation has identified a range of examples of successful operations supporting young people. More successful types of operations for young people have included:

- **Local and regional action plans to address early school leaving.** The use of ESF to support the development of area-wide action plans are seen as effective in Member States where there has traditionally been a lack of integrated approaches. A promising practice is in the Czech Republic, where action plans for education development were regarded by interviewed **stakeholders** as the most successful operation financed by the OP. ESF has enabled partnerships to be established among local and regional stakeholders (teachers, directors of schools, municipalities, parent representatives) to improve partner communication and strategic territorial planning in education, and in finding appropriate solutions to local educational problems by exchanging experience and solution views among stakeholders.

- **Operations for the improvement of quality, efficiency or modernisation of education/training systems or establishments, including digital & technological innovations, new management approaches.** ESF supports a Portugal's National Programme for the Promotion of School Success which aims at reducing school failure and ensuring that all children and young people successfully complete 12 years of high-quality compulsory education (see Box A5-7 in Annex 5). In Croatia ESF is supporting the development of digitally competent teachers to ensure they are prepared for the application of ICT innovations in their own pedagogical practices. The pilot phase of the E-Schools initiative in Croatia was implemented in 151 elementary and high schools in Croatia, involving over 7,000 teachers and more than 23,000 pupils (see Box 26).
- **Group training modules:** The case studies have also highlighted the benefits of targeted approaches for young people. The Prevention of dropping out of school in the Academy operation supported by the Pays de la Loire OP (France) forms groups of young students from 16 to 18 years old for key and other academic skills upgrading, by means of group training modules of four weeks with an 18-hour weekly programme. The operation supports 1,600 students per year and aims to increase the rate of continuation in initial school training or apprenticeship by 10%. To date, this operation has achieved a success rate of 80%.
- **Use of non-formal pathways to address early school leaving.** Of the good practice operations identified through the case studies, a number under IP10.i show the value of non-formal pathways in addressing early school leaving. The **Voluntary** 10th Grade Class operation in Germany (Box 8 below and Box A5-3 in Annex 5) is highlighted as an example of good practice.

**Box 8 Voluntary 10th grade class, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Regional OP (Germany) – Use of ESF to support vocational education certificates**

Voluntary 10th grade class, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Regional OP (Germany) – Use of ESF to support vocational education certificates

With a budget of EUR 18 million, the voluntary 10th grade class is offered to specially selected schools in the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern region in Germany in order to help school students to obtain a school leaving certificate (*Berufsreife*) and to enter an apprenticeship or other vocational training. The class is targeted specifically at students with special educational needs and those with learning difficulties. By the end of 2018, 1,983 school students had entered a voluntary 10th school year. This intervention is characterised by smaller class sizes and more intensive interactions between students and teachers. Only those students who show potential in German, maths and sciences are transferred onto the scheme. This initiative is seen as a success story and the region's flagship policy, achieving good results since its introduction in the 2014/15 school year. Around 90% of those attending the 10th school year achieved the school leaving certificate. A significant reduction in students leaving schools without a leaving certificate between 2013 and 2014 is directly attributed to the introduction of the voluntary 10th year of schooling. One of the characteristics contributing to the success of this intervention and which is enabled by ESF funding is the smaller class sizes, which facilitate more intensive interactions between students and teachers. Students also benefit from the extra time available to study for the school leaving certificate.

Some OPs focus on ensuring that young people have the skills required for the future. This is the case, for example, in England, where the North East Ambition operation focuses on skills development among young people in the North East, tying this to the region's economic growth and underpinning the aim of driving an uplift of 100,000 more and better jobs by 2024.

### **NEETS**

The evaluation has identified a limited number of operations aimed at reducing the risk of becoming NEET.

**Targeted education/training for disadvantaged learners within education & training systems at high risk of becoming NEET.** The case studies have identified operations targeted at pupils who are identified as being at high risk of disengaging from education. This could be due to attendance, attainment, behaviour or other reasons. Supporting specific groups of young people helps them complete their formal education and progress to further learning, training or employment.

The Young People with Edge operation (see Box A5-34 in Annex 5) supported by the Danish national OP aims to work with 320 of the most vulnerable young people in eight municipalities in the Capital Region; almost 21,000 young people aged 15-29 who have no qualifications, are outside the labour market and are not self-sufficient. It is expected that 70% of the operation's 320 young people achieved educational readiness and (partial) labour market readiness, and that 50% of the 320 young people begin vocational education with indicators of completing the education. The individual courses are designed together with the young people and coordinated between relevant professionals. In the courses, especially during the difficult transitions, work is done on young people's coping strategies, motivation, and skills for relationship formation. Due to the expanded individual guidance, approx. 50% of young people followed the path through preparatory basic education (FGU) into a vocational education (VET).

Box 9 (and Box A5-11 in Annex 5) shows an example of an operation that has supported those at risk of becoming NEET.

### **Box 9 West Wales and the Valleys: supporting those at risk of becoming NEET**

#### West Wales and the Valleys: supporting those at risk of becoming NEET

Cynnydd is an operation that supports pupils aged between 11 and 18 who are identified as being at great risk of disengaging from education. This could be due to attendance, attainment, behaviour, or other reasons. Supporting this group of young people helps them complete their formal education and progress to further learning, training, or employment. It sits within the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework of the Welsh Government. The operation is based on systematic identification and tracking of and engagement with young people most at risk of becoming NEET (not in employment, education or training). Participants are supported by a range of specialists, including literacy and numeracy coaches, specialised counselling support workers, volunteering support, transition support, learning readiness support, employability support, and entrepreneurship support. As of 31 August 2019, 4,317 individuals had participated, against an overall target of 7,717. A total of 543 qualifications had been

gained, against a target of 1,159, and 1,231 young people were at reduced risk of becoming NEET, against an overall target of 4,770.

### ***Supporting low-qualified adults***

The evaluation has identified a limited number of successful operations focused on supporting low-qualified adults. Successful examples have focused on targeted education/training for individuals to return to education & training. A promising practice is supported by the Slovenia national OP is the implementation of programmes for acquiring basic and professional competences targeting primarily adults with a low level of qualification, with a focus on those over 45 years of age (see Box A5-28 in Annex 5). Through two tenders that fund programmes until 2022, 18 consortium organisations have been selected for implementing the programmes through 65 partner organisations. The financed programmes range from programmes achieving basic competences, computer literacy to language skills. Provision of counselling is integrated into all the programmes. To date outreach and recruitment of counsellors (160 counsellors were recruited. 65% were female and the majority were between 22-56 years of age. Half were unemployed).

### ***Employees***

The evaluation has identified a limited number of promising operations focused on supporting employees. Successful examples have focused on **training for employees, including upskilling, new qualifications, adaptation to digitalisation, literacy**. The Training of Construction Studies Technicians operation (Bretagne OP (France), see case study in Annex 1.4) focuses on vocational training of 740 hours which leads to obtaining a level IV title (ISCED level 3, registered with the national register, RNCP<sup>89</sup>), which is the equivalent of a technician's certificate or a vocational baccalaureate ('Bac Pro'). This training targets profiles of draftsmen and designers and leads to jobs in operation management and engineering, assistant in design offices, architectural firms, or developers. It had successful participant outcomes: the success rate improved to 40% for Bac Pro and to 60% for scholarship recipients (+10%). The BioInnovation Wales operation (see Box A5-31 in Annex 5) supported by the West Wales and the Valleys OP (UK) provides flexible and responsive postgraduate training to update employees' technical knowledge, providing a route to postgraduate qualifications. Training is delivered in an industry-responsive and flexible format, enabling students to work via supported distance learning at a heavily subsidised rate of £165 per module.

### ***Disadvantaged groups***

The country reviews and case studies have highlighted the following successful types of operations supporting disadvantaged groups:

- **Training for educational staff to recognise and understand the potential problems that children from alternative or travelling communities face, when joining pre-school and mainstream school.** For example, the

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<sup>89</sup> Répertoire national des certifications professionnelles

Slovakia National OP supported the 'Schools open to everybody' (see Box A5-9 in Annex 5) operation to design a new educational model that promotes the inclusion of children from marginalised Roma communities. The model has been trialled in seven of Slovakia's less-developed regions. The training helped educational staff to recognise and understand the potential problems that children from alternative or travelling communities face, when joining pre-school and mainstream school. It has also led to the adoption of new teaching processes and strategies.

- **Targeted education/training for disadvantaged learners within education and training systems and pupils with special needs.** These operations aim to ensure adequate educational curricula to meet the diversity of interests, expectations, capacities and needs of students and are important in ensuring sufficient focus on diversity and inclusion. Curricular diversification programmes (*Programas de diversificación curricular* - PDC) & Programmes to improve learning and school performance (*Programas de Mejora del Aprendizaje y del Rendimiento* - PMAR) supported by the Galicia OP (Spain) (see Box A5-10 in Annex 5) use a specific methodology through the management of contents, practical activities and subjects which are different from and complement general provision. The operation has led to positive outcomes and certificates for a significant number of students. The Career Entry Support operation (see Box A5-35 in Annex 5) supported by the Federal Germany OP aims at improving the transition from school to vocational education for young people, with a particular focus on the low-achieving and disadvantaged pupils (also see section on access to vocational education).

***Evaluation Question 1.7: Which factors facilitate or hinder the effectiveness of ESF operations under Thematic Objective 10, by type of operation and by main target group?***

**Key findings – EQ 1.7**

The evaluation evidence highlights a **variety of success factors and challenges** in relation to the specific Investment Priorities and types of operations. Common success factors were identified as: local, regional and national governments adopting a central project delivery role (particularly early school leaving); strong coordination and the involvement of local and regional stakeholders, who can tailor programmes to specific needs (early school leaving operations, lifelong learning); provision of intensive and tailored support to individuals over a longer-term period of time (early school leaving, lifelong learning).

Key factors facilitating the effectiveness of ESF operations by type of operation are summarised below in relation to each of the main areas of intervention. The analysis for this evaluation question draws mainly on the stakeholder interviews and in-depth case studies.

***Preventing and reducing early school leaving (IP10.i)***

Under IP10.i, particular **success factors** have been identified as follows:

- **Local, regional and national governments adopting a central project delivery role** that helps to ensure that approaches are developed and coordinated at a wider level rather than relying on specific organisations such as schools to manage project delivery which may lesson opportunities for shared learning and longer-term sustainability including systemic change (see Lithuania example in box 10 below).
- **Strong coordination and the involvement of local and regional stakeholders, who can tailor programmes to specific needs** (e.g. Czech Action Plans). The participation of the key local stakeholders (municipalities, regions, school managers, teachers, parents) is one of the most important factors behind the success of these operations. Horizontal exchange helped to increase effectiveness of the assistance by sharing experience among the stakeholders and ideas on how to solve particular problems with improving quality of education and inclusiveness of education.
- **Provision of intensive and tailored support to individuals over a longer-term period of time** (for example counselling by mentors with continuous and individual support from specialist staff through to the vocational training stage). Such operations are considered costly in terms of human and financial resources. However, benefits are considered to be longer lasting and more effective as a result. The review of ESF TO10 evaluations (see Annex 1.1) showed that counselling, tutoring, and support services are very common TO10 operations implemented at all levels of education, mostly at secondary and tertiary level. The evaluation evidence shows these types of interventions to be effective in preventing school dropouts by helping students – especially from disadvantaged groups – to design and undertake suitable educational and professional paths. Targeted operations are supported by ESF at a group level or a school level as shown by Box 10 below (and Box A5-6 in Annex 5).
- **Use of detailed risk assessments of pupils at-risk of dropping out, allowing to tailor support to their individual needs**, such as the Aid to reduce early school leaving 'PuMPuRS' operation in Latvia (see Box 47 and Box A5-5 in Annex 5).
- **Strong partnerships with different NGOs that enable the needs of vulnerable children to be addressed** through a variety of measures such as after-school support, or support for parents, counselling, or other types of social measures.
- **Professional courses that enable a large number of participants to adopt alternative pathways to completing secondary education**. An educational and a vocational certification at the end of the participation is also a crucial element for sustainability of results.

**Box 10 Lithuania National OP - using ESF funds to implement systemic change in school prevention activity**

Lithuania National OP - using ESF funds to implement systemic change in school prevention activity

The operation 'Developing a safe environment in school II' (09.2.2-ESFA-V-729-03-0001) was launched in October 2016 under IP10.i. The operation is being implemented by the National

Agency for Education. The budget is EUR 8.0m (ESF funds), of which 65.7% or EUR 5.3m had been absorbed as of 17 December 2019. The operation is aimed at implementing effective prevention programmes in all schools: violence and bullying, psychoactive substance use, sexual assault prevention, social skills development, positive parenting skills development, development of access to psychological support for students, their parents, teachers and other educational staff. It is planned to expand the supply of programmes by developing methodological materials for a suicide prevention programme and piloting the programme at school. Project activities cover the following target groups: school administration, teachers, educational assistance professionals, students, parents, and other members of the school community. During the three years of the operation, preventive programmes were implemented in 432 preschool institutions providing pre-primary education programmes, and in 1,058 general and vocational education schools; psychological assistance was provided in 838 schools. The operation is considered particularly effective due to its wide coverage, the range of target groups who are involved, and the fact that it led to a change in national legislation which will ensure its sustainability: all schools must now have at least one preventive programme and programmes will build on the lessons of the ESF operation<sup>90</sup>.

Particular **factors hindering success under IP10.i** include reliance on **short-term contracts for project staff**. Knowledge and learning gained from operations cannot be applied in the longer-term if there is no plan for assuring continuity of the funding support for staff positions. For example, a regional network of career advisors was established using ESF funds to enhance the networking and information exchange between primary schools' career advisors in a region is one example. However, it is not planned that the roles will last beyond the ESF funding.

### ***Tertiary education (IP10.ii)***

Compared to IP10.i, under IP10.ii, evidence is less conclusive on the extent of good practice and successful operations. Some **success factors** have been identified however as follows:

- Providing financial support for more vulnerable students to attend university with **clear** criteria applied in identifying vulnerability, as illustrated by Box 7 above (and Box A5-13 in Annex 5).
- Dedicated support for students coming from vocational education streams including specific teaching materials that aim to improve their academic performance, **as** shown by the Support for Student Success project (France) (Box 11 below and Box A5-14 in Annex 5).
- The success of students is also linked to the will of university management to develop specific support modules for students in difficulty, with active tutoring, monitoring of results and management that is carried out internally by the university (for example Pays de la Loire OP, France).

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<sup>90</sup> Source: <http://www.sppc.lt/veikla/vykdomi-projektai/saugios-aplinkos-mokykloje-kurimas-ii/>  
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### **Box 11 OP (France) – Dedicated support for students coming from vocational education streams**

#### OP (France) – Dedicated support for students coming from vocational education streams

In agreement with the region, the University of Angers wanted to improve the success of students and especially those coming from the BAC Pro sectors and scholarship recipients, for whom the success rate in the first year at university is low. The operation, carried out from September 2016 to August 2018, made it possible to set up a dedicated team (operation manager + four teaching assistants) and a set of teaching means for support. On the basis of student volunteering, an individual interview is conducted, which leads to a support contract being signed by the student and the university, including compulsory regular meetings, methodology sessions (work methods, taking university course notes, stress management, motivation support) and support from 30 (year 1) to 50 (year 3) student tutors. The programme also includes a permanent evaluation and exchange monitoring system. This operation is in line with the educational operation of the university, which wants to strengthen the educational contract between the university and its students. The system supported 1,560 students over 3 years. The success rate for these supported groups improved to 40% for Bac Pro and to 60% for scholarship recipients (an increase of 10% in both cases)

**Factors** highlighted as **hindering success** under IP10.ii include

- The high perceived cost of operations to support graduate retention rates relative to the benefits that can be measurable over a short-term time horizon. Scholarships for students have a relatively high cost per participant ratio and the benefits are only likely to be measurable over a longer-term period.
- Vulnerable groups and groups at risk of not completing have been a challenge to reach within a tertiary education setting. The case studies highlighted challenges in identifying vulnerable students who want to access tertiary education. This was due to differing interpretations at local, regional and national levels of who might be considered as vulnerable, disadvantaged or under-represented. There were also restrictions in collecting sensitive personal data from students.

#### ***Lifelong learning (IP10.iii)***

**Factors supporting successful implementation** have been identified as:

- Established trust and cooperation between all stakeholders, particularly the private sector and stakeholders responsible for VET and apprenticeship policies and educational providers, including in defining curricula and providing apprenticeships (**for** example, see Box 12 and Box A5-23 in Annex 5).

### **Box 12 Future of Work, Federal German OP Skills development based on private and public sector collaboration**

#### Future of Work, Federal German OP Skills development based on private and public sector collaboration

This operation addresses the structural changes resulting from automation and increasing globalisation in the working world and the challenges that employers and employees face. It follows the high-tech strategy 'Innovations for Germany', which aims to ensure an appropriate technical and social modernisation of the working world. The programme especially targets SMEs. Within operations, new concepts and models are developed in close collaboration of

research, enterprises, and social partners, and tested in pilot applications. The following topics are supported under this intervention: increasing the ability to innovate through measures for personnel, organisational and competence development, workplace-integrated further training and knowledge transfer in the demographic change, health prevention as well as life-phase-oriented professional development and work-life balance.

- Clearly defined roles of the individual actors, and above all the co-responsibility of the business sector, including motivation and interest to provide on-the-job trainings and the importance of a clear representation of the business/economy. One example is found in the Malta National OP – Scholarships to improve labour market relevance of courses (see Box 13 below).

### **Box 13 Malta National OP – Scholarships to improve labour market relevance of courses**

#### Malta National OP – Scholarships to improve labour market relevance of courses

The ENDEAVOUR Scholarships Scheme aims to support good quality tertiary education and to ensure that the Maltese labour market is supplied with the right skills to help the economy compete at an international level. The scheme aims to support those pursuing this path to succeed both at the level of education attainment as well as contributing effectively towards the economy. Key objectives of the ENDEAVOUR Scholarships Scheme are to: assist people to pursue further levels of academic research; improve the quality and relevance of the education system; reduce skills mismatches particularly within the priority economic sectors; support further research in science and technology; and increase the capacity and level of research, innovation and development activity in Malta. 4 calls for scholarships have been issued and in total 1,474 applications were received. At the end of 2018, 775 participants have signed a scholarship grant amounting to EUR 7.4 million of which 95% were courses at Level 7 and 5% were courses at Level 8 MQF. Out of the 775 grant agreement awardees, 48% were females. 358 scholars have successfully completed the course to date.

- The provision and development of quality consulting and training aids tailored for specific target groups (i.e. low-skilled employees) and adequate human, financial resources.
- Consulting target groups in the initial phases of planning training programmes and correctly diagnosing the participants' needs. An example of good practice was the Estonian Unemployment Fund where a consultant/case manager in cooperation with the client would agree on the activities required to remain in work and based on an assessment of the individual's skills and needs, the client would be advised and directed to the services needed.
- Allowing adequate time for the outreach/fieldwork and provision of flexible approaches in counselling. The collaboration with partners in this regard, particularly **employers** to recognise the added-value of investing in elderly and lower-skilled employees, can contribute significantly to outreach.

**Factors hindering performance** have been identified as follows:

- Not **addressing the multiple barriers faced by people with low levels of qualifications**. Low-qualified people face obstacles which are additional to simply finance which means that there is a need for further accompanying measures. For example the Continuing Education Grant supported by the Federal OP (Germany) has attracted fewer applicants than expected as financial support was the main motivation for applying and the evaluation concluded that those with low **qualifications** face multiple barriers that are not addressed by financial support alone.
- **Administrative requirements for participants may act as a disincentive to take part in training** (e.g. providing salary statement). Attempts for raising demand (lifting the age limit) have been without success.
- Perception of low quality of lifelong learning opportunities.
- Courses which do not lead to an official qualification appear to be less popular.
- Concerns were also raised over the fairly formalistic approach in implementation of adult education programmes through the TO10, with a focus on achievements of quantitative targets compared to substantive criteria.
- **Labour market relevance (IP10.iv)**
- **A particular factor supporting successful outcomes** under IP10.iv has been identified as: incentive mechanisms for employers to provide on-the-job training for apprentices, secondary vocational students and students of higher vocational education (for example Linking Vocational Education and Training to the Labour Market Needs, Slovenia: see Box 14 and Box A5-38 in Annex 5).

#### **Box 14 Slovenia National OP - Linking Vocational Education and Training to the Labour Market Needs**

##### Slovenia National OP - Linking Vocational Education and Training to the Labour Market Needs

The objective of this operation was to strengthen the relationship between employers, social partners, and education providers in order to improve coordination and integration of the Slovenian VET system and thus ease young people's transition into employment. This was done through an incentive mechanism for employers to provide on-the-job training for apprentices, secondary vocational students, and students of higher vocational education. A call for proposals was launched in 2018 with two lots. The first lot aimed to strengthen the apprenticeship system, while the second focused on other work-based learning opportunities. In 2017-18, 2,228 employers and 3,265 individuals participated in funded initiatives. 51 apprentices, 2 276 secondary vocational students and 938 post-secondary vocational students were provided with on-the-job training. The operation is implemented by the Public Scholarship, Development, Disability and Alimony Fund of the Republic of Slovenia, which is also responsible for the disbursement of the incentives.

**Factors hindering performance** have been identified as follows:

- Challenges relating to the **creation of partnerships between vocational education, universities and employers**, as well as the inclusion of employers

in development of curricula and implementation of VET education. The problem with creation of partnerships is caused by the limited understanding of the universities of their benefits from this kind of cooperation, lack of structural incentives as well as **limited** administrative resources of the universities to engage in such partnerships. For example, the case study of the national Poland OP highlighted that the Ministry of Science and Higher Education's university performance evaluation system does not provide any incentives for this kind of cooperation.

- Similarly, **cooperation with employers** has long been regarded as challenging due to the lack of incentives and promotion of this kind of engagement among this group.

#### 4.2. Efficiency

##### ***Evaluation Question 2: Main evaluation question: How efficient is the ESF in the achievement of the objectives of Thematic Objective 10?***

###### Key findings on efficiency

Cost per participant is a key quantitative measure of cost-effectiveness. While recognising that comparisons are limited by the current inconsistency in coverage and availability of participation data across Member States and IPs, based on the available data it can be concluded that **TO10 operations generally display a reasonable degree of cost-effectiveness**. Overall, the average TO10 expenditure per participant is EUR 1,137. The cost per participation varies from EUR 729 under IP10.i (early school leaving) to EUR 2,754 under IP10.ii, (tertiary education). As regards IP10.iii, focused on lifelong learning, the unitary expenditure is EUR 1,041 and, under IP10.iv (labour market relevance), it is EUR 1,841. The average expenditure per result achieved across all Member States is EUR 2,378 and the variation across countries and IPs is very marked, following the pattern for expenditure per participant. It is difficult to draw clear conclusions on the relative cost-effectiveness of IPs based on cost per result figures alone. This reflects the limitations of common results indicators in fully capturing the longer-term benefits of specific operations.

A particular requirement of the evaluation was to conduct a **cost-benefit analysis** (CBA). This is a tool to identify relevant costs and benefits, to quantify them in line with the intervention logics where possible, and to indicate the likelihood and magnitude of those that cannot be quantified. After considering the available data, our approach was to apply CBA approach to each of the four Investment Priorities. The overall CBA suggests some positive returns particularly under IP10.i (early school leaving) and IP10.ii (tertiary education) however a note of caution should be attached to the results as a number of broad assumptions needed to be applied, given the limitations of the monitoring data and current impact evaluation evidence at the level of OPs and operations.

There are also a range of qualitative perspectives on the scope to improve the cost-effectiveness of TO10 operations. In relation to organisational approaches, a common theme to emerge is the **important role of intermediary bodies and wider partnerships arrangements** in the implementation of TO10 approaches. It has been shown that specialist sectoral organisations can play a key role in supporting the engagement and service delivery of beneficiary organisations to improve the efficiency of delivery. Stakeholder evidence from the case studies also identified the high level of involvement of local government and

educational authorities and close cooperation and lengthy discussions with potential beneficiaries prior to the actual competition/fund allocation as important factors supporting efficient results. In contrast, there was also evidence from the case studies that supporting a **high number of implementing partners can act as a constraint on efficient delivery**. Funding a high number of partners contributes to the administrative burden, delays with implementation, and increases the risk of engaging with organisations that had limited capacity to deal with the procedural requirements of ESF.

On the whole, the **ESF administrative and regulatory requirements are proportionate to the benefits achieved**. Most stakeholders shared that these requirements are necessary to avoid the fraudulent use of funds and that the large financial value of the programmes justifies the administrative requirements. **Particular challenges** in ensuring efficient delivery were highlighted as: administrative requirements for smaller beneficiary organisations; lack of cooperation between national government ministries; insufficient communication and information exchange between implementing organisations; lack of mutual coordination

***Evaluation Question 2.1: To what extent were operations cost-effective? To what extent are the costs of the intervention proportionate, given the changes/effects it has achieved? What types of operations were more and less cost-effective for which target group? In what contexts? What were the determining factors?***

#### Key findings – EQ 2.1

Overall, the average TO10 **expenditure per participant** is EUR 1,137. The cost per participation varies from EUR 729 under IP10.i (early school leaving) to EUR 2,754 under IP10.ii, (tertiary education). As regards IP10.iii, focused on lifelong learning, the unitary expenditure is EUR 1,041 and, under IP10.iv (labour market relevance), it is EUR 1,841. Higher unit costs under IP10.ii relate to their focus on longer-term financial support for individuals (compared to the training approaches seen under other IPs where higher numbers of individuals are involved).

There were **positive responses to the Public Consultation on the perceived cost-effectiveness of operations**. The reasons given by respondents for judging activities as cost-effective were related to the perceived positive results of operations, in particular in relation to young people and in supporting them to gain practical competencies and improving qualifications to succeed in the labour market.

Cost per participation provides a key quantitative measure of cost-effectiveness. Participation data is generally collected across all Member States and therefore provides a good basis for comparison. The use of participation data can however provide only a partial picture of the relative efficiency of operations. As considered in detail below, data is not always collected by Managing Authorities (MAs) on all individuals that are supported. There is also inconsistency in the timing of data collection as some MAs record participations after operations are fully implemented while in other cases data is collected on an ongoing basis. The overall cost per participant has been calculated on the basis of the most recent monitoring data provided by the Commission on common ESF outputs and results (extracted on 3 December 2019). The figures on expenditure per participant by IP and total are shown in Table 14 Expenditure per participant (EU + national co-financing), end of 2018 below. Overall, the average TO10 expenditure per

participation is EUR 1,137. The cost per participation varies from EUR 729 under IP10.i (early school leaving) to EUR 2 754 under IP10.ii, (tertiary education). As regards IP10.iii, focused on lifelong learning, the unitary expenditure is EUR 1,041 and, under IP10.iv (labour market relevance), it is EUR 1,841.

**Table 14 Expenditure per participant (EU + national co-financing), end of 2018**

	10.i	10.ii	10.iii	10.iv	TO10
EU	729	2,754	1,041	1,841	1,137

\* the number of total participants is obtained as sum of: C01 - unemployed, including long-term unemployed, C03 - inactive, and C05 - employed, including self-employed.

Source: Contractor's processing on data provided by EC, December 2019.

The case studies (see Annex 1.4) provide some insights into reasons for the levels of unit costs and differences across IPs. A number of the case studies show a strong variation in unit costs across IPs as shown in the examples below. Evidence from the case studies indicate that the **higher unit costs under IP10.ii relate to their focus on longer-term financial support for individuals** (compared to the training approaches seen under other IPs where higher numbers of individuals are involved). Analysis completed for the case study of the Galicia regional OP, for example, shows that the target unit cost per participant under IP10.ii (tertiary education) is EUR 75,000. The main activities supported are the predoctoral training grants which finance three-year full-time contracts for recent graduates and postgraduates of the three higher education institutions that are part of the Galician University System. The unit cost figure therefore appears to be reasonable given the scope of the operation.

In general, the **cost per participation analysis completed for the case studies provides reasonable explanations for the variance in costs per participation across OPs**. Analysis highlighted in the case study of the Federal Germany OP (see Box 15) provides a useful illustration of the reasons why a significant degree of variance in unit costs across IPs is observed at the interim stage of the programming period (where operations are still ongoing), while providing further explanation of differences across IPs and types of operations based on consideration of the intensity of the support provided.

**Box 15 Federal Germany OP – analysis of unit costs across operations**

Federal Germany OP – analysis of unit costs across operations

The Federal Germany OP publishes data on cost per operation in its annually published Gender budgeting report. Cost per operations figures are as follows:

- Career change – Men and women in Early Childhood Education and care – EUR 33,718
- Opportunities for parents 2 – getting families involved in education early on – EUR 1,707
- Continuing education grant – EUR 735
- Career entry support – EUR 4,697
- Promoting vocational education for sustainable development. Enabling green skills for climate-friendly, resource-efficient operation at work – EUR 1,869

Overall, it can be seen that cost per participation ranges from EUR 735 to EUR 33,718 for the OP's key operations. The high cost per participation of the operation supporting career change relates to the fact that the operation finances course development and implementation and that

by the end of 2018, only 66 participants had completed the training. The evaluation of the operation indicates that the unit cost is likely to reduce over time however as the course completion rate improves after 2018. The Career entry support operation aims to improve the transition from school to vocational education for young people, with a particular focus on the low-achieving and disadvantaged pupils. This is one of the largest operations in Germany, both in terms of allocated ESF funding (EURO 460 million) and number of participants (128,000). The relatively high cost per participant is explained by the type of intervention, as the individual support is expensive. Young people are counselled by career start mentors with continuous, individual support from school through to the vocational training stage. Activities commence in the penultimate year of general education at schools and continue for up to six months into the vocational training.

Table 15 below provides further case study evidence on cost per participation at the levels of individual OPs including comparisons across IPs and types of operations. It should be noted that in some cases it was considered too early in the programming cycle to conduct any meaningful cost per participation analysis. This was generally because either too few participations had been completed or the current available data on participation outputs did not reflect the current position in terms of activities delivered.

**Table 15 OP evidence on cost per participation**

Operational Programme	Evidence on cost per participation
England (UK)	IP10.iii operations: the mean grant per target participant is £2,145 with a range across operations from £536 to £3,372.  IP10.iv operations: the nature of IP10.iv means that their targets are for numbers of SMEs supported rather than participants. The average grant per target SME supported by IP10.iv operations is £10,390, with a range from £4,667 to £17,945.
National OP (Ireland)	The mid-term evaluation of the OP included cost per participant analysis for three of the key operations supported by the programme. The unit costs ranged from EUR 1,086 to EUR 1,711. Costs appeared reasonable reflecting the non-intensive nature of the interventions and the good level of take-up to date.
National OP (Slovenia)	The cost per participation calculated using spent funds and the outcome indicators shows that costs per participation across IP10.iii and IP10.iv are similar and reasonable, namely approximately EUR 945 per participation in the IP10.iii and EUR 836 per participation in IP10.iv.
Galicia regional OP (Spain)	The average cost per participations for IP10.i displays a good level of efficiency level (EUR 3,932) – cost per participation was higher than the average for IP 10.i reflecting the intensive support provided to students of secondary school age through operations such as the curriculum diversification programme.

In line with the findings from the case studies, respondents to the Public Consultation (see Annex 3) felt that most of the activities implemented under the ESF were cost-effective. Improving links between education/ training institutions and businesses/other partner organisations, improving careers or vocational guidance provision, supporting the unemployed and those in work to up-skill and re-skill, improving access to lifelong learning opportunities, improving recognition of informal and non-formal learning, supporting learners to access work-based learning opportunities and supporting the

development of work-based learning systems were considered to be particularly cost-effective. The main reasons given by respondents for judging activities as cost-effective were related to the perceived positive results of operations, namely supporting young people to gain practical competences, and improving qualifications to succeed in the labour market. Reaching out effectively to the target groups and successfully creating a dual learning path for vocational training, including the involvement of social partners and providers, were also mentioned from this perspective.

From the review of existing evaluations of TO10 operations (see Annex 1.1), it is difficult to draw clear conclusions on the efficiency of the TO10 intervention in quantitative terms due to the inconsistent interpretation of efficiency by the individual evaluators. There is limited quantitative analysis of relative cost-efficiencies based on comparative approaches.

***Evaluation Question 2.2: Are there significant cost differences between Member States/regions in the implementation of similar operations? What are these differences related to?***

#### Key findings – EQ 2.2

The analysis of cost per participant shows a **strong variation across Member States**, however a note of caution should be attached to cross-country comparisons given that it is still early in the programming cycle. Understanding the reasons for such large variations would require a detailed examination of cost data covering all key operations and all Member States which has been difficult to achieve with the limited resources for the study. The limitations of the comparative analysis emphasise **the need for robust cost-effectiveness analysis to be undertaken at the level of operations** at appropriate points during their implementation and particularly when comprehensive and robust data has been collected on the individuals supported. The ex post evaluation will provide a further opportunity to examine the reasons for the variation in cost differences.

The overall **CBA** suggests some **positive returns** particularly under IP10.i (early school leaving) and IP10.ii (tertiary education) however a note of caution should be attached to the results as a number of broad assumptions needed to be applied, given the limitations of the monitoring data and current impact evaluation evidence at the level of OPs and operations.

The analysis of **cost per participant shows a strong variation across countries**, although, as noted above, a note of caution should be attached to cross-country comparisons given that we are at still at an early stage of the programming cycle. For example, the total varies from a minimum of EUR 137 in Bulgaria to a maximum of EUR 6,791 in the Czech Republic (see Table 16 below). As highlighted above, **disparities of a similar magnitude can be observed also under each Investment Priority and within countries**. By comparing data across countries and IPs and referring to the evidence from the case studies (see Annex 1.4) in particular, it is apparent that **cost differences are likely to relate to the nature of the dominant operations in the country and to inconsistencies in methods of data collection rather than inherent inefficiencies in countries' implementation approaches**. There are several outliers in the Commission's dataset, where unusually large amounts of funding are associated with certain intervention fields, to which the corresponding cumulative

participations are small or zero. Smaller figures may relate to the quality and timeliness of monitoring data and/or the nature of specific operations, where for example participation data is not always collected. Under the England OP (UK), for example, targets are set for the numbers of SMEs supported rather than participants. The average grant per target SME supported by IP10.iv operations is £10,390, with a range from £4,667 to £17,945. It can be expected that towards the end of the current programming period, the data on outputs will become more complete and hence some of the current sharp differences will be mitigated.

**Table 16 Expenditure per participant (EU + national co-financing), end of 2018**

	10.i	10.ii	10.iii	10.iv	TO10
AT	1,623		2,645		1,821
BE	1,470		346		372
BG	111	1,446	21	45	137
CY			2,085		2,085
CZ	5,581	21,789			6,791
DE	1,266	4,754	1,791	2,073	1,747
DK			2,638	1,111	1,684
EE	5,930		952		1,862
ES	506	2,792	145	1,156	598
FI			1,545		1,545
FR	780	965	1,844	623	1,632
HE	15,610	2,770	522	786	4,243
HR		1,549	1,868	602	1,683
HU	4,237	12,313	595	1,094	1,399
IE			585		585
IT	499	3,711	1,040	1,001	728
LT	115	2,334	879		435
LU			551		551
LV	3,125	31,582		787	2,111
MT	4,390	9,877	732		2,835
PL	462	1,399	654	1,142	720
PT	1,657	2,797	1,542	5,021	3,253
RO	407		547	1,460	501
SE			983		983
SI			1,168	1,049	1,149
SK	201	725	2,812	1,313	343
UK	2,395		2,071	2,019	2,088
EU	729	2,754	1,041	1,841	1,137

\* the number of total participants is obtained as sum of: C01 - unemployed, including long-term unemployed, C03 - inactive, and C05 - employed, including self-employed.

Source: Contractor's processing on data provided by EC, December 2019.

Expenditure per participant is presented in Table 17 by category of region and IP. On average, expenditures are higher in transition regions (EUR 1 771) and lower in less developed regions (EUR 729). However, this situation varies considerably across IPs. Under IP10.i, IP10.ii and IP10.iii, the unitary expenditure is higher for more developed regions, while regions in transition are characterised by a higher unitary cost under IP10.iv.

**Table 17 Expenditure per participant by Investment Priority and category of region**

	10.i	10.ii	10.iii	10.iv	TO10 (total expenditure / total outputs)
Less developed	619	2,645	1,006	2,198	729
More developed	969	3,784	1,234	1,457	1,236
Transition	708	2,441	684	1,804	1,771

Source: Contractor's processing on data provided by EC, December 2019.

The **expenditure per result achieved** is shown by Member State and across IP in Table 18 below. The unitary expenditure was calculated by considering the following common immediate result indicators: CR01 - inactive participants engaged in job searching upon leaving, CR02 - participants in education/training upon leaving, CR03 - participants gaining a qualification upon leaving, CR04 - participants in employment, including self-employment, upon leaving. The average expenditure per result achieved across all Member States is EUR 2,378 and the variation across countries is very marked, following the pattern for expenditure per participant. Indeed, expenditure per result achieved is higher under IP10.ii (17,342) and lower under IP10.i (EUR 2,378) and IP10.iii (EUR 1,966). The outliers under IP10.ii, particularly the Czech Republic, influence the overall average however the higher cost per result for IP10.ii operations is consistently found across a number of Member States including Bulgaria, Denmark, Italy, Lithuania, and Spain. Based on the evidence available from all the evaluation research elements, it is difficult to draw clear conclusions on the relative cost-effectiveness of IPs based on cost per result figures alone. As highlighted in the cost per participation analysis it most likely relates to intensity and length of support for each participant and the numbers of individual participants involved.

**Table 18 Expenditure per result achieved**

	10.i	10.ii	10.iii	10.iv	TO10
AT	6,748		6,002		6,520
BE	2,333		1,169		1,225
BG	226	1,523	21	66	221
CY			2,399		2,399
CZ	490,897	3,431,271			607,183
DE	2,489	5,937	2,293	4,881	3,369
DK			19,208	117,242	29,316
EE	10,217		1,100		2,288
ES	611	5,681	181	1,207	703
FI			29,427		29,427
FR	2,040	1,378	3,078	1,269	2,909
GR	23,866	12,566	1,058	1,194	7,115
HR			9,355		9,355
HU	18,436	60,437	929	9,059	2,478
IE			932		932

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IT	6,609	29,376	1,991	6,659	7,145
LT	7,947	14,812	2,748		5,823
LU			34,483		34,483
LV	35,657				35,657
MT	308,197	16,182	12,229		24,357
PL	20,144	9,091	1,393	7,701	5,498
PT	3,778	104,692	6,376	9,812	10,622
SE			45,674		45,674
SI			3,518		3,518
SK	11,557	183,433	9,406	6,466	9,799
UK	33,005		3,331	5,838	3,807
EU	2,378	17,342	1,966	4,182	2,891

Source: Contractor's processing on data provided by EC, December 2019.

The large differences in figures generally highlight the **limitations of using cost per result as an indicator of cost-effectiveness both in terms of making comparisons across countries and IPs**. For example, in relation to IP10.i, the expenditure per result is EUR 611 in Spain, EUR 490,897 in the Czech Republic and EUR 308,197 in Malta. Under IP10.ii, it varies from EUR 1,378 in France to over EUR 3.4 million in Czech Republic. Understanding the reasons for such large variations would require a detailed examination of cost and results data covering all key operations and all Member States which is beyond the scope of this study. The data for the Czech Republic, for example, suggests that results data are generally not collected for individuals. The limitations of the comparative analysis emphasise the need for robust cost-effectiveness analysis to be undertaken at the level of operations at appropriate points during their implementation and particularly when comprehensive and robust data has been collected on the individuals supported. There is currently limited evidence from specific evaluation studies, however. The evaluation of the West Wales and the Valleys regional OP Traineeships programme provides an exception (Box 16).

### Box 16 West Wales and the Valleys OP (UK) - Example of cost-benefit analysis

#### West Wales and the Valleys Regional OP (UK) – Example of cost-benefit analysis

As detailed in Section 4.1, the Traineeships programme is a large-scale pan-Wales programme focused on providing support to disadvantaged young people to access employment. The cost benefit analysis results depend on the length of time over which the potential future benefits of the programme are considered (the time horizon), and the assumptions with respect to the cost of the alternative provision undertaken by the counterfactual group. The results were as follows:

- For a two-year time horizon, the estimates of the net present value of the programme range from £23.9 million to £81.7 million.
- For a three-year time horizon, the estimates of the net present value of the programme range from £67.7 million to £125.5 million.
- For a five-year time horizon, the estimates of the net present value of the programme range from £148.7 million to £206.5 million.

Expenditure per result achieved by category of region and IP are shown in Table 19. On average, expenditure per result achieved is higher in less developed regions (EUR 3,811) and lower in regions in transition (EUR 1,524). As it was observed for expenditure per participant, also in relation to results, unitary expenditure varies significantly across

IPs. Expenditure per result is higher in less developed regions under IP10.i, IP10.ii, and IP10.iv but not under IP10.iii, where the unitary expenditure is higher for more developed regions.

**Table 19 Expenditure per result achieved by category of region**

	10.i	10.ii	10.iii	10.iv	TO10(total expenditure / total results)
Less developed	3,230	18,613	1,897	5,365	3,811
More developed	2,685	15,648	2,517	3,886	2,967
Transition	1,263	9,914	1,103	2,560	1,524

Source: Contractor's processing on data provided by EC, December 2019.

### Cost-benefit analysis

A particular requirement of the evaluation was to conduct a **cost-benefit analysis** (CBA). This is a tool to identify relevant costs and benefits, to quantify them in line with the intervention logics where possible, and to indicate the likelihood and magnitude of those that cannot be quantified. It differs from a cost-effectiveness analysis by not only quantifying but also monetising results. A full CBA would ideally compare the costs with estimated benefits that would not have taken place without the programme (hence moving from gross to net benefits). In an ideal case, assessing the additionality of benefits requires robust information about the counterfactual, for example through a before-and-after comparison, a treatment-control group comparison, or by using econometric techniques. Accurately estimating the counterfactual in this way, and hence additionality, would however have been problematic at the whole TO10 level in particular given the diversity of types of operations and range of different groups supported.

We explored however the potential to undertake the CBA at the OP level, using more robust estimates of additional benefits where, for example, counterfactual impact evaluations (CIEs) were in place that provide quantified estimates of additionality to feed into our model. This potential was considered when analysing the national evaluations in Task 1 and selecting OPs for our sample in Task 4. However, by the end of February 2020, the Helpdesk project identified only a limited number of CIEs carried out at national level on interventions funded by the TO10. Our approach therefore was to apply a CBA to each of the four Investment Priorities. The framework considered participation costs (total costs including ESF and other funding). A high-level summary of the types of benefits considered, and evidence sources for the required data, is summarised in Table 20 below. A full description of the methodology and results is found in Annex 1.3.

**Table 20 Framework for types of benefits**

Type	Description	Evidence
<b>Direct benefits</b>	Benefits for individuals – qualifications, increased confidence, better chance of	Indicators relating directly to the participation of people in ESF operations. (output

	<p>work or a better chance of better work.</p> <p>Benefits for institutions – better graduation rates, better motivated staff, additional possibilities due to additional funding.</p> <p>Benefits for authorities – (increased) income tax and VAT from (increased) wages and consumer spending and reduced welfare payments to the extent Participants find employment</p> <p>Benefits for businesses – reduced skills shortages and increased production and profitability</p>	<p>indicators CO01 + CO03 + CO05 for the numbers of participants (unemployed, inactive and employed) and indicators CR01-CR04 as (mutually exclusive) indicators of successful completes, who in addition upon leaving are respectively engaged in job search, further education or training, with a qualification, and in employment.</p> <p>The results data have limited use for a cost-benefit analysis as employment is the main monetary benefit.</p>
<p><b>Indirect benefits</b></p>	<p>Spill-over effects on third parties – for example participation in further education, ability of ex-participants to train others, better educational performance of the children of participants (next-generation effects)</p> <p>Wider effects, for example ability to work with new technologies, increased productivity, competitiveness, and exports</p>	<p>Indirect effects such as these have been reported in evaluations of training, but are never quantified to our knowledge</p>

Across the Investment Priorities, output data on participations does not distinguish between teachers/trainers and students. This is a key limitation of the analysis as it is not possible with the available data to estimate the breakdown of students and teachers and trainers being supported. Ideally the analysis should 'convert' numbers of teachers supported into numbers of student results who would otherwise would not have had successful results. However, it has not been possible to find data on this and therefore a broad assumption of 100% student participation is applied across the relevant operations.

As usual in CBA analysis, costs are generally observed based on actual spending amounts and most benefits need to be estimated and monetised. The main monetisable benefit of education and training is the increased income from work from many years in the future. It is customary to value future benefits less than benefits today, with a discount rate. The cumulative discounted values of future benefits are referred to as 'lifetime benefits'. Here, 'lifetime' refers to the remainder of the career, which is assumed 40 years for initial education and 20 years for employee training. The return of education is the difference between lifetime benefits and costs. This study

differentiates between private returns (for the student), public returns (for the State) and employer returns, reflecting the returns of the main stakeholder groups. The returns are discussed below. Annex 1.3 explains in detail how the returns were estimated.

**Investment Priority 10.i** (early school leaving) is assumed to focus on early school leaving at upper secondary level, and the results are based on comparisons between gaining upper secondary education and lower secondary education. The following is taken account of:

- direct costs and foregone income during upper secondary education (in OECD calculations);
- the ESF **expenditure** on IP10.i;
- the percentage of upper secondary education entrants who graduate, the **percentage** of graduates who continue in tertiary education, costs and benefits of tertiary education (taken from the IP10.ii analysis);
- employment and wage levels of those not continuing in tertiary education (in OECD calculations), income tax and social security contributions (in OECD calculations) and two further public benefits in the form of reduced expenditure on social **assistance** thanks to a lower unemployment rate and higher VAT revenues (estimated based on Eurostat data). Social assistance benefits are treated as a private benefit, but VAT payment is not used in the private cost calculations.

The assumed additionality of IP10.i is that without ESF, the student would leave at once or stay dropped out, and with ESF the likelihood of graduation is average. For students, costs consist of tuition fees and postponed wages, and benefits of firstly an increased likelihood of being employed and secondly a higher wage (net of taxes, social security contributions) if employed. For those who continue in tertiary education, there are additional costs and benefits of education (taken from the IP10.ii analysis). The increased employment comes with a 'loss' of social assistance benefits which is also taken account of. The OECD has added up discounted future increases of income from work and subtracted the costs for most EU Member States. Averaging across the EU, this results in a private lifetime return of EUR 241,000 per student at a 2% discount rate and EUR 159,000 per student at a 4% discount rate.

For the State, costs consist of funding of education and the costs of the ESF intervention. Benefits consist of income tax and social security contribution revenues, as well as VAT revenues from increased consumer spending and lower expenditures on social assistance due to the higher employment rate. Using a mix of OECD and own calculations, public lifetime returns were estimated per EU Member State. Averaging across the EU, the public lifetime return is EUR 90,000 and EUR 52,000 at a discount rate of 2% and 4%, respectively.

For both private and public returns, nearly half the return is attributed to tertiary education as 58% of the upper secondary graduates start in higher education. It should be noted that the ESF cost of EUR 746 per participant is low compared to the public costs of upper secondary education of EUR 27,000 per student and that the additionality

of the ESF support has not been factored into the analysis. This reflects the current limitations of the quantitative evaluation evidence and therefore 100% additionality of ESF support has been assumed. The returns of IP10.i are positive in all EU countries.

**Investment Priority 10.ii (tertiary education)** is assumed to help access to tertiary education. The assumed additionality of IP10.ii is that without ESF the person would not have started in tertiary education. The estimation of lifetime benefits uses a similar approach to the method used for IP10.i except that the benefits of tertiary education are considered relative to those of completing upper secondary education. It is also assumed that there is no further education beyond tertiary education. The resulting private lifetime return is EUR 211,000 per student at a 2% discount rate and EUR 138,000 per student at 4% discount rate. The public returns are EUR 139,000 and EUR 89,000 at a 2% and 4% discount rate respectively. The ESF cost of EUR 2,761 per participant is still low compared to the public cost of EUR 32,500 per student (weighted with the number of IP10.ii participants). The private and public returns of IP10.ii are positive in all EU countries.

**Investment Priority 10.iii (lifetime learning)** is assumed to support companies in providing training to their employees, based on the fact that slightly more than half of expenditures in IP10.iii is on employee training. Thus, all participants are assumed to be employees and to remain in employment, with the wage, productivity, and tax revenue gains as sole benefits. Employee and employer cost and benefit data are taken from an OECD study. The percentage wage gains due to employee training according to the OECD study is applied to the average wage per year (across all educational levels). Social security contributions and employee income tax are considered as costs for employers and employees and as benefits for the public sector. ESF costs per participant are subtracted from employer direct costs per participant. Increased VAT revenue is treated as a further public sector benefit but not used in employee cost calculations. The lifetime returns per participant are EUR 1,313, EUR 382 and EUR 1,623 for employees, employers, and the public sector, respectively, at a 2% discount rate, and these values drop to EUR 1,082, EUR 60 and EUR 1,200 respectively at a 4% discount rate. While employee returns are positive in all EU countries and public sector returns are positive in most countries, employer returns are negative in roughly half of the countries. It should be noted that a remaining career time of 20 years is assumed. The public return also implies that the public sector benefits are less than twice as high as the ESF cost of EUR 1,036 per participant.

**Investment Priority 10.iv (labour market relevance)** covers a broad range of activities. Because apprenticeships and vocational training are most often mentioned in TO10 country recommendations, the cost-benefit analysis is limited to those two. For apprenticeships as opposed to school-based vocational education, a literature search revealed that according to all studies, apprenticeships have positive initial impacts on employment and wage rates, but studies that include later impacts all found that school-based vocational education graduates catch up in one to four years. Therefore, benefits of apprenticeships as opposed to school-based vocational education are assumed to be negligible over the whole career. For vocational education as opposed to general upper secondary education, the assumption is that without ESF the participant would have chosen general upper secondary education, and with ESF the participant chooses VET.

it is assumed that VET graduates work in medium-skilled blue-collar jobs and general upper secondary graduates in medium-skilled white-collar jobs continuation in tertiary education is implicitly assumed the same for VET and general upper secondary education. The employment rates are assumed the same for VET and general upper secondary education. The direct costs of VET and general upper secondary education are also assumed the same. All these assumptions are made due to lack of data by educational field. The benefits consist of the wage difference and associated social security contributions, income tax and VAT revenues. The private lifetime return is EUR 26,000 and EUR 19,100 at a 2% and 4% discount rate respectively. The public lifetime returns are EUR 18,700 and EUR 13,200 respectively. The returns are also positive in most countries, although in Croatia, Hungary, Italy (and Luxembourg but this country does not invest in IP10.iv), average wage rates in medium-skilled white-collar jobs are higher than in blue collar jobs. Thus, public sector benefits are at the EU level substantially higher than the ESF cost of EUR 1,888 per **participant**.

**Comparing the four investment priorities**, the private and public returns per participant are highest for IP10.i (early school leaving) and IP10.ii (access to tertiary education): all values are between EUR 50,000 and EUR 160,000 per participant at a 4% discount rate which are significantly higher than comparable values under IP10.iii and IP10.iv. Values are generally high because 100% additionality is assumed: it is assumed that without the ESF intervention, the participant would not have graduated from upper secondary education or gone on to complete their tertiary education studies. This is clearly a broad assumption and suggests that a finer grained analysis of the costs and benefits of particular operations based on specific evaluation evidence would have been a more valuable in informing an overall analysis of the monetary returns at an EU level.

**Evaluation Question 2.3 How do organisational arrangements influence service delivery by beneficiaries or, eventually, lead to non-take up by potential beneficiaries? To what extent is non-take-up a choice or due to non-awareness of the instrument?**

#### Key findings – EQ 2.3

**Organisational arrangements** highlighted as important in improving the efficiency of implementation practices based largely on evidence from the case studies included: role of specialist sectoral organisations as intermediaries in the management of operations was highlighted as an important factor in supporting the engagement and service delivery of beneficiary organisations; high level of involvement of local government and educational authorities; and close cooperation and lengthy discussions with potential beneficiaries prior to the actual competition/fund allocation.

There was very little evidence to suggest that non take-up was generally a choice, but rather this was mostly due to non-awareness of the instrument.

Further observations on **particular challenges and success factors** in the management of operations mainly from the case studies included:

- Analysis from some case studies suggests that a high number of implementing partners can act as a constraint on efficient delivery.

- The lack of cooperation between national government ministries in the delivery of operations under the same IP.
- Insufficient communication and information exchange between project managers in the implementing organisations for IP operations.
- Lack of mutual coordination in aligning individual education policy actions.
- Lack of consistency in the implementation of activities (for example where some activities are carried out in parallel, when they should take place in successive stages).

It has been shown that quantitative analysis based on cost per output and cost per result data is limited in understanding the relative cost-effectiveness of operations at this stage of the programming cycle. There are a range of qualitative perspectives however on scope to improve the cost-effectiveness of TO10 operations. In relation to organisational approaches, a common theme to emerge is the important role of intermediary organisations and wider partnerships arrangements in the implementation of TO10 approaches.

The **role of specialist sectoral organisations as intermediaries in the management of operations was highlighted in both the targeted consultations and case studies as an important factor** in supporting the engagement and service delivery of beneficiary organisations. One EU level stakeholder highlighted the example of the Belgium OP (Flemish MA) as good practice in engaging with intermediaries to define targets, drawing on feedback from organisations delivering on the ground through testing measures and their impact on target groups. In contrast the case study of the Romania National OP highlighted the weak level of coordination between the work of the Management Authority (MA) and the Intermediate Body (IB) which has hindered the implementation process and engagement of beneficiaries in programme operations. A vocational training operation delivered under the National OP for Ireland (see Box 17 below and Box A5-26 in Annex 5) provides a good example of how a structured and sector-based approach to the provision of vocational training with a key role for intermediary organisations has supported service delivery.

### **Box 17 National OP (Ireland) – Role of intermediaries**

#### National OP (Ireland) – Role of intermediaries

In July 2013, Ireland replaced its system of 33 Vocational Education Committees with a system of 16 Regional Education and Training Boards (ETBs). The reforms were intended to enhance the scale and strength of local education and training<sup>91</sup>. Also in 2013, a new organisation, SOLAS<sup>92</sup>, replaced FÁS<sup>93</sup> as the country's state training agency. The replacement of FÁS with SOLAS was also an attempt to remove some of the 'stigma' that had been associated with vocational education in a country where the aspiration and focus had long been towards higher education. In 2017-18, SOLAS became an intermediary body for ESF funds rather than a direct beneficiary. Through TO10, SOLAS provides grants under the Back to Training and Education Initiatives (BTEI) programme to the 16 ETBs to provide activities in 2014-18. SOLAS has the

<sup>91</sup> '01 July, 2013- Education and Training Boards replace VECs',

[www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2013-Press-Releases/PR-%202013-%2007-%2001.html](http://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2013-Press-Releases/PR-%202013-%2007-%2001.html)

<sup>92</sup> The word 'Solás' means 'light' in the Irish language, and it is an acronym for *An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna*: The Further Education and Skills Service.

<sup>93</sup> An Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS) was a state agency in Ireland with responsibility for assisting those seeking employment. It was replaced by SOLAS in 2013.

capacity to meet the financial and non-financial obligations associated with ESF operations. Interviewees praised the management arrangements of the BTEI programme as the FET sector (ETBs and SOLAS) has much better information on the people accessing its courses. The outcomes and impact of ESF operations are easier to measure as a result of greater integration and sharing of data by government agencies and departments, for example, the Department of Social Protection and Employment and the Office of the Revenue Commissioners.

Analysis from some case studies (see Annex 1.4) suggests that **a high number of implementing partners can act as a constraint on efficient delivery**. The case of the Slovenia National OP highlighted the variety of types of operations and high numbers of implementing partners involved in the delivery of the programme. By mid-2019, there had been direct allocation of funds for 46 programmes and operations resulting in more than 200 supported operations. This had contributed to the administrative burden, delays with implementation, and increased the risk of engaging with organisations that had limited capacity to deal with the procedural requirements of ESF. More positively, it was thought that with better coordination, the involvement of dispersed beneficiaries can contribute to the geographical accessibility of the various programmes and a balanced distribution of funds.

**Other organisational arrangements** highlighted as important in improving the efficiency of implementation practices from the case studies included:

- **High level of involvement of local government and educational authorities:** in Poland the local government authorities (who are responsible for managing schools and VET institutions) participated in the design and negotiation **process**. Interventions implemented directly by the local government authorities, rather than individual schools, have significant potential in some countries, one of the most important being the increasing responsibility of these entities over the quality of education.
- **Close cooperation and lengthy discussions with potential beneficiaries prior to the actual competition/fund allocation** is helpful in developing appropriate operation proposals. **This** is seen as preferable to MAs adopting a reactive approach and trusting the quality of applications.

Further observations on particular challenges in the management of operations from the case studies included:

- The lack of cooperation between national government ministries in the delivery of operations under the same IP.
- Insufficient communication and information exchange between project managers in the implementing organisations for IP operations.
- Lack of mutual coordination between schools, local authorities and wider stakeholders in aligning individual education policy actions.

Stakeholders at the EU level stressed the importance of MAs supporting beneficiary organisations to develop actions to increase their capacity to deliver ESF operations. According to the Slovenia National OP case study, for example, measures have been introduced to improve the administrative and management processes of a range of

beneficiaries. A survey was carried out by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports among TO10 beneficiaries to assess their capacity and training needs for effective implementation of the operations. Training sessions were organised for beneficiary organisations, and field operations/visits to offer on-site support intensified. Nevertheless, many stakeholders feel that there is an ongoing need to strengthen the implementation capacities of beneficiaries, including in administrative reporting.

**There was very little evidence to suggest that non take-up was generally a choice, but rather this was mostly due to non-awareness of the instrument.** As highlighted above, the case studies have emphasised the important role of intermediary organisations as multipliers in ensuring that the visibility of TO10 operations is maximised amongst beneficiary organisations. As highlighted elsewhere, there is some evidence that MAs face greater challenges in promoting the benefits of ESF to harder-to-reach groups such as refugees given the additional costs involved in undertaking the outreach work effectively. There is a range of evidence to suggest that **non-awareness is likely to be greater amongst disadvantaged groups** who are currently not connected with intermediary organisations who play a role in promoting ESF and engaging participants.

Other factors highlighted in the case studies as explaining non take-up include:

- Perceptions of the quality and efficiency of operations amongst beneficiary **organisations** (this was only relevant to a few MAs). For example, some case studies highlighted that schools has not taken up support as it was perceived that actions were too short-term and piecemeal to have an impact on vulnerable groups.
- Perceptions of the administrative burden associated with project delivery.

***Evaluation Question 2.4: To what extent were the organisational arrangements, including management and control systems at all levels, conducive to the effectiveness of operations? Is there gold plating? Are there opportunities to simplify the national legislation or reduce unnecessary regulatory costs without undermining the intended objectives of the intervention? Were the procedures for reporting and monitoring timely and efficient?***

#### Key findings – EQ 2.4

Overall, the majority of respondent organisations to the Public Consultation (see Annex 3) and the majority of stakeholders believed that on **the whole the ESF administrative and regulatory requirements are proportionate to the benefits achieved**. This view did not hold for some stakeholders interviewed from countries with smaller ESF allocations where the requirements were felt to be too onerous. The evaluation research suggests that administrative requirements can discourage smaller beneficiaries such as NGOs - which are crucial for reaching vulnerable groups. **Gold-plating** was frequently highlighted by national stakeholders as creating additional administrative barriers for ESF project managers or potential beneficiaries. The **procedures for reporting and monitoring are generally considered to be timely and efficient** based on the views of stakeholders and the majority of respondents to the Public Consultation. However there remains a perception within some

Member States that the requirements are disproportionate relative to the size of operations supported.

A common theme across the country mapping and stakeholder interviews is whether the administrative requirements can be considered proportionate to overall levels of programme spend and benefits achieved. Overall, the majority of respondent organisations to the Public Consultation (see Annex 3) and the majority of stakeholders believed that on the whole the **ESF administrative and regulatory requirements are proportionate to the benefits achieved**. Some highlighted that these requirements are necessary to avoid the fraudulent use of funds and that the large financial value of the programmes justifies the administrative requirements. However, **this view did not hold for some stakeholders interviewed from countries with smaller ESF allocations where the requirements were felt to be too onerous**. Interviewees for several of the case studies also highlighted the relatively high levels of administrative input required in the monitoring and reporting of ESF operations. In a number of cases, interviewees considered the documentation required to submit and implement operations as overly complicated with too many requirements imposed (for example too many indicators, too many restrictions, complex documentation). On the national level, gold-plating was mentioned frequently as creating additional administrative barriers for ESF project managers or potential beneficiaries. One stakeholder highlighted that 'room for interpretation' in the legislation at EU level, gave national authorities the chance to make rules stricter, reducing the risk for themselves, but increasing the burden for beneficiaries.

Evidence from both the stakeholder interviews and case studies the **administrative requirements can discourage smaller beneficiaries such as NGOs - which are crucial for reaching vulnerable groups** - from applying to calls for proposals. Some stakeholders also held the view that reporting requirements for the beneficiaries were disproportionate, particularly for some organisations with more limited administrative capacity such as schools. ESF operation organisers in one country described the requirement to collect paper documents from individuals to prove their eligibility to participate, for example, birth certificates, proof of employment/unemployment, as 'very onerous'. This can mean that voluntary organisations and NGOs involved in activities for TOs relating to social inclusion, such as programmes for people with disabilities and migrants, find it more difficult to deal with the funding and data collection requirements. For smaller NGOs, participating in ESF TO10 initiatives can be very prohibitive in terms of the financial accounting and reporting required. For ESF participants themselves, some interviewees highlighted that the requirement to submit so much personal data (date of birth, social insurance number, proof of employment, etc) can act as a disincentive to participate in operations or see them through to completion. Additionally, the timings imposed to beneficiaries for executing administrative procedures is sometimes considered inadequate.

At the level of implementation for specific operations, many of those interviewed for the targeted consultations at the national level and for the case studies identified **simplified cost options (SCOs) as supporting improved efficiency**, with positive feedback from beneficiary organisations. Stakeholders highlighted that SCOs reduce room for error, and support in particular smaller beneficiaries that do not have the capacity or

expert knowledge of ESF, in general calling for them to more widely used. However, all stakeholders that spoke of SCOs also identified challenges in their implementation. Several mentioned that the development of SCOs was still a process with a heavy administrative burden, and one that took time to implement, with stakeholders speaking of delays from the European Commission in approving SCOs proposed by Member States.

The responses to the Public Consultation (see Annex 3) reflect the views of interviewed stakeholders in that the majority felt that the administrative requirements are appropriate while a minority saw them as overly bureaucratic. The majority also saw the SCOs as supporting rather than hindering efficiency. The results for two sub-groups of respondents are set out below:

- *MAAs and IBs*: overall, on average across the processes listed, the majority of respondents (62.3%) judged the listed arrangements to be appropriate. However, more than 20% of respondents on average across all processes rated the arrangements to be burdensome, while the equivalent figure for those rating the arrangements as insufficient was around 8%. Looking closely at each of the administrative arrangements, the largest majority of respondents judged project follow-up and implementation (72.1%) and communication (72.1%) to be the most appropriate administrative arrangements. All other arrangements were also judged as appropriate by a majority of respondents (more than 56%). The most burdensome arrangements were seen as being the management and control system (38.5%), reporting and monitoring (30.8%), and project follow-up and implementation (20.2%). The least burdensome arrangements were the application of simplified cost options (SCOs), and communication, both with less than 9% of responses.
- *Beneficiary organisations*: overall, the majority of respondents in this group (59.5%) judged the listed arrangements as appropriate when averaged across all the processes considered. However, more than 22% of respondents rated the arrangements to be burdensome on average across all processes taken together, while 6% on average perceived the arrangements to be insufficient. On average across the processes, around 12% did not know or wish to answer. Looking closely at each of the administrative arrangements, the largest proportion of respondents judged communication (72.2%) to be the most appropriate administrative arrangement. Almost all other arrangements were judged as appropriate by more than 50% of respondents with the one exception of the management and control system (only 48%). The most burdensome arrangements reported by this sub-group were the management and control system (40%), reporting and monitoring (34.4%), and project follow-up and implementation (23.8%). The least burdensome arrangement was the application of simplified cost options (9.7%).

The case studies (see Annex 1.4) highlighted the speed of response of MAs to queries from beneficiaries as another area where there still scope for some improvement. Some interviews asked for more tailored rules that align with the specificity of higher education

institutions rather than following the overall common monitoring and reporting rules of ESF funding.

**Evaluation Question 2.5: How visible are ESF funded operations under T010?**

**Key findings – EQ 2.5**

Overall, there was **positive evidence on the visibility of ESF funded operations**. Responses to the Public Consultation suggested a good level of visibility of ESF amongst organisations with no direct role in managing and delivering ESF programmes. Programme managers were familiar with the programme's visibility requirements and are applying them in practice. Programme websites were generally regarded by stakeholders as informative with clear links to ESF opportunities. Beneficiaries tend to be acquainted with visibility regulations as this is part of their contractual obligations.

For the Public Consultation civil society organisations and other organisations with no direct role in managing/delivering ESF were asked: 'How familiar are you with the European Social Fund?'. Only 62 respondents provided an answer to this question. The analysis of responses showed 35.5% of respondents in this group were familiar with the ESF which suggests a reasonably good level of visibility, while 21.0% had an idea of the goal and scope and knew at least one activity funded by the ESF. This was followed by 17.7% of respondents who reported only having a general idea of the ESF's goal and scope and did not know any specific activities funded. Lastly, 12.9% of organisations did not wish to answer and 12.9% reported never hearing of ESF before the survey. Although the responses are small, the responses suggest a **good level of visibility of ESF amongst organisations with no direct role in managing and delivering ESF programmes**.

The issues of visibility were among many questions explored in the case studies, so it is not possible to provide detailed analysis on the efficiency of processes to ensure visibility of T010 operations. The case studies did not reveal any particular concerns however in the implementation of communication requirements linked to ESF support. It was apparent that **programme managers were familiar with the programme's visibility requirements** and are applying them in practice. Managing authorities have issued visibility guidelines, while standard rules on visibility of EU funding opportunities and communication plans for the OP have been developed aiming to maximise visibility of ESF.

European funding websites and websites dedicated to ESF have been created to increase the visibility of ESF T010 operations. Websites tend to provide all the basic information on priorities and funding, key results and evaluations conducted, as well as relevant documents. Like other EU/ESF funded operations, T010 calls for proposals are publicly promoted both on relevant government websites and other implementing organisations' websites. **Websites were generally regarded by stakeholders as informative with clear links to ESF opportunities**. In some cases, however, interviewees felt that the mention of ESF support and/or logos could be more prominent on the websites of implementing organisations.

Beneficiaries tend to be acquainted with visibility regulations as this is part of their contractual obligations. Only a few case studies reported particular issues. In Romania for example, it appears that certain public sector beneficiaries (schools, school inspectorates etc.) are less transparent and do not follow very accurately visibility rules (especially concerning publicly promoting the projects), while NGOs tend to communicate better about the projects under their implementation. In other countries some interviewees were concerned about the limited possibility to finance visibility activities although this was considered crucial to the achievement of programme objectives.

Overall, the case study evidence suggests that communication processes are generally working well. For example a population level survey that was undertaken for the intermediate evaluation of the Employment, Education and Training 2014-2020 (Spain) OP<sup>94</sup> provided positive results on the visibility of the programme and funding opportunities with advertisements in social networks found to be an effective means of advertising particular funding opportunities. Box 18 below provides an example of an effective approach to improving visibility.

**Box 18 Thematic OP (Portugal) - effective communication to improve visibility**

Thematic OP (Portugal) – effective communication to improve visibility

Interviewees for the thematic OP case study agreed that TO10 ESF-funded operations were visible, acknowledging the great effort to disseminate, including through publicity events with relevant stakeholders in different locations. Dissemination guidelines are deemed to have been thoroughly followed. According to the latest Annual Implementation Report (AIR), 167 news items were produced for the website, with 78,000 users, 124,000 sessions and 232,000 page views. Over 5200 people subscribed to the OP's newsletter (four editions)<sup>95</sup>. A total of around 11 000 people followed the OP on social media. 28 videos were produced and disseminated aiming at storytelling and identifying good practices and success factors. The Managing Authority (MA) participated in the two largest fairs of vocational guidance in Portugal - Futurália and Qualifica - involving different partners within the scope of human capital, the European Commission's permanent representation in Portugal and beneficiaries. These two fairs had over 125,000 visitors. In 2018, the MA organised seven events with over 130,000 participations and 13,000 units of merchandising material distributed. The MA developed a communication campaign involving the portal, social networks, one national and three regional newspapers to present the results achieved, which reached over 1m people<sup>96</sup>.

As highlighted under Evaluation Question 2.4, intermediary organisations have played an important role as multipliers in maximising the visibility of TO10 operations amongst beneficiary organisations. As also highlighted elsewhere, there is some evidence that MAs face greater challenges in promoting the benefits of ESF to harder-to-reach groups such as refugees given the additional costs involved in undertaking the outreach work effectively.

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<sup>94</sup> Evaluación Intermedia del Programa Operativo de Empleo, Formación y Educación, anualidad de 2019, Red2Red. June 2019.

<sup>95</sup> AIR2018

<sup>96</sup> AIR 2018

### 4.3. Relevance

#### **Evaluation question 3: How relevant are the ESF operations under Thematic Objective 10?**

##### **Key findings on relevance**

The assessment of relevance examines the extent to which the operations planned under ESF TO10 were relevant to addressing education and training needs and the needs of target groups requiring support. The assessment of this evaluation criterion also examines the continued relevance of these plans in the face of changing needs of target groups or as a result of external political or contextual changes. It is important to note that, as per the evaluation framework, this evaluation criterion focuses on the programming level and assesses ESF operations *planned* under Thematic Objective 10. Assessment of the relevance of these operations to target groups in terms of implementation is examined under the effectiveness evaluation criterion.

Overall, the evidence shows that planned operations are relevant to education and training needs and largely relevant to the needs of target groups. There is, however, **room for increasing consultation** with key ESF stakeholders to improve relevance to target group needs.

The high degree of relevance of planned operations under ESF TO10 is strongly linked to the requirements of the **European Structural and Investment Funds programming process**. This ensured that education and training needs were identified at the strategic planning stage in the Partnership Agreements by all Member States based on thorough needs assessments. The way the Investment Priorities are designed -covering a range of policy areas across various education levels throughout the life-cycle – also contributed to ensuring relevance at the strategic level. The Investment Priorities allowed for **flexible programming**, adaptable to diverse needs in each Member State or region.

Relevance is also seen in the **strong alignment between European Semester country specific recommendations and the Partnership Agreements**. 22 Member States addressed all the education and training target groups identified by the relevant country specific recommendations in their Partnership Agreements, which then translated into planned actions in Operational Programmes. Despite this, room for further increasing the synergies between the European Semester and the ESF was identified by several key stakeholders. Plans to do so in the next programming period were welcomed by stakeholders, in particular those working on ESF and education and training at the EU level.

The evaluation shows that **target groups** of ESF TO10 were identified by all Member States at the design stage of operations. Again, this is in large part thanks to the programming process of European Structural and Investment Funds which ensured that **needs assessments** were conducted by all Member States in the Partnership Agreement and reflected in the Operational Programmes. Systematically analysing the most important needs of each target group is challenging, as not only are these needs different for each group, but the same target group may have different needs depending on the local, regional, or national context they are in. Nevertheless, there is evidence to show that as a whole, **there was an effort across Member States and Operational Programmes to take on board the most important needs of the main target groups of ESF TO10 operations** in planned ESF operations. Examples include young people – targeted with actions to support their entry into the labour market – and a range of disadvantaged groups targeted with tailored support.

However, despite this, the evidence suggests that relevance to target groups could be further increased through involving in a more meaningful way different actors in both designing and monitoring ESF TO10 actions. **Broad stakeholder consultation** was one of the most common ways planned operations were tailored to the needs of target groups. This did largely occur in Member States in the planning of ESF TO10 actions: the evidence shows that the partnership principle was implemented in all Member States at planning level on paper (i.e. in the drafting of the Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes). However, in terms of consultation throughout the implementation of ESF TO10 actions in practice, the majority of stakeholders consulted expressed concerns that this was not occurring enough or in the right way. Non-public partners such as civil society, social and economic partners, training institutions/vocational schools, employers and entrepreneurs reported that they were not always appropriately consulted during implementation of the ESF TO10 operations. Consulting a more diverse range of non-public actors was identified as a possible way of increasing relevance to target group needs. Where they were consulted, it was not done in a timely manner, prohibiting meaningful contribution. The issue of building capacity of key partners to enable them to contribute was also raised. Given the importance of stakeholder involvement in ensuring relevance to target group needs – particularly those most disadvantaged – it appears that **relevance of ESF TO10 to target group needs could have been further enhanced by more meaningful involvement of key partners.**

Despite this, as a whole, **planned operations remained relevant throughout the programming period** to date. This is despite changes in the socio-economic context, in particular improvement in employment levels which had been particularly low at the start of the programming period as a consequence of the economic and financial crisis. The continued relevance of actions is in part due to the breadth of topics covered by the Investment Priorities which allowed the Operational Programmes to be flexible in addressing a range of education and training challenges. Evidence shows that where adaptations to ensure continued relevance were needed – such as, when new target groups emerged, or where challenges shifted – they largely occurred. This was undertaken either through smaller changes to planned operations or through more substantial reprogramming of funds. There are notable examples of Operational Programmes that were successfully reprogrammed to respond to emerging needs and adapt to new realities in this way. There were very few examples of the ESF being unable to adapt to a significantly altered implementation or political context.

***Evaluation Question 3.1(a): Were the objectives and the operations funded by the ESF relevant to the needs of target groups?***

**Key findings – EQ 3.1(a)**

The evaluation has found that the objectives and operations planned under ESF TO10 are **relevant** to the needs of target groups. This is evidenced in the **substantial strategic alignment** between the challenges and target groups in need of support identified in the Partnership Agreements, and the types of operations planned in the ESF Operational Programmes. The **programming process** of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) has to a large extent contributed to this alignment, by ensuring that a needs-based assessment and clear identification of target groups was undertaken at the start of programming to steer funding choices. Stakeholders also highlighted that the broad design of the Investment Priorities allowed for **flexible programming** which contributed to increasing the relevance of planned operations.

There is also **strong alignment between the priorities of the European Semester and the priorities identified in the OPs**, with only a small minority of Member States not

adequately reflecting country specific recommendations in their programming choices. This points further to the relevance of the objectives and operations planned under ESF TO10.

The ESF Regulation defines the broad target group of ESF operations in Article 2(3): 'The ESF shall benefit people, including disadvantaged people such as the long-term unemployed, people with disabilities, migrants, ethnic minorities, marginalised communities and people of all ages facing poverty and social exclusion. The ESF shall also provide support to workers, enterprises, including actors in the social economy, and entrepreneurs'<sup>97</sup>. Within this broad group defined by the Regulation, the **groups targeted by ESF operations are varied and multiple**. They vary depending upon the Thematic Objective and the Investment Priority being addressed, as well as the specific context of the country and region in which operations are implemented. Nevertheless, broad groups of individuals targeted by ESF TO10 can be identified from the evaluation research. These include:

- Children (<15)
- Families and parents
- Teachers and school administrative staff
- Young people in initial education and training (>15 & <25)
- Trainees/apprentices
- Young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs)
- Disadvantaged groups (migrants, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities)
- Older workers (>45)
- Low-skilled adults
- Adult learners
- Researchers
- Unemployed
- Long-term unemployed
- Inactive

The evidence gathered throughout the evaluation shows that **objectives and operations planned under ESF TO10 are largely relevant to the needs of target groups, but that there is room to increase this relevance through increased consultation with key stakeholders**. The programming process of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) has to a large extent contributed to ensuring the relatively high degree of relevance. The Partnership Agreement (PA), the obligatory strategic document outlining the use of ESIF, is based on an extensive process that was carried out by every Member State to identify needs and priorities. All PAs adopted in the 2014-2020 programming period include a thorough needs assessment which identifies the socio-economic and education and training challenges in the country. On this basis, each PA defines which Thematic Objectives and Investment Priorities will be funded and, in turn, which target groups will receive support.

The mapping undertaken as part of this study (see Annex 1.1) shows that the above process appears to have led to **substantial strategic alignment between the**

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<sup>97</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013 on the European Social Fund. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32013R1304>

**education and training challenges identified in the PAs, the TO10 Investment Priorities, and the types of operations planned in the ESF Operational Programmes.** National evaluations conducted confirm this: out of the 22 evaluations of ESF TO10 operations with a focus on relevance, all 22 conclude that the main groups targeted by the OPs are relevant with respect to the features and needs of their respective context (see Annex 1.1).

Stakeholders consulted (see Annex 2) agreed with this finding of a high degree of relevance, with a majority across both EU and national stakeholders holding the view that ESF TO10 planned operations responded directly to education and training needs identified in each country. The **design of the IPs was mentioned frequently as contributing to this relevance.** Most consultees praised the fact that the IPs covered a broad range of topics, with this viewed as enabling **flexibility in the programming** to cover all needs and target groups. Responses to the open Public Consultation (see Annex 3) confirm that ESF planned operations adequately address target groups. When asked what kind of actions should be provided, the three most popular actions among respondents from organisations familiar with the ESF were<sup>98</sup>: support for the unemployed to learn new skills to help find work (54.8%); provision of career counselling/vocational guidance and policies or programmes to reform and improve the quality of education or training systems (46.7%) and support to professional development of teachers and trainers, including for pre-school (45.1%). Organisations familiar with ESF were also asked 'Do you think these actions are indeed being provided?'. 41% of respondents responded positively (while 35% said they did not know or did not wish to answer and 24% believed that these actions are not being provided). Of respondents from the general public aware of the ESF, almost half (47%) agreed that relevant actions of ESF supporting education and training are being provided, (28% believe that they are not and 24% of respondents did not know or did not wish to answer).

When asked which target groups should be prioritised by the ESF, both respondents from the general public and from organisations indicated that the two most important and relevant target groups are, firstly, children in poverty or at risk of social exclusion and, secondly, children at risk of early school leaving. The mapping undertaken for the evaluation (see Annex 1.1) shows that children are a common target group for most Member States in their planned ESF TO10 operations. The case studies (see Annex 1.4) and consultations (see Annex 2) suggest that **where the need for targeting children was there, these groups were well-identified** in the Partnership Agreements and the Operational Programmes. In **Romania**, for example, the need for supporting vulnerable children is strong: total government expenditure on pre-primary and primary education was the lowest across EU28 in 2013 at 0.6%, reflected in the low availability and quality of pre-school education and in high early school leaving rates (17.3% in 2013). The Romanian OP Human Capital identifies these challenges and responds with a strong focus in all TO10 planned actions on vulnerable groups. Roma children are targeted directly in particular under IP10.i with operations aiming to increase the participation of at-risk vulnerable groups in the education system at all levels, starting

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<sup>98</sup> Multiple responses were possible.

from pre-primary through to secondary (vocational and general) and post-secondary education.

Similarly, the regional OP of Galicia, **Spain**, identifies low performance in reading, mathematics and science, and widespread learning difficulties in achieving secondary education objectives as key challenges impacting children in the region, in particular, those in disadvantaged groups. In response, TO10 operations under IP10.i target disadvantaged children who are underachieving due to their socioeconomic situation, learning difficulties or other factors influencing school performance. Operations plan to develop specific tailored methodologies and adapted curricula to meet the diversity of interests, expectations, capacities and needs of these children in school.

The **strong alignment between the priorities emerging from the European Semester process and the OPs** is further evidence of the relevance of planned operations to target group needs. Most Member States (23) appropriately address needs identified in the CSRs in their PA and OPs. For example, **Germany** includes explicit support for migrants in the national OP and in nine out of the 16 regional OPs, following repeated CSRs (2014, 2015, 2018, 2019) citing the need to improve educational outcomes and skills levels of disadvantaged groups. In **Croatia**, the OP is relevant to the needs identified in repeated CSRs (2014-2015, 2017-2019) to improve the quality and labour market relevance of the education and training system for both young people and adults. The OP prioritises operations under IP10.iv that better align the educational system to the needs of the labour market and increase employability of young graduates and students. The strong alignment between the European Semester and programming choices was also confirmed by several stakeholders on the EU level in the targeted consultations and the Policy Delphi validation process.

According to the country mapping (see Annex 1.1), only four Member States (Belgium, Finland, Hungary and Portugal) were identified as not adequately addressing the education and training related CSRs in their OPs, exposing some gaps in relevance to target groups. For example, the regional OP Wallonia-Brussels, **Belgium**, does not invest in reducing early school leaving for disadvantaged groups as recommended repeatedly in CSRs of 2013, 2014 and 2017. **Finland** plans some operations to tackle early school leaving under IP10.i but does not focus enough on specific groups identified in CSRs of 2012 and 2013 (namely male early school leavers) or on the issue of regional disparities in ESL rates. In **Portugal**, activities on increasing the attractiveness of vocational education are less explicitly addressed in the OPs despite repeated CSRs in 2012 and 2014 on this.

The country mapping does not point to a particular reason for this gap in addressing the needs of some target groups in some Member States. What is evident from the case studies (see Annex 1.4) and the consultations (see Annex 2), however, is that **national political contexts – such as shifts in priorities after changes in government – are a clear influence on programming decisions** – and thus a likely reason for this gap. **Hungary** is an example of this influence, as the competence-based curriculum which had been prepared using ESF was abandoned following a change of government. Another example is in **Latvia**, where the new curriculum developed as part of ESF TO10 actions was not accepted by the government due to the proposed school starting age

and had to be adjusted in 2018. **Certain target groups and needs may also have been addressed exclusively through national funding.** This was the case in **Ireland**, where no resources were allocated under IP10.iv to develop further education and training schemes, as specified in the 2013 and 2014 CSRs, but this was addressed through a nationally financed large-scale re-organisation of the further education and training sector instead.

Nevertheless, there is **still room to further improve the link between the two processes** and enhance relevance of ESF in the future. Several stakeholders consulted at the EU level spoke of the importance of this and praised the fact that the 2019 European Semester Country Reports have explicitly identified funding priorities for Cohesion Policy in Annex D, allowing for a stronger link between EU funding needs and the Semester process.

**Evaluation question 3.1(b): Were the most important needs of these groups addressed?**

#### Key findings – EQ 3.1 (b)

The evaluation has found that the most important needs of the target groups were largely addressed by planned operations under ESF TO10. **Major groups in need of support, such as young people and disadvantaged groups are well-targeted** in the majority of Member States' planned operations. Specific needs of target groups vary hugely depending on the specific context, but the evaluation does point to the fact that the common needs of these groups were addressed in ESF TO10 planned operations. Examples include young people that were targeted with actions to support their entry into the labour market, and a range of disadvantaged groups that were targeted with tailored support. However, stakeholders consulted in the evaluation highlighted that **needs of target groups could have been better addressed through involving different actors** more in the design of the actions. This was reported from a range of stakeholders representing a range of target groups, including: social partners representing employers, workers, and teachers; NGOs representing tertiary education students and learners at different education levels; and national VET providers.

Systematically analysing the most important needs of each target group is challenging, as not only are these needs different for each group, but the same target group may have different needs depending on the local, regional, or national context they are in. However, it is possible from the evidence to identify certain similarities in needs across some of the main target groups of ESF TO10 and to thus assess whether these ESF TO10 planned operations were relevant to these needs. Based on this, the evidence shows that **the most important needs of target groups of ESF TO10 were widely addressed by planned operations**, but that there remains room to increase relevance.

**Young people** are a key target group under the ESF TO10. The most important needs of this target group are heavily influenced by many factors, such as geographical location, educational level, age, socio-economic status and more. However, at the time of programming of the ESF (2012-2014), young people, despite their heterogeneity as a group, were facing a broadly similar situation across Europe. This was the case due to widespread high youth unemployment rates, which reached their peak in many Member

States in 2013. This meant that support to access the labour market was one of the most important needs of young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs), at the time of programming. Evidence suggests that **the need for support to access the labour market was generally very well reflected in ESF T010 planned operations**. Young people aged 15-24 were the most targeted group across ESF T010 relevant OPs. They were most frequently a target group of IP10.iv – arguably, the most directly relevant IP for supporting entry to the labour market. The case studies (see Annex 1.4) and consultations (see Annex 2) support this finding, providing many examples of ESF T010 planning responding well to the most important needs of young people at PA and OP level.

For example, the **Slovenian** PA identifies that young people are entering the labour market late and lack the competences and skills to allow them to better face and respond to labour market needs. The design of priorities in the OP responds to this need, with an emphasis on operations to strengthen the match with the labour market, through scholarships, learning through practice, and career guidance at all educational levels. In **Sweden**, even though Sweden's employment rate was approaching the Swedish goal for 2020 at the time of programming, the PA highlights that challenges remain for those with a weak foundation in the labour market, in particular young people. The Swedish OP responds to this by planning a range of operations to strengthen the skills base of workers and improve the qualifications and job opportunities of the unemployed, the inactive and those far from the labour market. Within this, the OP places focus on operations to support young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs).

**Disadvantaged people** represent another frequently targeted group in ESF T010 operations. This is a target group explicitly cited in the ESF Regulation (Article 2.3) as part of the mission of the ESF and is a broad group, encompassing inter alia the long-term unemployed, people with disabilities, migrants, ethnic minorities, marginalised communities and people of all ages facing poverty and social exclusion. The heterogeneity of this large group renders it difficult to analyse specific and most important needs systematically. However, the evidence points to the fact that the **significant needs of this broad target group were generally identified in the programming documents** and taken on board in the design of priorities at OP level. Box 19 below provides an example of the focus on vulnerable groups in Greece.

#### **Box 19 Greece – focus on vulnerable groups**

##### **Greece – focus on vulnerable groups**

In **Greece**, vulnerable groups were targeted across all operations planned under all IPs. The PA in Greece outlines the issues experienced at all levels of the education system in terms of equal access to education, identifying particular vulnerable groups in need of support, namely people with disabilities and from low-income households. The focus on these target groups is evident in the OP Human Resources Development, Education and Lifelong Learning, where vulnerable groups are explicitly mentioned as a target group of all the operations planned under IP10.i, IP10.ii and IP10.iii.

In **Spain, Portugal and Romania**, ESF supported programmes to improve school performance identified reduced classroom sizes, support tailored to the pupil, and

operations that take into account pupils' situations outside the school environment alone, as a clear need of **pupils at risk** of early school leaving. In **Slovenia**, a similar need was identified for another sub-group of the disadvantaged, **low-skilled adults**, who needed flexible counselling, tailored to specific needs as well as outreach activities, as part of a TO10 programme for the acquisition of basic competences. In **Germany**, ESF TO10 funding was planned to support the skills profiling of **migrants**, for example the 'B3 Education and Consultation' ESF operation in Baden-Württemberg (see Box 20 below) provides tailored support to migrants with education-related degrees to have their qualifications recognised.

### **Box 20 Germany - B3 Education and Consultation**

#### Germany – B3 Education and Consultation

In Baden-Württemberg, an ESF operation called B3 Education and Consultation has helped migrants with education-related degrees to have their qualifications recognised in Germany, and to integrate into German working life. For people who have acquired a degree or high-level qualification in education, social education, or psychology abroad, B3 provides the opportunity to qualify as an educational counsellor, integrate into the labour market and find work.

The national **Spanish** OP outlines a range of measures to support the at-risk group of early school leaving, acknowledging the need to address the underlying causes of early school leaving with a holistic approach. The **Romanian** OP Human Capital, for example, includes a specific objective on increasing participation in pre-preschool and preschool education, especially amongst groups at risk of early school leaving. The OP outlines integrated measures as part of this focus, with counselling services for parents or guardians to provide holistic, tailored support to participants. In **Latvia**, the programme for development of support of pupils at risk of early school leaving was designed based on a partnership of municipalities, general educational institutions and vocational education institutions, to ensure access to all relevant information about target pupils so that support could be tailored to the individual. In **Italy**, in the regional OP for Lazio, target groups are identified as children/pupils in primary, lower and upper secondary schools, young and disadvantaged adults, such as those of migrant background or with socio-economic deprivations, and to some extent teachers and other school staff. The most important needs of these groups were addressed through actions focused on development of skills, retention in an education system of high quality, rather than early school leaving and truancy, and promotion of social inclusion.

In some Member States, **older workers** and their specific needs are targeted, such as **Austria** (see Box 21 below). However, the group as a whole was not a priority in most Member States.

### **Box 21 Austria - awareness raising for older workers**

#### Austria – awareness raising for older workers

In **Austria**, the Partnership Agreement identifies that existing strategies for lifelong learning for older workers are not having enough impact. The OP focuses on this target group with operations planned under IP10.iii to develop an educational advice network to raise awareness of the importance of education and training and lifelong learning amongst older workers, people re-entering the work force, and people from a migrant background.

Stakeholders consulted throughout the evaluation did, however, hold the view that **target group needs could be better addressed at the planning stage**. Respondents to the Policy Delphi on Investment Priority 10.ii, for example, highlighted that aside from ESF-funded student scholarships, there was little opportunity for students to access ESF funding directly because a lot of ESF funding was directed at systems development and capacity-building of Higher Education personnel rather than at students themselves. **Increased involvement of other actors** in the design of operations was identified as crucial in ensuring that these gaps in target groups are addressed. The Policy Delphi on Investment Priority 10.i identified that the voices of **marginalised students and parents** needed to be better heard so that organisations designing ESF TO10 operations can ensure that they will be relevant to their needs 'in the field'. Similarly, all respondents to the Policy Delphi on Investment Priority 10.ii shared the view that individuals facing multiple barriers to accessing education were less targeted by operations under this Investment Priority. All respondents to this Policy Delphi – consisting of EU level NGOs, policymakers in the field of education and public authorities responsible for education – highlighted the importance of consulting widely with stakeholders before developing new projects and initiatives under IP10.ii in order to widen participation of **under-represented and disadvantaged groups** in ESF TO10 actions. Respondents to the Policy Delphi on Investment Priority 10.iii agreed, highlighting that relevance would be increased through improvements to **working with target audiences themselves** when designing actions.

Both in the targeted consultations and in response to the Policy Delphi consultation, **social partners** – trade unions and employer representatives alike – stressed the importance of an increased social partner role in the design of operations, particularly for actions under IP10.iv which are more directly linked to the labour market. For example, one trade union representative shared that sectoral trade unions are informed of developments on ESF actions, but are not involved in the governance of ESF support to education and training at national level, with an impact on the relevance of actions to the specific needs of target groups. All social partners consulted called for ESF to **build their capacity** to enable them to effectively play a meaningful role in the design of actions under ESF and in turn enhance the relevance of planned operations to target group needs. NGOs consulted – on both EU and national level – confirmed the importance of NGO involvement in the design of ESF operations, highlighting in particular the role that NGOs can play in reaching out to disadvantaged groups that are harder to engage in operations. This is further explored in response to Evaluation Question 3.2, below.

**Evaluation Question 3.1(c): To what extent are the objectives and operations funded by the ESF still relevant to the needs of the target groups?**

**Key findings – EQ 3.1 (c)**

Planned operations under ESF TO10 remained relevant to the needs of target groups throughout the programming period. Whilst socio-economic changes occurred, the fundamental objectives of the ESF TO10 remained relevant to education and training needs. Stakeholders consulted strongly agreed that Operational Programmes (OPs) remained relevant as they were designed and structured on the basis of broad IPs that allowed a range of topics and target groups to be addressed by planned actions. Evidence on the operational level also shows that **where national/regional needs and/or priorities did change, OPs were able to adequately adapt**, either through smaller changes to planned operations or through more substantial reprogramming of funds. The evidence shows that there were very few examples of the ESF being unable to adapt to significantly altered implementation or political context.

The evidence shows that planned operations under ESF TO10 were able to **retain a high degree of relevance** to the needs of target groups throughout the programming period. Despite changes in the socio-economic context, the key education and training challenges faced across the EU28 in 2013-2014 largely persisted throughout the programming period. An analysis of the evolution of the main relevant indicators for each Investment Priority over the programming period shows this (see Annex 1.1). The EU28 early school leaving rate, for example, decreased over the period from 11.9% in 2013 to 10.5% in 2018, but remains a relevant priority given that several Member States have not reached the target yet and that the gender gap in rates has shown no sign of reduction over time. Another example is evident in the employment rate of tertiary education graduates – which increased over the period from 66.3% in 2013 to 74.3% in 2018, but still had not reached pre-crisis levels by that date.

Continued relevance of ESF TO10 to the needs of target groups was also ensured through the **design of the Investment Priorities**. Stakeholders consulted strongly agreed that OPs remained relevant as they were designed and structured on the basis of broad IPs that allowed a range of topics and target groups to be addressed by planned actions. The 'life-cycle approach'<sup>99</sup>, and the fact that IPs address all levels of education, were referred to by many stakeholders on both EU and national level as a key factor in ensuring that planned actions were relevant, even as the implementation context evolved throughout the programming period. Examples shared most frequently by stakeholders concerning the adaptability of OPs related to the **migration crisis** and responses to this, along with the increased focus on **upskilling** as an EU policy priority that came about through the launch of the EU Skills Agenda in 2016, and that was subsequently reflected in ESF operations.

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<sup>99</sup> The 'life-cycle approach' refers to an approach to social policy that reflects that individuals face different risks and vulnerabilities at different stages in life, and that social policies can be designed to address these risks at each stage. See <https://socialprotection.org/learn/glossary/lifecycle-approach>

**Evaluation Question 3.1(d): How were the different target groups prioritised and the actions tailored to their specific needs?**

**Key findings – EQ 3.1 (d)**

The evidence shows that different target groups were prioritised and actions tailored to their needs on the basis of a **thorough needs assessment analysis** conducted in the Partnership Agreements by all Member States. This was supported by thorough **consultation with key stakeholders**. Other ways through which target groups were prioritised included integrating respect of the 'horizontal principle' of equal opportunities (gender equality, disability, age and ethnicity) as an award criterion at operation selection; and planning risk assessments at the start of operations to ensure tailored support to individuals.

The country mapping (see Annex 1.1) shows that the different target groups were prioritised and actions tailored to their needs on the basis of a thorough **needs assessment analysis** conducted in the Partnership Agreements by all Member States, as detailed in response to Evaluation Question 3.1(a). This was supported by a **process of consultation** with key relevant stakeholders in the design of the PAs and OPs, which occurred in all Member States<sup>100</sup> and included ministerial, economic and social, as well as civil society partners.

In **Austria**, for example, different working bodies were set up to support the development of the PA, under the name 'STRAT.AT.2020'. A Steering Group of high ranking public officials and a Project Group of responsible bodies from the programming authorities steered the consultation, which consisted of focus groups on specific themes and forums open to all actors involved in the programming (programme implementation partners, economic and social partners, Association of Towns and Associations of Municipalities, intermediaries, NGOs, experts/academia). The forums were designed to deepen the exchange among key actors and create a feedback loop to ensure relevance of planned actions to target group needs<sup>101</sup>. This regular contact with key stakeholders was the way that actions designed were tailored to target groups need.

In **Latvia**, the competency-based curriculum for actions under IP10.i was developed by 300 education experts and several higher education establishments as partners. **Belgium**, particularly the Flemish OP, was also cited by stakeholders consulted as another example of how consultation was used to ensure actions were tailored to target group needs. In **Malta**, an example of stakeholder involvement is found in the design of the country's ESF-funded state aid training operations, which were a response to an industry-led request to fill skills gaps, and which saw the key involvement of the private sector in their design. Another example is in the **Czech Republic**, where the OP identifies the role of a range of educational actors in all operations - including parents, founders of schools, and labour market actors - to build sustainable change to education systems. The example from **Poland** in Box 22 is another example of consultation with the education sector. The fact that these examples come from Member States with

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<sup>100</sup> European Parliament, 2015, Research for Regi Committee - Review Of The Adopted Partnership Agreements. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/563393/IPOL\\_STU\(2015\)563393\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/563393/IPOL_STU(2015)563393_EN.pdf)

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

different historical and cultural approaches to partnership and consultation in the development of policy, further points to the importance of this approach to tailoring actions to target group needs.

The importance of this approach was also highlighted by consultees in the Policy Delphi on Investment Priority 10.iv. The consultees, consisting of VET providers, EU level NGOs representing students and higher education authorities, social partners at national and EU level, education experts and national ministries of education, suggest that relevance of operations under Investment Priority 10.iv could be further increased through a more systematic examination and analysis of training needs. To this end, they stressed the importance of institutional dialogue mechanisms between local authorities, social partners, and other regional and local actors to identify skills needs in different sectors and territories and design operations accordingly.

### **Box 22 Pomorskie, Poland – a strong consultative approach**

#### Pomorskie, Poland – a strong consultative approach

In the regional OP for Pomorskie in Poland, operations were developed in a consultative manner, with many of the calls being developed together with the beneficiaries. In the case of general education, this consultative approach was undertaken with one third of beneficiaries.

Some other examples of how actions were tailored to the needs of target groups arose in the consultations (see Annex 2). These included integrating respect of the '**horizontal principle**' of equal opportunities (gender equality, disability, age and ethnicity) as an award criterion at operation selection. In addition, **planning risk assessments** at the start of operations targeting disadvantaged groups, as in the Latvian example in Box 23 below, to allow for an even more tailored support that directly addresses the needs of the person, was also cited.

### **Box 23 Latvia – risk assessments for early school leavers**

#### Latvia – risk assessments for early school leavers

A risk assessment methodology was developed as part of the programme supporting students at risk of early school leaving in Latvia. This allowed the programme, from the start, to identify specific needs of the individual and their circumstances, as they vary even within the same target group. Some at-risk students, in particular those with learning difficulties, for example, needed extra classes, whilst others, such as those from low-income families, needed transport and accommodation compensation instead. The risk assessment allowed the programme to be tailored to these needs, increasing its relevance.

***Evaluation Question 3.2: Were the most relevant groups, in the different education and socio-economic contexts targeted starting from the design stage? How was the partnership and multi-level governance implemented?***

#### **Key findings – EQ 3.2**

The evidence shows that most relevant target groups in need of support were identified at the design stage, in the PAs. All Member States upheld the partnership and multi-level governance principle and involved a range of actors in the development of the PAs and the OPs. However, the evidence also identified that **there is room for improving implementation of the partnership principle**. Relevant actors including NGOs and social partners expressed the view that they were not always properly involved in the design of PAs, reporting challenges such as not being given enough time to react to consultation documents, not being afforded the opportunity for meaningful exchange with national authorities, as well not being provided with enough information to allow for real consultation. Analysis of plans for implementing the partnership principle during programme implementation also show that public authorities were generally overrepresented in planned partnership activities at implementing level (committees and consultation actions) at the expense of the general public, civil society and social and economic partners. Given that diverse stakeholder involvement in designing operations enhances the relevance to target group needs, this finding suggests that **relevance to target group needs was partly weakened** by the inadequate implementation of the partnership principle.

As outlined in response to Evaluation Question 3.1(d), the most relevant target groups in need of support were identified at the design stage, in the PAs, based on an analysis of the socio-economic and education and training situation in each country, which then translated into planned operations in the OPs.

**At the level of planning**, several EU-wide studies conducted following adoption of the PAs and OPs<sup>102</sup> found that **all Member States upheld the partnership and multi-level governance principle** and involved a range of actors in the development of the PAs and the OPs. According to the 2016 European Commission study 'Implementation of the partnership principle and multilevel governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds', partners contribute to diverse range of tasks at planning level but are mainly involved in the selection of Thematic Objectives (21% of partners surveyed) and in the analysis of disparities and needs (17% of partners surveyed), with only 7% declaring that they were not involved at all<sup>103</sup>. A positive example is in the **Czech Republic** in Box 24, where the Partnership principle was widely used at various levels of programming.

#### **Box 24 Czech Republic – Partnership principle**

##### Czech Republic – partnership principle

In the Czech Republic, the Partnership Principle was applied not only to identify priorities of ESF in the PA, but also during the development of the systems to be used for managing the Agreement and the individual programmes. This included consultation with experts involved in the implementation of the Funds, but also the general public, through an electronic questionnaire.

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<sup>102</sup> European Parliament, 2015, Research for Regi Committee - Review of The Adopted Partnership Agreements. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/563393/IPOL\\_STU\(2015\)563393\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/563393/IPOL_STU(2015)563393_EN.pdf) and European Commission, 2016 Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/policy/how/studies\\_integration/impl\\_partner\\_report\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/how/studies_integration/impl_partner_report_en.pdf)

<sup>103</sup> European Commission, 2016 Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds.

Nevertheless, stakeholders consulted throughout the evaluation research consistently called for better engagement with partners in the design of ESF TO10 actions. Consultees often referred to the **lack of 'meaningful' or 'substantial' partner involvement** in designing ESF TO10 actions. Several interviewed stakeholders spoke of not being given enough time to provide meaningful input, not being given the right information, and not having a real opportunity to engage in serious exchanges with public authorities on programme design. Some NGOs spoke of the consultation exercise at the design of PAs as 'merely a formal exercise' without meaningful impact on the design of actions and their relevance to target groups and needs<sup>104</sup>.

Results of the aforementioned European Commission study broadly confirm this. A significant number of partners (around 20% of partners surveyed) answered 'Hardly' or 'Not at all' to the question on whether the timeframe in which documents have been provided was sufficient to provide meaningful inputs. 21% of partners surveyed also indicated having almost no time for public consultation for programmes<sup>105</sup>. A **lack of flexibility** to take on broad stakeholder views in planned operations was also referred to several times by consultees interviewed for the study. Another issue raised in particular by social partners – employers and trade unions alike – was the **lack of capacity-building** of partners and beneficiaries. Social partners spoke of the importance of increasing capacity building of national, regional, and sectoral social partners to enable them to properly engage with ESF programme design and implementation and thus improve relevance to target groups and their needs. A European Parliament study on beneficiaries' experience with the ESF confirmed this, showing that only half of the Member States mentioned capacity building measures in their PAs and OPs, and planned tools mainly focused on training, and the provision of guidance materials<sup>106</sup>.

These findings suggest that whilst the partnership principle may have been broadly respected on paper, some **gaps remain in practice**, with some clear room for improving the way that consultation with key actors take place when designing ESF TO10 actions. The same can be said for the partnership principle **during the implementation** stage of ESF TO10 actions. According to the 2016 European Commission study 'Implementation of the partnership principle and multilevel governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds', the OPs did as a whole include plans to respect the Partnership Principle in the implementation of programmes and outline partners' involvement in monitoring and implementation. The study outlines that 85% of all programmes outlined partner involvement through a committee, with 27% of all programmes outlining partner involvement through other consultation actions<sup>107</sup>. However, many stakeholders interviewed – at both EU and national level – expressed

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<sup>104</sup> European Anti-Poverty Network, Structural Funds 2014-2020: What room for social inclusion and for the involvement of NGOs?, 2013

<sup>105</sup> European Commission, 2016 Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds.

<sup>106</sup> European Parliament, 2018, The European Social Fund: Beneficiaries' Experience in the Current Funding Period. Available at:

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/626052/IPOL\\_STU\(2018\)626052\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/626052/IPOL_STU(2018)626052_EN.pdf)

<sup>107</sup> European Commission, 2016 Implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 ESI Funds.

the view that **some relevant partners were not adequately involved, namely NGOs, trade unions and employers**. This was confirmed in the Policy Delphi consultation for all Investment Priorities as outlined in the answer to evaluation question 3.1(b) above, and is also supported by the findings of the aforementioned European Commission study which showed that **public authorities, especially from the national and regional levels, are generally overrepresented** in planned partnership activities at implementing level (committees and consultation actions) at the expense of the general public, civil society and social and economic partners<sup>108</sup>. Results of the Public Consultation also support this finding, as respondents suggested that **training institutions, vocational schools, employers, entrepreneurs, and local authorities could have an increased role** in the planning and implementation of education and training operations.

The study has found that diverse stakeholder involvement is important for ensuring relevance of planned operations to target group needs, as outlined in response to evaluation question 3.1(d). Both public and non-public stakeholders from EU and national level consulted in the framework of the case studies, the Policy Delphi and the targeted interviews, confirmed this. All respondents to the Policy Delphi on Investment Priority 10.ii, for example, highlighted the importance of consulting widely with stakeholders - national and regional public authorities, higher education institutions, rectors' conferences, national and European unions of students and trade unions - before developing new projects and initiatives to increase future relevance of operations. Respondents to the Policy Delphi for Investment Priority 10.iv also identified the development of sustainable partnerships between employers and education and training systems, for example through platforms like sectoral experts' councils, and promoting and supporting employees as learning ambassadors as a key need for increasing relevance. In light of this, the finding that consultation with key actors was not always adequately carried out, and could be improved in quality, diversity and frequency, suggests that **relevance to target group needs was partly weakened**. A more meaningful implementation of the partnership principle during design and implementation of ESF TO10 actions could therefore increase relevance further.

***Evaluation Question 3.3: To what extent were OPs flexible and able to adapt to changes in the implementation context or political priorities?***

**Key findings – EQ 3.3**

Evidence on the operational level shows that **where national/regional needs and/or priorities did change, OPs were able to adequately adapt**, either through smaller changes to planned priorities or through more substantial reprogramming of funds. There were very few examples of the ESF being unable to adapt to significantly altered implementation or political context.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

Evidence on the operational level also shows that **where national/regional needs and/or priorities did change, OPs were able to adequately adapt**. An increase in employment rates represented one of the key contextual changes that occurred throughout the programming period across all Member States. This had an impact on the relevance of certain ESF TO10 actions that had been initially designed under what was often a starkly different labour market situation. Planned actions were generally able to adapt to this. In **Ireland**, for example, it became harder to engage unemployed people in training programmes, with participation in these programmes lower than expected due to the declining rate of unemployment. The OP was adapted to address this: following the national mid-term evaluation of the ESF programme, ESF funds for training for the unemployed (IP10.ii) were reallocated to operations to promote adult literacy under IP10.iii. In **Portugal**, the OP Human Capital was reprogrammed in 2018 to allocate increased funding to operations targeting low-skilled adults, which had been less of a priority in initial programming given the strong focus on operations for the unemployed at the start of the period. In **Lithuania**, the OP was reprogrammed partially to take into account developments in preschool education actions, and to adapt to the ongoing education reform in the country.

Other **country-specific changes also prompted adaptation to OPs**. In **Spain**, the national OP was reprogrammed in December 2018 to allocate funding to specific objectives not initially programmed under TO10 but in increasing need of support, such as the prevention of early school leaving at primary school level, where a new measure was introduced targeting pupils and teachers. The flexibility of the OP was deemed even higher, given the fact that changes in political priorities is a complex undertaking for Spain due to its strong regional governance which requires it to deal with multiple administrative levels, actors and implementation modalities.

Similar adaptation was evident across other countries. For example, in **Austria**, over the course of implementation, the Austrian authorities put additional emphasis on disadvantaged women as part of IP10.iii. In **Lithuania**, the OP was revised to make TO10 indicators more relevant to the evolving pre-school education needs in the country, with a new indicator added to measure the number of upgraded preschool and pre-primary settings to the OP to reflect this. In **Denmark**, operations to increase attractiveness of VET were found to not be adequately targeting students in post-secondary level of education and were also amended. In **Portugal**, under the regional OP Norte, adult training courses were adapted to be delivered in the evening instead of during the day, as participants were increasingly likely to be employed and unable to attend classes during working hours – something which had not been the case at the planning of the operation. An example from **Germany** is presented in Box 25 below.

### **Box 25 Germany – adapting to new target group need**

#### Germany – adapting to new target group need

In Germany, the regional OP for Mecklenburg-Vorpommern was reprogrammed to allow resources to be much more intensively targeted to the refugees and migrants that had come into the region from 2015 onwards. This heavily enhanced the relevance of ESF TO10 operations, particularly on the local level.

In summary, it is clear from the above evidence that ESF planned operations remained relevant in many cases to the needs of target groups, and that OPs were generally flexible and adaptable enough to ensure this where needed. There is still, however, **some evidence of new needs and related target groups that emerged throughout the programming period but that were not sufficiently targeted** by actions under ESF TO10.

The mapping undertaken for the evaluation (see Annex 1.1) identified several countries where this was the case. In the **UK**, the adult participation rate in lifelong learning fell slowly but consistently between 2013 and 2018 with a 2018 rate higher than the EU average, yet ESF TO10 actions were not adjusted to reflect this. In **Denmark, Sweden** and **Estonia**, early school leaving emerged as a problem after programming in 2014, yet the focus on this target group remains limited in the respective countries' ESF TO10 actions. In Estonia, other emerging challenges that remained unaddressed include an increase in gender inequality in education, with a widening gap between males and females in recent years. Evidence from the case studies (see Annex 1.4) also shows that some gaps did emerge throughout the programming period. Stakeholders in the UK, for example, referring to the ESF OP for England, held the view that ESF operations did not adapt to the increasingly common phenomenon of precarious employment, despite reports of participants graduating from ESF operations into precarious employment, leading to in-work poverty.

Specific reasons as to why planned actions were not adapted to enhance relevance are very context-dependant, and thus vary across Member States that made such choices. Political priorities at national level were mentioned in the case studies (see Annex 1.4) and by national stakeholders consulted (see Annex 2) as a key influence on whether planned actions changed in response to changing needs, as highlighted above. Issues related to the administrative burden of adapting OPs also emerged but infrequently. In **Poland**, for example, the strict ministerial guidelines and procedures required to make more substantial changes to the OP (such as adding an intervention or a new specific target group) were cited by stakeholders as the reason the OP was not adapted to respond to the emerging needs of migrant and refugee populations (despite the political will to do so).

#### 4.4. Coherence

##### ***Evaluation question 4: Coherence: How coherent are the operations funded by Thematic Objective 10 among themselves and with other actions in the same field?***

###### **Key findings on coherence**

Coherence analyses linkages, synergies and potential duplication with related EU, national and regional policies, instruments, initiatives, and recommendations (policy and programme coherence). Based on the evidence gathered throughout the course of the evaluation research, **the ESF operations funded under TO10 display overall a good degree of internal and external coherence.** There is nonetheless some variation in the degree of coherence according to the Member State considered and in relation to the different types of funds, policies and priorities concerned. Challenges have also emerged in relation to implementation of actions combining certain different funding mechanisms.

**ESF TO10 interventions are overall well aligned with other EU policies in the field of education and training, including the ET 2020 strategic framework,** as well as new policies and policy priorities which have emerged since 2014, including the Digital Education Action Plan<sup>109</sup>, the Council Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems<sup>110</sup> and the education priorities of the Action Plan for the Integration of third country nationals<sup>111</sup>, which emerged in response to the 2015 migrant crisis. There is evidence, in the form of ESF-funded operations, that ESF has supported the concrete implementation of these policies on the ground.

**Investments under TO10 also contribute well to the objectives of other EU initiatives** including the New Skills Agenda for Europe<sup>112</sup>, particular via the interventions funded under IPs 10.iii and 10.iv. Due principally to the national focus of ESF, few of the operations funded by ESF TO10 use the EU policy tools (e.g. EQF<sup>113</sup>, ECVET<sup>114</sup>, EQAVET<sup>115</sup>); nonetheless, analysis of the texts providing a legal basis for these tools suggests some alignment between the objectives which are mutually reinforcing, for example in promoting flexible and individualised pathways or strengthening VET provision.

**There is overall good internal coherence between operations funded by ESF TO10 and other ESF-funded Thematic Objectives (TOs)** (in particular TOs 8 and 9), between Investment Priorities (IPs) within TO10, and between national and regional OPs. Coherence between TOs is good, particularly in the legal texts and at programming stage. Although there are also many good examples of coherence in implementation, **there have been some**

<sup>109</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/digital-education-action-plan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/digital-education-action-plan_en)

<sup>110</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A52018DC0271>

<sup>111</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/proposal-implementation-package/docs/20160607/communication\\_action\\_plan\\_integration\\_third-country\\_nationals\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/proposal-implementation-package/docs/20160607/communication_action_plan_integration_third-country_nationals_en.pdf)

<sup>112</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52016DC0381>

<sup>113</sup> COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 22 May 2017 on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and repealing the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9620-2017-INIT/en/pdf>

<sup>114</sup> RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32009H0708\(02\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32009H0708(02)&from=EN)

<sup>115</sup> RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32009H0708\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32009H0708(01)&from=EN)

**challenges**, which may have limited the synergies between operations under different Thematic Objectives in certain Member States, with some potential overlaps. **Coherence between Investment Priorities within ESF TO10 is overall very strong.** The sectoral focus of the different IPs has helped to ensure clarity of scope and coherence between the different levels and types of education and training. Although there is some slight blurring of the distinction across different Member States between IPs 10.iii and 10.iv, there was no evidence of overlaps. Key factors contributing to internal coherence included: rigorous planning at programming stage, ensuring alignment with CSRs and national strategies and good coordination and communication between authorities managing different TOs/IPs/OPs. Factors which hindered internal coherence included insufficiently comprehensive planning, insufficient coordination, over-separation of management responsibilities, and weak intersectoral cooperation.

**Coherence with other EU funding instruments is more mixed.** While there is often a good degree of coherence with other EU funding instruments in the legal texts, evidence of synergies and coherence in implementation varies. Whereas there are many examples – at OP and operation level – of coherence of ESF with the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)<sup>116</sup> and Erasmus+<sup>117</sup>, there are much more limited examples for the other European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF)<sup>118</sup> and other funding instruments such as the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)<sup>119</sup> or the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions (MSCA)<sup>120</sup>. Where interventions do combine funding, challenges have been highlighted in terms of articulating different funding instruments which limit potential synergies.

**There is overall good coherence across the EU between the ESF TO10 operations and the priorities, analyses and country specific recommendations (CSRs)<sup>121</sup> from the European Semester<sup>122</sup>.** The CSRs in the field of education and training are generally reflected well in the situation analyses of the Partnership Agreements, in the TO10 funding priorities of national and regional Operational Programmes, and – ultimately – in the operations implemented. Despite overall good coherence, the degree does however vary in different Member States and for different IPs. Fulfilling the ESF ex-ante conditionalities did lead to structural reforms in the field of education and training in some Member States, e.g. Czech Republic, Estonia, or Greece. In Portugal, the ex-ante conditionalities did lead to some alignment with EU policy tools.

Our study concludes that there is **generally strong coherence between the investments under ESF TO10 and other activities supporting education and training at national and regional level.** In addition to the close links to national needs and priorities driven by European Semester process, evidence from all the national ESF evaluations dealing with

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<sup>116</sup> REGULATION (EU) No 1301/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 December 2013 on the European Regional Development Fund and on specific provisions concerning the Investment for growth and jobs goal and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013R1301&from=en>

<sup>117</sup> REGULATION (EU) No 1288/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 11 December 2013 establishing 'Erasmus+' the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport and repealing Decisions No 1719/2006/EC, No 1720/2006/EC and No 1298/2008/EC, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013R1288&from=EN>

<sup>118</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/funding/](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding/)

<sup>119</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/financing/fundings/migration-asylum-borders/asylum-migration-integration-fund/union-actions\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/financing/fundings/migration-asylum-borders/asylum-migration-integration-fund/union-actions_en)

<sup>120</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/research/mariecurieactions/node\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/research/mariecurieactions/node_en)

<sup>121</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/eu-economic-governance-monitoring-prevention-correction/european-semester/european-semester-timeline/eu-country-specific-recommendations\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/eu-economic-governance-monitoring-prevention-correction/european-semester/european-semester-timeline/eu-country-specific-recommendations_en)

<sup>122</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/eu-economic-governance-monitoring-prevention-correction/european-semester\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/eu-economic-governance-monitoring-prevention-correction/european-semester_en)

coherence confirmed this alignment. This coherence was further confirmed by the majority of the case studies, targeted consultations, and the results of the Public Consultation. Greater coherence could however be achieved through wider involvement of national/regional stakeholders in ESF (including labour market actors and target groups), as well as through better coordination of policies and actions at national/regional level.

***Evaluation Question 4.1: Were ESF interventions in line with EU policies on education and training? To which extent did they contribute to the implementation of EU education and training policies? To which extent are the investments under T010 contributing to other EU initiatives such as the New Skills Agenda for Europe? To what extent did they take advantage of or were aligned to EU policy tools, such as the Europass documents, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), the European Quality Assurance Framework in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) and the European Credit transfer system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)?***

#### Key findings – EQ 4.1

**ESF T010 operations are in line with the key EU policies on education and training.**

This alignment holds true across the different education sectors (i.e. schools, early childhood education and care (ECEC), higher education, vocational education and training (VET), adult learning). **The significant funds provided by ESF T010 have in many cases been instrumental in ensuring the implementation of these policies on the ground**, even though many were published after the beginning of the ESF programming period. Our evaluation also found that **ESF T010 is contributing effectively to other key EU initiatives, such as the New Skills Agenda for Europe<sup>123</sup>**. There is also **alignment in the legal texts with the objectives of policy tools** (such as EQF<sup>124</sup>, ECVET<sup>125</sup>, Europass<sup>126</sup> and EQAVET<sup>127</sup>), **but these are rarely cited or referred to in ESF-funded operations**, largely due to the national focus of ESF, and thus coherence is weaker in implementation.

The different strands of research conducted for the evaluation have provided a range of evidence in relation to the alignment between ESF T010 interventions and EU education and training policies, initiatives, and tools. We set out below a summary of the main evidence, including desk-based analysis of the alignment of legal texts, findings from targeted and Public Consultations, the case studies and evidence of implementation of aligned ESF operations on the ground for:

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<sup>123</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52016DC0381>

<sup>124</sup> COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 22 May 2017 on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and repealing the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9620-2017-INIT/en/pdf>

<sup>125</sup> RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32009H0708\(02\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32009H0708(02)&from=EN)

<sup>126</sup> <https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/>

<sup>127</sup> RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32009H0708\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32009H0708(01)&from=EN)

- a) Key EU policies and initiatives, focusing on the ET 2020 strategic framework, the EU Digital Education Action Plan, the Council Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems and the Council Recommendation on Common values, the EU Action Plan for the Integration of Third Country Nationals and the New Skills Agenda for Europe;
- b) EU policy tools, focusing on EQF, ECVET and EQAVET.

#### **a) Alignment with key EU policies in education and training**

Our evaluation finds that there is good alignment between ESF TO10 and relevant EU policies in the field of education and training, across all education sectors (i.e. schools, early childhood education and care (ECEC), higher education, vocational education and training (VET), adult learning). The full range of policies are set out in section 2.2 of this report. While this alignment holds true across the range of policies, we present below some examples of specific policies as evidence.

- ***Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020)***

The Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020)<sup>128</sup> was set out in the Council Conclusions of 12 May 2009, establishing the joint priorities of the EU Member States for cooperation in the field of education and training; it was well established prior to the formulation of the ESF priorities for the 2014-2020 programming period. As a comprehensive overarching strategy for EU education and training, alignment with ESF TO10 (as well as wider ESF) is essential in order to ensure that cooperation at EU level and actions implemented at Member State level are acting in synergy. **Our evaluation finds good alignment between ET 2020 with the priorities of ESF TO10.**

Our analysis of the underpinning legal texts (please see Table 8.1 in Annex 1.1) finds **good alignment between ET 2020 and ESF TO10 across all strategic objectives**<sup>129</sup> of the ET 2020 strategic framework. There are only a **few exceptions** where a priority area from ET 2020 was not mentioned in the ESF regulation. Some of these exceptions are logical, such as the lack of a specific ESF focus on mobility of learners (part of ET 2020 strategic objective 1) or the development of linguistic competences (part of ET 2020 strategic objective 2) due to the primarily national focus of ESF. Other priorities (e.g. intercultural competences and creativity, part of strategic objective 3) are not explicitly mentioned in the ESF texts, however, can be considered to come broadly under other umbrella categories such as inclusive education or innovation. A focus on these areas can also often be found in ESF Operational Programmes at national or regional level. In addition, there is **close alignment with the ET 2020 benchmarks across all areas except mobility.**

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<sup>128</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52009XG0528\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52009XG0528(01))

<sup>129</sup> (1) Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality; (2) Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training; (3) Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship; (4) Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training

Stakeholders interviewed as part of the targeted consultations often in particular underlined that there are good synergies between ESF TO10 and the ET 2020 strategy, with their objectives well aligned on policy issues. Some also highlighted examples (e.g. in Portugal) where **'the system works well', with the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) generating new ideas from policy exchanges, which can then be piloted using the ESF**. However, stakeholders in general felt that there were insufficient links between the ET 2020 OMC (in particular the ET 2020 Working Groups), underlining that ET 2020 Working Group experts were often unaware of the support which could be provided by ESF TO10 and that the Working Group discussions rarely focused on this support. These **synergies could be enhanced by creating more transparent links between the two processes and awareness-raising for stakeholders involved in each**.

- ***EU Digital Education Plan***

The **EU Digital Education Action Plan<sup>130</sup> is clearly aligned with the interventions eligible for funding under ESF TO10**. For example: Actions 1 to 3 aim to make better use of digital technology for teaching and learning, which can be supported under all of the ESF TO10 IPs (depending on the education sector concerned); Action 4 (Higher Education Hub) is aligned with IP10.ii; and Action 6 (EU code week in schools) and Action 8 (Training in digital and entrepreneurial skills for girls) are aligned with IP10.i, since it focuses on primary and secondary education. One example of a large ESF operation focused on training in digital skills for girls is the ADA project run by the Women's Institute in Spain<sup>131</sup>. The Action Plan also aligns with article 3 (para 2) of the ESF regulation 2014-2020 which states that ESF TO10 IPs should also contribute to 'Enhancing the accessibility of, and use and quality of, information and communication technologies through the development of digital literacy and e-learning, and investment in e-inclusion, e-skills and related entrepreneurial skills'.

Reflecting this alignment, our study has shown that there are several major ESF TO10 interventions supporting digital education which are clearly in line with the EU Digital Education Action Plan, including the 180 million EUR 'e-Schools' initiative in Croatia<sup>132</sup> (see Box 26 below and Box A5-12 in Annex 5), the 78 million EUR 'Bridging the Digital Gap' operation in Hungary<sup>133</sup>, and the €73 million 'Encouraging young people to pursue IT' in Poland<sup>134</sup>.

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<sup>130</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/digital-education-action-plan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/digital-education-action-plan_en)

<sup>131</sup> <https://bit.ly/2X4rCd5>; <http://www.inmujer.gob.es/areasTematicas/SocInfo/Programas/Ada.htm>

<sup>132</sup> <https://www.e-skole.hr/en/>

<sup>133</sup> [https://www.nive.hu/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=641#system-messagecontainer](https://www.nive.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=641#system-messagecontainer);  
[https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/filedepot\\_download/1145/2266](https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/filedepot_download/1145/2266)

<sup>134</sup> [www.pwsz.elblag.pl/projekty.html](http://www.pwsz.elblag.pl/projekty.html)

### **Box 26 Croatia - e-schools: complete computerisation of school and teaching processes to create digitally mature schools for the 21st century**

Croatia - e-schools: complete computerisation of school and teaching processes to create digitally mature schools for the 21st century

ESF TO10 has provided comprehensive support to the digitalisation of Croatian schools, focusing on the inclusion of ICT in teaching and learning, as well as teacher education and support. ESF-funded among others the creation of digital educational content, the re-design of the e-Laboratory for testing and developing digital tools, teacher education and the creation of a framework of digital competences for pupils. The pilot phase (2015-2018) was implemented in 151 elementary and high schools in Croatia, involving over 7,000 teachers and more than 23,000 pupils. The second phase (2018-2022) will build on the experiences and tools of the pilot phase.

- ***Council Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems***

Our study also finds that **ESF TO10 is clearly aligned with the Council Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems**<sup>135</sup>. IP10.i of ESF TO10 focuses among others on 'promoting equal access to good quality early-childhood [...] education', corresponding to the first recommendation cited in the Council Recommendation: 'improve access to high-quality early childhood education and care systems'. In addition, IP10.iii includes a focus on 'upgrading the knowledge, skills and competences of the workforce', which aligns with the third recommendation: 'support the professionalisation of early childhood education and care staff, including leaders'.

ESF TO10 funds major initiatives in the field of early childhood education and care (ECEC) aligned with the Council Recommendation. Examples include the operations in Hungary and Slovakia promoting access to ECEC for Roma pre-school children, for example the 'Support for pre-primary education of children from marginalised Roma communities'<sup>136</sup> operation in Slovakia (see Box 27 below), or the SEK 30 million operation in Sweden on 'Skills enhancement for preschool teachers'<sup>137</sup> (see Box A5-29 in Annex 5).

### **Box 27 Slovakia – Support for pre-primary education of children from marginalised Roma communities (PRIM)**

Slovakia – Support for pre-primary education of children from marginalised Roma communities (*Projekt Inklúzie v Materských školách - PRIM*)

The objective of this ESF operation was to increase kindergarten attendance by children from marginalised Roma communities by creating an inclusive environment (establishing inclusive teams involving additional teachers and professional staff) and working with families whose children are not yet attending kindergartens. The project is open to 150

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<sup>135</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/council-recommendation-on-high-quality-early-childhood-education-and-care-systems\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/council-recommendation-on-high-quality-early-childhood-education-and-care-systems_en)

<sup>136</sup> <http://www.minv.sk/?narodny-projekt-prim-projekt-inkluzie-v-materskych-skolach>

<sup>137</sup> <https://www.esf.se/Resultat/Projektbanken-2014-2020/Alla-Projekt/Spangen/>

municipalities and has been implemented by the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government for Roma Communities.

- **Council Recommendation on Common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching**

ESF TO10 is also **broadly in line with the Council Recommendation on Common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching**<sup>138</sup>. For example, the focus of IP10.i on 'reducing and preventing early school leaving and promoting equal access to good quality early-childhood, primary and secondary education including formal, non-formal and informal learning pathways for reintegrating into education and training', and that of IP10.ii on supporting disadvantaged groups in participation and attainment in tertiary education are in clear alignment with the Recommendation's focus on inclusive education (recommendation 4: 'promote inclusive education for all learners'). The ESF target groups, set out in article 2 of the ESF regulation, include a particular focus on disadvantaged people<sup>139</sup> which also corresponds to the focus on inclusive education in the Recommendation.

ESF TO10 however **aligns less with certain aspects of the Recommendation, such as the focus on promoting a European dimension of teaching** (recommendation 6). It is of interest to note that the Recommendation does clearly state (recommendation 11) that effective use should be made of EU funding instruments including European Structural and Investment Funds.

Our research has shown that ESF TO10 has supported operations in line with this Council Recommendation, for example the EUR 120 million ESF TO10-funded initiative in Italy to implement citizenship education programmes in primary and secondary schools in Italy<sup>140</sup>, or the EUR 1 million 'Only (with) others are we'<sup>141</sup> operation in Slovenia (see Box 28 below).

### **Box 28 Slovenia – Only (with) others are we**

Slovenia – Only (with) others are we

ESF TO10 has supported the 'Only (with) others are we' (*Le z drugimi smo*) operation, with the aim of training 10 000 expert workers and leaders at all levels in social and civic intercultural competencies in order to boost acceptance of diversity, to support faster identification of potential conflict situations and to develop intercultural relations. The participants are taught how to include this approach in any lesson.

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<sup>138</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/council-recommendation-on-common-values-inclusive-education-and-the-european-dimension-of-teaching\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/council-recommendation-on-common-values-inclusive-education-and-the-european-dimension-of-teaching_en)

<sup>139</sup> Regulation (EU) no. 1304/2013, article 2, para 3: 'The ESF shall benefit people, including disadvantaged people such as the long-term unemployed, people with disabilities, migrants, ethnic minorities, marginalised communities and people of all ages facing poverty and social exclusion'

<sup>140</sup> [https://www.istruzione.it/allegati/2014/PON\\_14-20.pdf](https://www.istruzione.it/allegati/2014/PON_14-20.pdf)

<sup>141</sup> See: <https://isim.zrc-sazu.si/en/programi-in-projekti/only-with-others-are-we> and <https://lezdrugimismo.si/sl/predstavitev-projekta-katalog-zgibanka>

- ***Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals***

Although the migrant crisis did not occur until 2015 (after the beginning of the ESF programming period), the scope of ESF TO10 has also been sufficiently broad to allow the funding of operations targeting the integration of migrants into education and training. **There is sufficient alignment between the ESF regulation and the priorities for education in the Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals<sup>142</sup> to allow ESF funding.** Alignment can be identified in several areas including the following: the ESF regulation (article 2, paragraph 3) specifically mentions that 'ESF shall benefit people, including disadvantaged people such as [...] migrants'; the priority on access to ECEC for migrants links to the focus of IP10.i on 'Promoting equal access to good quality early-childhood [...] education'; the focus on upskilling of low-skilled workers corresponds to IP10.iii: 'Enhancing equal access to lifelong learning' and 'Upgrading the knowledge, skills and competences of the workforce'; and the Action Plan explicitly calls for the use of ESF funding to support the integration of migrants.

This alignment has been demonstrated by an important number of ESF operations which have been implemented to support the integration of migrants into the education and training system since the migrant crisis in 2015. Examples include the Irish 'Support for businesses and government raising migrants' skills' or the 'Yrk In' operation in Sweden.

- ***New Skills Agenda for Europe***

An analysis of the legal texts shows that **there is strong alignment between the New Skills Agenda for Europe<sup>143</sup> and ESF TO10.** The Communication on the New Skills Agenda specifically mentions in its introduction that ESF will 'inject over EUR 30 billion to support skills development in the period 2014-2020'. Its actions<sup>144</sup> are clearly aligned with ESF TO10. In particular, IP10.iii (lifelong learning) aligns with Action 1 (Upskilling pathways: new opportunities for adults) and IP10.iv (labour market relevance) aligns with Action 6 (VET) and Action 4 (Blueprint for sectoral cooperation on skills).

Reflecting this alignment, many of the operations funded by ESF TO10 are in line with the objectives of the New Skills Agenda: most of such operations are funded under IP10.iii and IP10.iv. The Skills Agenda was one of the EU policies cited by some respondents to the open responses to the Public Consultation (see Annex 3) relating to coherence with ESF TO10 funding. As identified in the country mapping (see Annex 1.1), several Member States focus their ESF TO10 funding on promoting lifelong learning and the development of new skills for disadvantaged adults in line with the Upskilling Pathways dimension of the New Skills Agenda, e.g. Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, France, Hungary, Luxembourg, Slovenia. Examples of Austrian and Slovenian ESF operations promoting upskilling are presented in Box 29 and Box 30 below.

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<sup>142</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52016DC0377>

<sup>143</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52016DC0381>

<sup>144</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223>

### **Box 29 Austria – You can do something (*Du kannst was*)**

#### Austria – You can do something (*Du kannst was*)

In Land Salzburg, the ESF-funded 'You can do something' operation enables participants to obtain formal recognition for previously acquired vocational skills and experience, as well as to obtain vocational qualifications. It targets employees with poorly recognised qualifications who are at high risk of unemployment and fall under the category of 'working poor'. After assessing their skills and needs, participants attend a variety of workshops and training sessions in order to acquire their missing competences and finalise their vocational training.

### **Box 30 Slovenia – Programmes for acquiring basic and professional competences**

#### Slovenia – Programmes for acquiring basic and professional competences

This Slovenian ESF operation finances the implementation of programmes for acquiring basic and professional competences, targeting primarily adults who are less qualified, less educated, with a focus on those over 45 years of age who have the greatest need to acquire new knowledge and skills to allow them to (re-)enter and adapt to labour market needs. The programmes range from programmes achieving basic competencies, computer literacy to language skill. Provision of counselling is integrated into all the programmes.

Some Member States, such as Germany, also use ESF TO10 funding to support the skills profiling of migrants which corresponds to Action 5 (EU skills profile tool for third country nationals) of the New Skills Agenda; for example the 'B3 Education and Consultation' ESF operation<sup>145</sup> in Baden-Württemberg (see Box 20 above) helps migrants with education-related degrees to have their qualifications recognised.

There is also an important focus on digital upskilling for workers, particularly older workers, in ESF TO10 operations in several Member States, corresponding to Action 3 (Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition) of the New Skills Agenda. One example is the Luxembourg 'Digital Skills Bridge' (see Box 31 below).

### **Box 31 Luxembourg - Digital Skills Bridge**

#### Luxembourg – Digital Skills Bridge

The Ministry of Labour and the Employment Agency ADEM launched the pilot project 'Luxembourg Digital Skills Bridge' with ESF support in May 2018. Its aim is to support companies (irrespective of their size or sector) and their employees that are substantially affected by a major technological change, including digital transition. The employees concerned can acquire new digital and other competences and receive specialised advice to identify a new job, follow an accelerated certified training and settle into the new job. Social partners are involved in the requalification process.

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<sup>145</sup> <https://www.netzwerk-iq-bw.de/de/>

b) **Alignment with EU policy tools in education and training**

**Very few of the ESF TO10 operations specifically mention EU policy tools related to education and training** (e.g. EQF, ECVET, EQAVET), beyond reference to specific qualification levels (EQF levels). Most consultees were also unable to express an opinion on the coherence with these tools. Some alignment was found however: in Cyprus for example, the new VET curricula and quality frameworks, developed thanks to funding from ESF TO10, are based on ECVET and EQAVET.

**Analysis of the texts providing a legal basis for these tools however underline the alignment between the mutually supporting objectives of the tools and ESF TO10:**

- The Recommendation underpinning the **European Qualifications Framework (EQF)**<sup>146</sup> refers for example to 'facilitating flexible learning pathways and transfer across different levels and types of education and training' (§16) which corresponds to the focus under IP10.iii on 'promoting flexible pathways'. The goal of 'supporting the validation of learning outcomes' (§4) aligns with the focus of IP10.iii on 'validation of acquired competences';
- The Recommendation establishing the **European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)**<sup>147</sup> similarly aligns with the focus of IP10.iii on 'validation of acquired competences' (see e.g. §8). The Recommendation also states (§8) that ECVET should 'particularly facilitate the development of flexible and individualised pathways and also the recognition of those learning outcomes which are acquired through non-formal and informal learning', aligning closely with the focus of IP10.iii on 'promoting flexible pathways' and the focus of IP10.i on 'non-formal and informal learning pathways for reintegrating into education and training';
- The Recommendation establishing the **European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET)**<sup>148</sup> is designed to introduce a framework and review mechanism to improve the quality of VET across the EU, which aligns closely with the focus of IP10.iv on 'strengthening vocational education and training systems and their quality'.

**The texts underpinning these policy tools however differ from ESF TO10 in their focus on ensuring the transparency and mutual recognition of qualifications across borders in a context of transnational mobility**, which is neither a primary focus of ESF nor specifically mentioned in relation to ESF TO10.

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<sup>146</sup> COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 22 May 2017 on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and repealing the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9620-2017-INIT/en/pdf>

<sup>147</sup> RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32009H0708\(02\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32009H0708(02)&from=EN)

<sup>148</sup> RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32009H0708\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32009H0708(01)&from=EN)

Some ESF TO10 operations do use national qualification frameworks aligned with EQF such as the German B3 operation cited above. Similarly, many operations under IP10.iv are focused on the improving of the quality of VET and VET curricula or frameworks at national level, in line with the goals of ECVET and EQAVET. Case studies conducted for the evaluation have also revealed that the **ESF ex-ante conditionalities have ensured some degree of alignment with these EU policy tools in certain Member States**, for example in the Portuguese Human Capital OP (see Box 32 below and case study in Annex 1.4).

### Box 32 Portugal – Thematic OP alignment with EU policy tools

#### Portugal – National OP alignment with EU policy tools

In Portugal, due to the need to ensure compliance with ESF ex-ante conditionalities, EQF alignment was achieved by 2019; schools are also being funded with ESF so that they can be granted the certification of alignment with the European system. Alignment with EQAVET and ECVET only became possible during the implementation period and, although not yet concluded for all sectoral areas, is making progress.

The overall lack of explicit reference to the EU policy tools in most ESF-funded operations is in marked contrast to projects funded under Erasmus+ or other funding for transnational projects (e.g. Horizon 2020) which often do include explicit reference to alignment with EU policy tools such as ECVET, EQAVET and EQF (e.g. the Erasmus+-funded ArtTS<sup>149</sup> or the Skill-Me projects<sup>150</sup>). It is likely that this reflects the greater immediate relevance of these EU policy tools for transnational projects given the need to align approaches and learning outcomes across several countries, whereas ESF-funded projects are almost exclusively focused on one Member State.

***Evaluation question 4.2: Were the ESF operations of TO10 complementary with each other and with interventions under other Thematic Objectives? What were the main factors fostering and/or hindering complementarity?***

#### Key findings – EQ 4.2

**The internal coherence between operations funded by ESF TO10 and other ESF-funded Thematic Objectives (in particular TOs 8 and 9) is overall good, particularly in the legal texts and at programming level.** There are also many good examples of coherence at implementation level; however, **there have been some challenges in implementation which may have limited the synergies** between operations in certain Member States, and **some potential for overlaps. Coherence between Investment Priorities within ESF TO10 is overall very strong.** The sectoral focus of the different IPs has helped to ensure clarity of scope and coherence between the different levels and types of education and training. Although there is some slight blurring of the distinction across different Member States between IPs 10.iii and 10.iv, there is no evidence of overlaps. **Key factors contributing to internal coherence** included rigorous planning at programming stage, ensuring alignment with CSRs and national strategies, and good coordination and

<sup>149</sup> <http://www.arts-project.eu/> ; <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplplus-project-details/#project/554288-EPP-1-2014-1-EL-EPPKA2-SSA>

<sup>150</sup> <https://www.gzs.si/skill-me> ; <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplplus-project-details/#project/554370-EPP-1-2014-1-SI-EPPKA2-SSA>

communication between authorities managing different TOs/IPs/OPs. **Factors which hindered internal coherence** included insufficiently comprehensive planning, insufficient coordination, over-separation of management responsibilities, and weak intersectoral

In terms of the scope of the support set out by the ESF regulation 2014-2020, the objectives of TO10 are complementary to those in the other ESF Thematic Objectives, particularly TO8 (Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility) and TO9 (Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination). We set out below the evidence of coherence based on legal analysis (what the regulations say), then on examples from programming and implementation.

Legal analysis of the texts (see Table 8.2 in Annex 1.1) shows that **there is a high degree of coherence between the objectives and scope of TO8 and TO10**, with TO10 interventions providing the mechanisms for education and training of different groups, including the unemployed and workers, in order to enhance their employability and opportunities for access to quality employment, of particular relevance to IPs 8.i, 8.ii, 8.v and 8.vi (in relation to older workers). There is more limited complementarity with IP8.vii (modernisation of labour market institutions), although workforce training operations under IP10.iii and IP10.iv could also contribute to retraining staff in these institutions. **No overlaps are evident between TO10 and TO8 at the legal level.**

Similarly, our analysis of the regulations (see Table 8.3 in Annex 1.1) shows that there is also a **very good level of coherence between TO10 and several IPs under TO9**. ESF TO10 includes a focus on enhancing employability through education and training, corresponding to key aspects of IPs 9.i and 9.v, and on ensuring the access (or re-integration) of disadvantaged groups to quality education and training, corresponding to key aspects of IPs 9.ii and 9.iii. There is less obvious coherence with IP9.iv focusing on access to services. As for TO8, while there is good complementarity, there is no evidence of duplication at the legal level.

This **good degree of coherence with TOs 8 and 9 is also evident at the programming stage**. In targeted consultations, the majority of stakeholders confirmed this analysis, expressing the view that there was generally a strong level of coherence between TO10 and the other ESF Thematic Objectives at the programming stage. The European Commission confirmed that this coherence is checked within each draft Partnership Agreement, which helps to ensure complementarity at the planning stage.

Evidence from our mapping analysis (see Annex 1.1) backs up the views of the stakeholders, showing overall a good degree of internal coherence at programming stage between operations funded by TO10, and with those funded by TO8 and TO9 (and TO11 where relevant). This internal coherence with other Thematic Objectives was for example underlined in the country mapping in Member States including Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland (in which the coherence with TO11 was also mentioned), Spain and the UK.

Some consulted stakeholders did however suggest that **coherence could be enhanced in implementation**. Suggestions included involving stakeholders more in the design and implementation to **develop holistic operations that address all TOs**.

Some EU stakeholders also underlined the importance of enhancing the link between the European Semester and the use of funding to ensure coherence across the ESF; the process used under the last European Semester (in Annex D of the 2019 Country Reports) to link investments to priorities highlighted in CSRs was welcomed in this respect.

In terms of implementation, the evaluation has shown that **coherence has proven generally to be stronger with TO8, particularly (but not only) in relation to youth employment, with some potential for overlaps**. Several operations relating to training for young people also refer to YEI or TO8 funding; the Irish national evaluation of TO10<sup>151</sup> underlines for example the coherence with YEI. The Italian evaluation of ESF TO10 IP10.iv in the Regional OP for Lombardia also highlights that the ESF contribution to vocational education in TO10 is coherent with TO8, as do certain case studies (see Annex 1.4), for example that relating to the ESF regional OP in Pomorskie Voivodeship. The Slovenian case study also identifies complementarity with TO8, particularly IP8.iii (active and healthy ageing), in operations such as financial incentives for companies to develop strategies and innovative solutions to enhance the productivity and efficiency competencies of older employees<sup>152</sup> as well as promotional campaigns for reducing/eliminating intergenerational stereotypes and promoting intergenerational cooperation in the workplace (titled 'Generation Management')<sup>153</sup>.

Coherence with TO9 at implementation level tends to depend on the type of intervention; for example, active inclusion operations as well as operations for inclusion of the Roma population often have close coherence with TO10, while access to services has less of a direct link. Certain types of operations could be found under either TOs 10 or 9, and this tended to depend on the focus of OPs in different Member States/regions e.g. access for Roma to ECEC.

Issues were raised in some Member States, e.g. France, in relation to coherence with TO8 and TO9 due to difficulties in relationships with stakeholders involved in their implementation. Some targeted consultations also underlined that, while coherent, there were sometimes limited synergies between the different TOs: one EU stakeholder stated that the actors involved in TO8 and TO10 came from 'different worlds', while a national stakeholder highlighted that 'there was limited overlap as the target groups are distinct'.

The case studies (see Annex 1.4) allow a further exploration of the relationships between the Thematic Objectives. In the Portuguese national OP case study for example, the coherence between TO10 and TO8 and TO9 is deemed strong by all stakeholders interviewed, with boundaries clearly established through preparatory work, and major overlaps prevented by the coordination work established within the

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<sup>151</sup> POBAL (2017), Kickboxing, Kindness and Going the Extra Mile

<sup>152</sup> Comprehensive Support Program for Business for the Active Aging of the Workforce, <http://www.sklad-kadri.si/si/razvoj-kadrov/celovita-podpora-podjetjem-za-aktivno-staranje-delovne-sile-asi/>

<sup>153</sup> Public call is available here: <https://www.podjetniski-portal.si/moj-spletni-prirocnik/26211-javni-razpis-za-sofinanciranje-projekta-komunikacijske-kampanje-za-zmanjsevanje-odpravljanje-medgeneracijskih-stereotipov-in-spodbujanje-medgeneracijskega-sodelovanja-na-delovnem-mestu>

scope of the Portugal 2020 strategy. The case study on the Portuguese OP Norte also underlines examples of good complementarity between specific TOs (see Box 33 below).

### **Box 33 Portugal OP Norte – examples of good coherence across TOs**

#### Portugal OP Norte – examples of good coherence across TOs

In the Portuguese OP Norte, there were several examples of complementarity and synergies between TO10 and other TOs. For example, in the doctoral programme +Superior (funded under TO10), support was provided for the hiring of highly qualified human resources under TO8. There is also good coherence between the TEIP (Educative territories of priority intervention) under TO10, and operations under TO9 such as the Local Contracts for Social Development and the 'Escolhas' Programme. Where these operations coincide in one territory, interventions are coordinated in order to maximise the investment and the results both in terms of education/training and (broader) social inclusion and employment.

There was a similar situation in West Wales and the Valleys, with several examples of good synergies across Thematic Objectives (see Box 34 below).

### **Box 34 West Wales and the Valleys OP (UK) – examples of good coherence across TOs**

#### West Wales and the Valleys OP (UK) – examples of good coherence across TOs

In West Wales, there is a good level of coherence between TO10 operations and other TOs. For example, the 'Working Skills for Adults' operation (TO10) runs joint activities with the Bridges to Work operation (TO8) and has put together a holistic intervention for participants. Similarly, the Cynnydd operation is linked to the 'TRAC 11-24' operation in North West Wales and the pan-Wales 'Inspire 2 Achieve' operation, which is similarly focused on young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET; beneficiaries of these operations often graduate to the nationwide apprenticeship and traineeship schemes.

However, in some Member States, the case studies highlight some challenges in terms of ensuring coherence between Thematic Objectives, as in Lithuania (see Box 35 below), where responsibilities for each Thematic Objective were overly separated.

### **Box 35 Lithuania – challenges in ensuring coherence between Thematic Objectives**

#### Lithuania – challenges in ensuring coherence between Thematic Objectives

In Lithuania, although TO10 is consistent with TO8 and TO9 and a lot of attention was paid to avoid duplication of activities and participants, in some cases the effort to clearly distinguish between TO activities and participants has nonetheless led to unforeseen negative consequences. For instance, investments in lifelong learning activities were split between three administration authorities (the Ministry of Social Security and Labour responsible for the group of the unemployed, the Ministry of the Economy and Innovation responsible for the workforce and the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports) in order to prevent the same person from participating in overlapping activities. This led however to some challenges in terms of ensuring a joined-up approach to ESF support for lifelong learning.

The Romanian case study also underlines that, despite good coherence between Thematic Objectives on paper, a lack of intersectoral cooperation and multisectoral policy programming means that issues such as enrolment in education and early school leaving for vulnerable groups, or adapting education systems to the needs of the labour market, are not addressed in a sufficiently joined-up manner.

Overall, the study found **good internal coherence between the different Investment Priorities (IPs) within T010**. The majority of consulted stakeholders and case study research emphasised that the sectoral focus of the different IPs helped to ensure clarity of scope and coherence between the different levels and types of education and training: pre-school and school education (IP10.i), higher education (IP10.ii), lifelong learning (IP10.iii) and vocational education and training (IP10.iv). The greatest overlap found (at a pan-European level) was between IPs 10.iii and 10.iv; in particular, VET-focused priorities and operations could be found under both, especially in relation to adult learners and workers. However, specific OPs generally used a clear logic for each (which varied according to the needs of the Member State or region), and there did not seem to be duplications or excessive blurring of the boundaries at this level.

On occasion, however, challenges in ensuring coherence were raised. In France for example, the Bretagne case study highlighted that there was limited coherence between the IPs (see Box 36 below).

#### **Box 36 France OP Bretagne – limited coherence between IPs**

##### France OP Bretagne – limited coherence between IPs

Under the global regional coherence frameworks (CPRDFOP<sup>154</sup> in particular), the qualifying training operations funded under IP 10.iii are theoretically articulated with those of the State and Pôle Emploi (national employment agency) on TO8 and General Councils on TO9. In practice however the concertation on the ground is rare and as limited as it is important on the guiding principles. It is hoped that the introduction of the Regional Skills Investment Plan (PACTE) will make this cooperation will be more concrete.

The Portuguese case study also underlined challenges in terms of potential duplications between national and regional OPs (see Box 37 below).

### **Box 37 Portugal – ensuring coherence between regional and national OPs**

#### Portugal – ensuring coherence between regional and national OPs

In Portugal, there were a few cases where both the national OP and the regional OPs programmed similar operations. This was the case in the support to doctoral programmes and to the higher education technical courses (TeSP - *Cursos Técnicos Superiores Profissionais*) where regional OPs funded those aligned with their specialisation strategies and the national OP funded a wider range of cases. Establishing boundaries between these interventions posed some challenges, requiring joint work to avoid overlaps e.g. between the national programme for success at school (PNPSE - *Programa nacional de promoção do sucesso escolar*) and the local action plans to tackle school failure (PiiCiE - *Plano integrado e inovador de combate ao insucesso escolar*) which are supported under the regional OPs.

Overall, the evidence – also confirmed in our Policy Delphi validation process - highlighted that **factors contributing to coherence** between TOs and IPs within TO10 included:

- Rigorous planning at the programming stage to ensure clear distinctions between TOs/IPs;
- Planning ESF interventions in line with national strategies (e.g. Portugal 2020);
- Planning, or adjusting, ESF priorities in line with CSRs;
- Ongoing coordination and communication between authorities responsible for managing different TOs and IPs in order to avoid duplication or double funding, but also to allow beneficiaries to receive funding under different priorities if relevant and ensure a global overview of funding;
- Good coordination between national and regional OP levels, both at the planning and implementation stages;
- Well trained and experienced staff in ESF Managing Authorities;
- Clear sectoral distinctions for ESF Investment Priorities, as in IPs i, ii, iii and iv in this programming period;
- Effective involvement of a range of stakeholders in planning priorities and overseeing implementation.

**Factors which sometimes hindered internal coherence** within ESF TOs and IPs included:

- Separating TOs into different OPs;
- Insufficiently comprehensive planning at programming stage;
- Over-separation of responsibilities for management/oversight for each TO/OP/IP;
- Insufficient ongoing coordination between authorities managing different OPs/IPs or national/regional ESF Managing Authorities;
- Insufficient intersectoral cooperation to address cross-cutting challenges e.g. early school leaving or early childhood education and care (ECEC) for vulnerable target groups;
- The 'payment by results' system which may discourage some beneficiaries from referring participants to other TOs/IPs/operations for fear of losing funding.

**Evaluation Question 4.3: To what extent were ESF operations complementary and coherent with other EU funding instruments such as ERDF, EAFRD, Erasmus(+), AMIF or Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions (in particular COFUND and Seal of Excellence)?**

**Key findings – EQ 4.3**

In terms of coherence with other EU funding instruments, **the picture is more mixed**. While there is often a good degree of coherence with other EU funding instruments in the legal texts, evidence of synergies and coherence in implementation varies. Whereas **there are many examples – at OP and operation level – of coherence in operations with the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Erasmus+**, there are **more limited examples** for the other European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and other funding instruments such as the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) or the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions. Where interventions do combine funding, **challenges are also highlighted in terms of articulating different funding instruments** which limit potential synergies.

We set out the below the evidence gathered from the evaluation in respect of each of the funding instruments. We start with a focus on ERDF (due to its importance in relation to ESF T010), followed by the other European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), Erasmus+, then the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions, and finally the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF).

- **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)**

The **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)** regulation for 2014-2020<sup>155</sup> displays clear areas of coherence and complementarity with ESF support for education and training under T010. The scope of support of the ERDF includes 'investment in social, health, research, innovation, business and educational infrastructure' (article 1(d)). ERDF Investment Priority 1(a) includes: 'Enhancing research and innovation (R&I) infrastructure and capacities to develop R&I excellence, and promoting centres of competence' and 1(b) includes: 'developing links and synergies between enterprises, research and development centres and the higher education sector [...] and supporting technological and applied research' (article 5). Investment priority 10 focuses on 'investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning by developing education and training infrastructure' (article 5).

The research conducted for the evaluation has indeed highlighted a lot of examples of **good coherence and synergies with the ERDF, both within multi-fund OPs (e.g. Lithuania) or within joint operations combining funding from ERDF and ESF**. At country/national OP level, the mapping analysis (see Annex 1.1) highlighted strong coherence with ERDF in particular Member States, including Bulgaria, Cyprus, France (in particular IP10.iii), Germany, Greece, Romania and Slovenia. Targeted consultations

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<sup>155</sup> REGULATION (EU) No 1301/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 December 2013 on the European Regional Development Fund and on specific provisions concerning the Investment for growth and jobs goal and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013R1301&from=en>

with EU stakeholders revealed that the Baltic states also articulate these two funds particularly well, with strong coordination at the planning stage.

At the level of operations, synergies between ERDF and ESF have been particularly effective in terms of large operations which combine improvements to educational infrastructure and the need for training for educational staff and/or pupils and the development of materials or frameworks. Effective combinations of funds were most commonly found to support digital education such as the Croatian e-schools initiative (see Box 38 below) or the operations targeting ICT literacy in Slovenia (see Slovenian case study in Annex 1.4). As one stakeholder interviewed in the Portuguese national OP stated: 'ERDF intervention provided the basis for a better ESF intervention... It is a bit like computers: we need hardware to run the software'.

### **Box 38 Croatia - e-schools: effective synergies between ERDF and ESF TO10 funding**

#### Croatia - e-schools: effective synergies between ERDF and ESF TO10 funding

The Croatian e-schools initiative is being 85% funded by EU Structural Funds, respectively ERDF and ESF. ERDF funding has been used to finance adequate ICT infrastructure in pilot schools, including the establishment of data centres, the establishment of suitable school infrastructure including the equipping of classrooms and staff, and the establishment of a network of Regional Training Centres (ROC). ESF funding focused on the inclusion of ICT in teaching and learning as well as teacher education and support.

ERDF was also successfully used to complement other types of ESF TO10 operations, including: a) the development or improvement of pre-school (ECEC) facilities in several Member States (particularly in central and eastern Europe) - for instance, the regional evaluation of Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship OP 2014-2020 indicates a high degree of complementarity between ESF and ERDF in the area of pre-school education; b) the development of VET regional competence centres, as in the 'Regional centres of competences in VET and a pilot of dual VET education complement VET reforms' operation in Croatia funded under IP10.iv; and c) the development of high-level skills for industry, using technological support from ERDF and skills development support from ESF, such as the operation run by St David's University in West Wales (see case study in Annex 1.4).

The Public Consultation also showed that a large share of respondents felt that ESF operations on education and training are coherent with the support offered through the ERDF: 46% of the general public, 55.9% of organisations managing/delivering ESF and 52% of other organisations. These figures are markedly higher than the share of respondents considering that the other ESIF are coherent with ESF TO10 (see above). It is however important to note that a relatively small share of respondents did consider that there was overlap between the two funds ('they do the same'): ranging from 5% of organisations managing/delivering ESF to 20% of other organisations. 7% of respondents from the general public also felt the two funds were contradictory or hindered each other, but none of the respondents from other categories.

Despite the successful examples, **challenges in articulating the two funds were repeatedly raised throughout the research.** Many of the stakeholders interviewed

as part of the targeted consultations felt that, while coherence existed in the design of the funds, this coherence was challenging to achieve at both application stage and in implementation. Too often, to avoid complexities, the two funds are operated using, as was cited in relation to Finland, 'a silo approach'. This approach is also evidenced in the England case study (Annex 1.4), which indicates that Managing Authorities in London have tried to avoid any duplication, resulting in 'people tending to go for one or another'. Improving coordination and synergies between ESF and ERDF was one of the key areas underlined as important for the future in the Policy Delphi validation exercise.

Several stakeholders, in both targeted consultations and case studies, spoke of **the complexity of having to apply under both funds for a joint project, which often also subsequently impeded effectiveness of actions during implementation**, through being unable to combine funding. Many examples were identified, often revolving around IT equipment. For example, in an ESF digital skills operation in Italy, the building and equipment of the digital lab could not be supported by the ESF. In Latvia, an ESF operation developing educational methodologies for students with dyslexia could not provide the computers needed for the students to actually benefit from these methodologies. ERDF operations which did not include training/skills support via ESF were also deemed problematic, highlighting the problems of funding educational infrastructure (e.g. digital tools) without funding actions to support staff and students to access and use it. **Timeframes for implementation and delivery of outcomes are also very different across the two funds** (ERDF requires a much longer timeframe to achieve results), which poses an inherent challenge in monitoring and reporting. Potential solutions to mitigate such challenges which were raised include adopting a strategic approach to combining the two funds from design stage, eliminating administrative complexities of using both funds (e.g. implementing a 'one stop shop' for specific operations), or combining support for infrastructure (under ERDF) and training (under ESF) under one operation.

- **Other European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF)**

The Common Provisions regulation 2014-2020<sup>156</sup> clearly establishes the need to 'improve coordination and harmonise implementation of the Funds providing support under cohesion policy' (preamble, §2). In each Member State or region, a Common Strategic Framework (CSF) should be established to ensure coordination of EU intervention under the ESI Funds (preamble, §16). Analysis of the individual regulations governing the ESI Funds shows that **the strongest level of coherence is with the ERDF**, addressed in the previous sub-section.

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<sup>156</sup> REGULATION (EU) No 1303/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013R1303&from=EN>

There is nonetheless some coherence in the texts with the **European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EARDF)**<sup>157</sup>, which includes a measure on 'knowledge transfer and information actions' focusing on vocational training and skills acquisition for workers in relevant sectors (e.g. agriculture, forest management) or in SMEs in rural areas (article 14) which is coherent with the ESF IP10.iii focus on 'upgrading the knowledge, skills and competences of the workforce'. The regulation stipulates that 'support under this measure shall not include courses of instruction or training, which form part of normal education programmes or systems at secondary or higher levels' (article 14, §3) which partially avoids overlap with ESF TO10 interventions; however TO10 does not only include 'normal' education programmes so there is still a risk of overlap, particularly with IP10.iii. **The Cohesion Fund**<sup>158</sup> does not include any interventions directly related to education and training.

The Public Consultation showed that 29% of the general public, 23.8% of organisations managing/delivering ESF and 37% of other organisations considered that these other ESI Funds (other than ERDF which was measured separately) are coherent with ESF support to education and training. It is important however to note that the largest share of respondents stated that they did not know/did not wish to answer: 58%, 69.7% and 41% respectively. The evaluation did not identify any complementary use of ESF TO10 and the EARDF in OPs or operations.

- **Erasmus+**

The regulation underpinning the **Erasmus+ programme**<sup>159</sup> explicitly calls for the Commission and the Member States to ensure overall consistency and complementarity with 'other relevant EU sources of funding for education, training, youth and sport, in particular the European Social Fund' (article 25(b)). Its objectives, as set out in article 5 of the regulation, are clearly aligned with those of ESF TO10, in particular:

- Objective (a) - 'to improve the level of key competences and skills, with particular regard to their relevance for the labour market [...] through strengthened cooperation between the world of education and the world of work' – is clearly aligned with all IPs under ESF TO10;
- Objective (b) – 'to foster quality improvements, innovation excellence [...] at the level of education and training institutions' is also aligned with ESF TO10;
- Objective (c) – 'to promote the emergence and raise awareness of a European lifelong learning area designed to complement policy reforms at national level and to support the modernisation of education and training systems [...]' is complementary in particular to ESF IP10.iii;

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<sup>157</sup> REGULATION (EU) No 1305/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 December 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013R1305&from=EN>

<sup>158</sup> REGULATION (EU) No 1300/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 December 2013 on the Cohesion Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1084/2006, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013R1300&from=EN>

<sup>159</sup> REGULATION (EU) No 1288/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 11 December 2013 establishing 'Erasmus+': the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport and repealing Decisions No 1719/2006/EC, No 1720/2006/EC and No 1298/2008/EC, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013R1288&from=EN>

- Objective (d) – ‘to enhance the international dimension of education and training, in particular through cooperation between Union and partner-country institutions in the field of VET and in higher education, by increasing the attractiveness of European higher education institutions [...]’ links in particular to IP10.ii.

**The focus is coherent with ESF TO10, while the scope – focusing strongly on transnational exchanges and mobility - ensures complementarity rather than overlap.**

The coherence with Erasmus+ is confirmed by the results of the Public Consultation (see Annex 3), which shows very high shares of respondents (the highest in relation to any other EU programme or instrument) who consider that actions promoting education and training supported by the ESF are coherent with Erasmus+: 62% of the general public, 63.8% of organisations managing/delivering ESF and 74% of other organisations. Only a very small share (4% or less) of respondents consider that Erasmus+ and ESF education and training actions ‘are contradictory or hinder each other’, although 16% of the general public has the perception that ‘they do the same’.

The targeted consultations also show that the **objectives of both mechanisms are considered to be well aligned**, showing ‘a clear and coherent connection’. Stakeholders highlighted in particular that ESF has been used successfully in a number of Member States and regions to provide **top-up support for disadvantaged students and to support their mobility** (e.g. Estonia, Lithuania, Poland), **and for scaling up successful Erasmus+ projects** (e.g. the Erasmus+ project NEWTT (New Way for New Talents In Teaching<sup>160</sup>). Stakeholders confirmed that, in future, there are plans for Erasmus+ to use the mechanism of the Seal of Excellence<sup>161</sup> (as used in Horizon 2020) to open the gateway to additional ESF+ funding for the best projects. **Erasmus+ National Agencies are also sometimes ESF Intermediary Bodies** (e.g. FRSE in Poland) which can lead to interesting synergies and improved coordination. As a result of this double role, FRSE for example has used ESF to specifically finance mobility projects for students with disabilities and those in financial hardship, and funds mobility projects from schools in rural and disadvantaged areas which do not receive Erasmus+ funding<sup>162</sup>.

The ESF Transnational Platform on Youth Employment, Learning and Skills produced a paper on synergies between the ESF and Erasmus programmes<sup>163</sup>, which identifies **three main ways in which ESF and Erasmus+ are currently combined**: (1) topping up Erasmus+ mobility grants through the ESF; (2) upscaling/mainstreaming

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<sup>160</sup> <http://www.newtt.eu/sites/default/files/NEWWT-A4-2-pager-1.pdf>

<sup>161</sup> The Seal of Excellence is a quality label awarded to project proposals submitted to Horizon 2020, which were judged to deserve funding, but did not get it due to budget limits. The Seal recognises the value of the proposal and helps other funding bodies take advantage of the Horizon 2020 evaluation process. The Seal of Excellence gives indicates basic information on the proposal, the call and the proposer, and shows political commitment by displaying the signatures of the Commissioners. Further information can be found at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/seal-excellence\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/seal-excellence_en)

<sup>162</sup> ESF Transnational Platform (2019). Synergies between the ESF and Erasmus programmes: making it happen, [https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/filedepot\\_download/2557/2462](https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/filedepot_download/2557/2462)

<sup>163</sup> ESF Transnational Platform (2019). Synergies between the ESF and Erasmus programmes: making it happen, [https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/filedepot\\_download/2557/2462](https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/filedepot_download/2557/2462)

successful Erasmus+ projects through the ESF (e.g. smaller mobility projects for pupils in Poland); (3) and awarding a quality label (following an Erasmus+ evaluation). Examples of successful coherence between ESF and Erasmus+ include a major project in Lithuania to support the internationalisation of higher education (see Box 39 below):

**Box 39 Lithuania – Internationalisation of higher education supported by ESF and Erasmus+**

Lithuania – Internationalisation of higher education supported by ESF and Erasmus+

In Lithuania, a large-scale operation on the 'Internationalisation of higher education' has been funded by the ESF at national level. The Erasmus+ National Agency applied to be one of the implementing organisations of this national operation and received EUR 4.9 million under this ESF action for the period 2010-2015. This investment helped achieve the objectives of the ESF Operational Programme in Lithuania, while also increasing the number of Erasmus+ student mobility grants by 10.3%. The ESF support was subsequently renewed and increased to €10.2 million for the second stage of the operation (2016-2021). The ESF funding has – among others - enabled 3,758 students from 36 Lithuanian higher education institutions (HEI) to spend a study period abroad at a partner HEI and 780 students to do a work placement abroad.

The Slovenian case study undertaken for this evaluation (see Annex 1.4) also highlights two examples of successful coherence between ESF and Erasmus+, focusing on adult learning (see Box 40 below) and top-up loans for students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds provided by the Centre for Mobility and European Education and Training Programmes<sup>164</sup>.

**Box 40 Slovenia – GOAL - combining ESF and Erasmus+ to support adult learners**

Slovenia – GOAL - combining ESF and Erasmus+ to support adult learners

In Slovenia, the results of the Erasmus+ project GOAL (Guidance and Orientation for Adult Learning), which developed models and tools for the guidance and orientation of low-educated adults, have been used by practitioners implementing lifelong learning programmes for low-skilled workers under TO10<sup>165</sup>.

The Galician case study (see Annex 1.4) shows that the Dual Vocational Training programme combined funds from ESF and Erasmus+. In Spain too, the city of Gijón set up a local Youth Employment and Activation Agency, funded primarily by the municipal budget and ESF/YEI, which provides participants with the option of joining a mobility project using Erasmus+<sup>166</sup>.

**Despite the good level of coherence with Erasmus+ in texts and many successful examples, the evaluation has highlighted several challenges of achieving synergies in practice** due to different application processes, different partnership and co-funding requirements, different timescales, and different managing

<sup>164</sup> Implementation report European Cohesion Policies 2014-2020 for January period 2014 to the end of June 2019, <https://www.eu-skladi.si/sl/dokumenti/porocila-mnenja-tolmacenja/porocilokp.pdf>

<sup>165</sup> Interview with the representative of the beneficiary organisation.

<sup>166</sup> ESF Transnational Platform (2019). Synergies between the ESF and Erasmus programmes: making it happen, [https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/filedepot\\_download/2557/2462](https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/filedepot_download/2557/2462)

bodies. Reasons cited for these challenges in consultations (see Annex 1.2) included: a lack of cooperation between institutions responsible for each fund on the national level; different implementation and delivery modes (direct vs. shared management); the difference in target groups (ESF target groups are often harder to reach); and insufficient communication to potential beneficiaries on the possibility of combining funds. In several Member States and regions, as identified for example in the Bretagne (France) case study (see Annex 1.4), there is no organised cooperation between the two funds. Improving coordination and synergies between ESF and Erasmus+ was one of the key areas underlined as important for the future in the Policy Delphi consultation exercise.

- **Horizon 2020 (Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions)**

The general objective of **Horizon 2020** as set out in the regulation<sup>167</sup> – ‘to contribute to building a society and an economy based on knowledge and innovation’ – is coherent with the objectives of ESF T010. The most clearly coherent funding strand with T010 under Horizon 2020 are the **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)**<sup>168</sup> which focus among others on developing the skills of researchers ‘to ensure optimal development and dynamic use of Europe’s intellectual capital in order to generate, develop and transfer new skills, knowledge and innovation’. This aligns in particular with ESF IP10.ii (higher education) but also IP10.iii (lifelong learning).

**Despite good alignment on paper**, our evaluation found **limited examples of complementary use of the funds in practice**. Examples found included the REP-EAT<sup>169</sup> project in Italy, or support for Seal of Excellence schemes for MSCA Individual Fellowships in the Czech Republic and Lithuania. The Latvian national evaluation to assess the impact of the activities for reducing fragmentation of study programmes in (foreign) languages of the European Union<sup>170</sup> (part of the Growth and Employment NOP 2014-2020), focusing on TO10 IP10.ii, also underlines that three ESF operations received complementary support from MSCA. The country mapping (see Annex 1.1) underlined clear coherence in Malta, noting that TO10 emphasis has been given to PhDs and fellowship programmes especially to contribute towards R&I investment, in line with Marie Skłodowska-Curie and Horizon 2020 provisions; this is reflected for example in the ENDEAVOUR Scholarship scheme<sup>171</sup>. The Lithuanian case study (see Annex 1.4) shows that it is envisaged in the future that ESF may be used to support high quality MSCA applications which are not able to be funded under that programme. The Public

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<sup>167</sup> REGULATION (EU) No 1291/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 11 December 2013 establishing Horizon 2020 - the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2014-2020) and repealing Decision No 1982/2006/EC, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013R1291&from=EN>

<sup>168</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-section/marie-skłodowska-curie-actions>

<sup>169</sup> REP-EAT is a MSCA Cofund Project, supported by the Horizon 2020 Programme, the Region Abruzzo ESF Operational Programme 2014-2020 and the University of Teramo. The main objective of REP-EAT is to build up a new and innovative research and training doctoral programme (DP) in the interdisciplinary domain of food and healthy diet to deepen the impact of food quality on reproductive Health (REP) and eating disorders (EAT). The ESF contribution (€712,800) covers the mobility, research and training part of the project (approximately 40% of total costs), under the Region’s Strategies for Smart Specialisation. Further information can be found at: [http://repeat.unite.it/Marie\\_Sklodowska\\_Curie\\_Actions](http://repeat.unite.it/Marie_Sklodowska_Curie_Actions)

<sup>170</sup> Evaluation of ‘Reduce fragmentation of study programmes and better share of resources’, part of the Growth and Employment Latvia National OP 2014-2020

<sup>171</sup> <https://education.gov.mt/en/education/myScholarship/Pages/ENDEAVOUR%20Scholarship%20Scheme.a.spx>. Further information is available in Annex Five of the report.

Consultation (see Annex 3) showed divergent results by target group in term of the perceived coherence with Horizon 2020 (MSCA): while only 29% of respondents from the general public and organisations managing/delivering ESF felt that there was coherence between the two funds, almost double the share (57%) of those from other organisations did.

Qualitative evidence from consultations and case studies showed that coherence between ESF and MSCA was challenging in practice. One stakeholder expressed the view that, despite guidance being written in 2014 about how funding could be combined, many project promoters of Horizon 2020 are too fearful of dangers of double funding or administrative complications to seek to combine the two programmes in joint actions. Moreover, **Horizon 2020 is more geared towards business rather than social inclusion, restricting coherence with ESF**. The West Wales and the Valleys case study (see Annex 1.4) also underlined that, although the two funds can be complementary, the audiences of both are often different.

- ***Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)***

The regulation establishing the **Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)**<sup>172</sup> states that the fund can support a range of actions including 'measures focusing on education and training, including language training and preparatory actions to facilitate access to the labour market' (article 9,§1(d)) for migrants and 'training of staff providing public and private services, including educational institutions' (article 10(d)). The fund can also support education and training for asylum-seekers (article 5(a,b)). In order to ensure coherence with the ESF, it also stipulates that authorities designated by Member States for the purpose of the management of the interventions of the European Social Fund should be included in the partnership overseeing the fund (article 9, §4). The interim evaluation of AMIF<sup>173</sup> concluded that it was coherent with ESF on paper.

Very limited evidence of coherence on the ground with AMIF was however identified in the evaluation although (as noted above) several ESF T010 operations were focused on the integration of migrants and asylum-seekers. The Public Consultation (see Annex 3) showed nonetheless that some respondents felt that the funds were coherent: 27% of the general public, 18% of organisations managing/delivering ESF and 28% of other organisations. The most common response was however by far that respondents did not know: respectively (for the different groups of respondents) 59%, 76.8% and 54%.

Although no concrete examples of joint implementation were found in the evaluation, the Public Consultation also showed that a smaller share of respondents considered that ESF was coherent with:

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<sup>172</sup> REGULATION (EU) No 516/2014 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 16 April 2014 establishing the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, amending Council Decision 2008/381/EC and repealing Decisions No 573/2007/EC and No 575/2007/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Decision 2007/435/EC, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:02014R0516-20181221&from=EN>

<sup>173</sup> [http://publications.europa.eu/resource/cellar/4fdd6477-e702-11e8-b690-01aa75ed71a1.0001.01/DOC\\_1](http://publications.europa.eu/resource/cellar/4fdd6477-e702-11e8-b690-01aa75ed71a1.0001.01/DOC_1)

- **COSME** (EU programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs)<sup>174</sup>: 21% of the general public, 17% of organisations managing/delivering ESF to 37% of other organisations;
- **EURES**<sup>175</sup>: 24% of the general public, 25% of organisations managing/delivering ESF to 33% of other organisations.

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<sup>174</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/cosme\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/cosme_en)

<sup>175</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eures/public/homepage>

**Evaluation Question 4.4: To which extent are the investments under TO10 consistent with the analyses and priorities identified in the context of the European Semester notably in the Country Reports, the National Reform Programmes and the country specific recommendations? To which extent fulfilling ex-ante conditionalities in the different sectors led to structural reforms or legislative changes in those countries/regions that had to work to fulfil them?**

#### Key findings – EQ 4.4

The evidence gathered during the evaluation shows that there is **overall very good coherence across the EU between the ESF TO10 operations and the priorities, analyses and country specific recommendations (CSRs) from the European Semester**. The CSRs in the field of education and training are generally reflected well in the situation analyses of the Partnership Agreements, the TO10 funding priorities of national and regional Operational Programmes, and – ultimately – in the operations implemented. The degree of coherence does however vary in different Member States. **Fulfilling the ex-ante conditionalities did lead to structural reforms in some of the Member States** which had to fulfil them. These reforms include action plans on inclusive education, a new approach to monitoring Roma inclusion in education, the inclusion of a focus on lifelong learning and early school leaving in national education strategies, expanding apprenticeships and developing a national VET strategy involving all key stakeholders. Ex-ante conditionalities have also led to more alignment with EU policy tools (EQF, ECVET, EQAVET).

The evidence gathered for this study has shown that there is **overall very good coherence** across the EU **between the ESF TO10 investments and the priorities, analyses, and country specific recommendations (CSRs) from the European Semester**.

As shown in our mapping analysis (see Annex 1.1), there is very strong alignment between the priorities emerging from the European Semester process and the OPs. As discussed above (section 4.3 relevance, evaluation question 3.1), most Member States (22) appropriately address needs identified in the CSRs in their PA and OPs.

In most cases, the situation analysis in the Partnership Agreements clearly reflects the priorities of the National Reform Programmes and CSRs in the field of education and training. **The strategies for ESF TO10 are built around these priority areas, with the clear aim to use ESF funding to address challenges identified**. There are however gaps in some cases between the CSRs and the focus of the ESF TO10 Investment Priorities.

We consider the coherence with CSRs under each IP in turn below:

- **IP10.i:** A total of some 66 CSRs were issued in the field covered by IP10.i between 2012 and 2019. Clear coherence between these CSRs and the focus of IP10.i was identified in several Member States, including Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Malta, Portugal, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and the UK. CSRs which have not – or only partially - been addressed however include: a lack of specific focus on improving the educational outcomes of Roma in some OPs in Hungary or a lack of

consideration of specific disparities (e.g. between genders, regions) in early school leaving in Finland.

- **IP10.ii:** Only 8 CSRs were issued relating to higher education in 2012-2019: one in Austria, four in Germany and three in Italy. Where these exist, there was generally good coherence in terms of the focus of IP10.ii in the Member States concerned.
- **IP10.iii:** Some 34 CSRs were issued relating to lifelong learning between 2012 and 2019. Overall, there was a good level of coherence between CSRs and the focus of IP10.iii across the different Member States concerned. Cyprus for example addressed the CSR to 'Improve the skills of the workforce to reinforce their occupational mobility towards activities of high growth and high value added' by focusing IP10.iii funding on training in the blue and green economies, energy and tourism. Clear coherence was also in evidence in Belgium (Flanders), Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland and Portugal.
- **IP10.iv:** The largest number of CSRs (95) related to the field of labour market relevance across the EU in 2012-2019. A good degree of coherence with the focus of IP10.iv has been established in most Member States, including Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and the United Kingdom. Bulgaria has for example invested ESF funding in a national information platform 'Science-Education-Business' and developed the systems for education planning in accordance with labour market needs at national and regional level. CSRs in this area however were not – or not fully addressed include: in Portugal, the 2012 and 2014 CSRs to improve the attractiveness of vocational education have not been sufficiently addressed and, in Poland, adult learning funded by ESF is not sufficiently relevant to labour market needs, not sufficiently addressing the creation of work-based learning opportunities for adults as suggested by the 2012 CSR.

Our study also concludes that **fulfilling the ex-ante conditionalities did lead to structural reforms in some of the Member States/regions** which had to fulfil them. The 2017 Commission Staff Working Document on the added value of **ex-ante conditionalities**<sup>176</sup> highlights some reforms in the area of education and training which were implemented due to the ex-ante conditionalities. For example, in the Czech Republic, a detailed action plan for inclusive education was implemented to fulfil the ex-ante conditionalities on early school leaving, addressing the repeated CSR on the need to include disadvantaged children (including Roma) in mainstream schools. Furthermore, in order to fulfil the ex-ante conditionality on the integration of marginalised Roma communities, a monitoring methodology was adopted on the inclusion of Roma in several policy areas including education. In Estonia, the 'Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020' implementation documents were developed and approved in the framework of ex-ante conditionalities relating to early school leaving and lifelong

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<sup>176</sup> European Commission (2017), The Value Added of Ex-ante Conditionalities in the European Structural and Investment Funds, SWD(2017) 127 final

learning. In Greece, the ex-ante conditionality on vocational education and training (VET) supported the expansion of apprenticeships and led to the development of the VET national strategy which provided a framework for developing an integrated approach that brings together key actors and stakeholders of various vocational and education sub-systems.

As mentioned above, case studies conducted for the evaluation have also revealed that the ESF ex-ante conditionalities have ensured alignment with EU policy tools (EQF, ECVET, EQAVET) in the field of education and training in certain Member States, for example in the Portuguese Human Capital OP (see Box 37 above).

In some cases, ex-ante conditionalities did however lead to delays in ESF TO10 implementation. For example, in Romania (see case study in Annex 1.6), fulfilling the ex-ante conditionalities led to delays in launching the calls for proposals.

***Evaluation Question 4.5: To what extent were the investments under TO10 complementary and coherent with other activities supporting education, training and vocational training at national/regional level?***

#### Key findings – EQ 4.5

Our study concludes that there is **generally strong coherence between the investments under ESF TO10 and other activities supporting education and training at national and regional level**. In addition to the close links to national needs and priorities driven by European Semester process (discussed in response to the previous evaluation question), evidence from all the national ESF evaluations dealing with coherence confirmed this alignment. This close coherence was further confirmed by the majority of the case studies, targeted consultations, and the results of the Public Consultation. Greater coherence could be achieved through wider involvement of national/regional stakeholders in ESF (including labour market actors and target groups), as well as through better coordination of policies and actions at national/regional level.

In the country mapping, targeted and public consultations, as well as in case studies, it was noted that there was **generally good coherence between ESF TO10 operations and national and/or regional policies in the field of education and training**.

Targeted consultations as well as case study evidence underlined that coherence of ESF TO10 with national/regional strategies was strongly supported by its **coherence with the European Semester process**, as discussed in the previous section. The country report and country specific recommendations provided a comprehensive framework for action, which Member States could address by complementary strategic use of national and European funds. Similarly, the robust **needs assessments in Partnership Agreements** contributed to ensuring coherence of ESF TO10 investments with national and regional, avoiding duplications of investments and ensuring synergies.

In **each of the seven national/regional ESF evaluations which addressed coherence**, it was found that the ESF TO10 operations were coherent with the national/regional policy context. For example:

## Study for the Evaluation of the ESF support to Education and Training (TO10)

- The national evaluation of ESF TO10 in Estonia for example confirms the coherence with the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy (ELLS);
- The Irish ESF evaluation ('Kickboxing, Kindness and Going the Extra Mile') underlines that the implementation of ESF TO10 is in line with the national Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) action framework:
- At regional level, the Independent evaluation of the Lombardy Operational Programme ESF 2014-2020 confirms that ESF TO10 support to vocational education is complementary to the regional strategy of creating sectorial industrial value chains.

The case studies (see Annex 1.4) included a number of further concrete examples of coherence of ESF TO10 funding with national and regional strategies. For example:

- The Portuguese thematic OP case study notes the coherence of the focus of ESF TO10 Investment Priorities with the Portugal 2020 strategy;
- In Galicia (Spain), the case study underlines that funds from the ESF TO10 OP play a complementary role for other regional initiatives in education and training policy. For example, ESF funds have contributed to financing basic vocational training and secondary education programs. Without the funding of TO10 initiatives, many regional programmes would be of lower quality and have longer implementation times;
- In Germany, the Continuing Education grant (see Box 44) was programmed in close coherence with the grants that were currently offered at Länder-level. This resulted in the eligibility criteria set at the beginning - such as the maximum salary, the maximum costs of the training - to avoid overlaps. However, due to the low uptake, the eligibility criteria were revised. As a result, a so-called coherence table was created, setting out the focus and roles at federal and the Länder-level for each intervention, in order to avoid overlaps and highlight the established coordination mechanisms;
- In the Czech Republic, the ESF interventions on education and training are complemented by national policies which improve the synergy of the whole set of these policies in the Czech Republic;
- In England (UK), ESF TO10-funded projects are in the line with England's Universal Credit Scheme. The local agenda drives ESF funding towards the support needs that are not addressed through mainstream funding, i.e. ESF is providing services and support on the margins of existing programmes in order to provide a fuller, more complete service. ESF-funded projects and services are 'in addition to, and alternative to, existing provision';
- In Ireland, there was strong coherence between ESF TO10 support and national education and training strategies (see Box 41 below):

### **Box 41 Ireland – coherence with national education and training strategies**

Ireland – coherence of ESF TO10 with national education and training strategies

In Ireland, ESF TO10 funding is fully in line with national funding priorities and programmes. The Action Plan for Education 2016-2019, which incorporates the Department of Education and

Skills strategy statement for the period, aspires to make the Irish education and training system a leader in Europe within the next ten years. To do this, it sets out five high level goals, which are to: improve the learning experience and the success of learners; improve the progress of learners at risk of educational disadvantage or learners with special educational needs; help those delivering education services to continuously improve; build stronger bridges between education and wider community; improve national planning and support services. Within its high-level goals, it identifies several broad objectives, which are consistent with the objectives and activities supported in the OP. For example: improving the learning experience and learning outcomes for learners impacted by disadvantage; promoting high quality learning experiences in the further education (FET) and higher education (HE) sectors; enhancing wider capacity to meet national and regional skills needs; and creating a greater diversity of learning opportunities beyond first- and second-level education.

Some case studies did, however, indicate **a lack of coherence** between ESF TO10 and certain regional or national policies in the field of education and training. For example, in Bretagne (France), it was noted that there was limited concertation of ESF TO10 support for vocational training under IP10.iii with the global regional coherence frameworks (CPRDFOP<sup>177</sup> in particular). The introduction of the Regional Skills Investment Plan (PACTE) may ensure greater complementarity and synergy in future. Stakeholders however raise concerns relating to future concertation with apprenticeship training at regional level, since this is no longer a regional competence.

The results of the Public Consultation (see Annex 3) show that **34% of the general public, 43.2% of representatives of organisations managing/delivering ESF and 33% of representatives from other organisations consider that ESF TO10 operations are coherent with national and/or regional education and training policies**. A minority did consider that there was duplication (ranging from 8% of representatives of organisations managing/delivering ESF to 14% of the general public), or – worse – that they are contradictory (ranging from 0% of representatives of organisations managing/delivering ESF to 11% of representatives of other organisations). No evidence was however found to support this perspective.

The Policy Delphi consultation process underlined that **greater coherence with national and regional policy priorities and actions could be achieved through wider and more in-depth involvement of national/regional stakeholders, including labour market actors and target groups**, in the programming, monitoring and delivery of ESF TO10. There should for example be greater involvement of national/regional labour market stakeholders in identifying skills shortages and mismatches. Target groups themselves (or their representatives) should be involved in order to better identify and monitor evolving needs. Stakeholders also underlined that **improved coherence between policy fields and policymakers** (e.g. VET and education, education and employment, education and social inclusion) **at national/regional level would contribute to better coherence with ESF TO10**.

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<sup>177</sup> Contrat de Plan Régional de Développement de la Formation et de l’Orientation professionnelle  
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#### 4.5. EU Added Value

***Evaluation Question 5: EU added value: What is the EU added value of the ESF-funded operations in the field of education? To what extent did the ESF-funded operations produce effects at the national and regional level that would otherwise not have taken place without the EU intervention?***

##### Key findings on EU added value

The assessment of the EU added value of ESF support to education and training has involved the identification of key dimensions and types of effect (volume, scope, role and process), gathering evidence to determine the extent to which the ESF TO10 operations have produced effects at the national and regional level that would not have taken place without the EU interventions concerned. Our evaluation concludes overall that there is a **good degree of EU added value across all dimensions**, with substantial evidence pointing to volume, scope, role and process effects.

An important number of **volume effects** were identified through the research including: increasing the number of participants (teachers/trainers or learners) and learning establishments which could benefit from education, training or school/college improvement programmes; increasing the geographical scope of implementation of education and training initiatives; and allowing the implementation of innovative education and training programmes at larger scale than would exist without ESF support (e.g. inclusive education, adult learning, programmes to tackle early school leaving).

There was similarly strong evidence of **scope effects**, both in terms of broadening actions to new target groups and new policy areas. In terms of target groups, the evidence clearly shows that ESF funding has provided the opportunity for education and training providers to address more disadvantaged and harder-to-reach groups, in all Member States and across all education sectors and all IPs. Such groups include young NEETs, early school leavers, children with low socio-economic status, low-skilled or low-qualified adults, migrants, Roma, people with special educational needs (SEN), people living in remote areas, as well as older workers and workers with obsolescent skills. ESF TO10 funding has allowed education and training providers to address wider policy areas including inclusive education, adult/lifelong learning, non-formal education, digitisation, civic education, developing vocational training in wider/future-orientated sectors and developing soft/transversal competences.

Evidence of **role effects** in terms of supporting innovation, the transfer of ideas and structural changes was also found in the research. Although it is challenging to identify the origins of policies or practices, our evaluation has shown that ESF investments have contributed to the transfer of ideas through funding the piloting or wider implementation of ideas from other Member States or from regional to national level, e.g. early warning systems for early school leaving, systems for the validation of previous learning or digital education reforms. There is clear evidence that ESF actions have supported innovation in education and training including various forms of modernisation of practices and policy in education and training (e.g. digitisation, inclusive education), targeting skills development in new or evolving sectors of the economy (e.g. sustainable development, high-tech industries), testing new or alternative pedagogies (e.g. inclusive educational methods, use of theatre) and developing innovative training offers. ESF TO10 funding has also led to structural changes including: the development of local or regional education strategies; the rolling-out of new educational approaches and strategies nationwide; major structural investments in e.g. digital education, inclusive education, adult learning and dual learning; the establishment of sustainable links between business and education/training; and the creation of networks and centres of

excellence. Role effects could however be enhanced by greater support for transnational cooperation and peer learning (at national and regional levels) within ESF TO10.

There are also a several important **process effects** generated by ESF TO10 support which are likely to lead to sustainable improvements in the effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation of education and training services. Such effects include: the establishment of closer links and cooperation between education and training providers and the wider community; improvements to the governance of education and training at national, regional and local levels; improvements to teacher/training skills and recruitment; development of new tools and processes for managing and monitoring learning processes; increasing employer engagement in learning and raising awareness of the importance of key education and training priorities e.g. tackling early school leaving, upskilling of workers.

**In terms of sustainability**, the study concludes that **many of the positive effects of ESF TO10 support are likely to continue after the end of funding**. There is a strong likelihood of ongoing benefits at individual, institutional and policy level. For **individuals**, sustainable impacts are likely to include improved life chances and labour market opportunities through the qualifications, skills and experiences gained through participating in ESF-funded programmes. For **institutions**, longer-term benefits from ESF funding are likely to be seen thanks to improvements to the skills of teachers and trainers, new teaching methods and approaches, the availability of new tools to monitor and manage learning processes, the establishment of links with the wider community (including employers) and investments in new curricula and materials. At the **policy level**, the introduction of major new reforms in education and training are in particular likely to lead to sustainable policy impacts in these areas. The support for local and regional actions in particular policy areas (e.g. early school leaving) is also likely to lead to sustainable impacts at local and regional level.

In this section, we present our evaluative judgement on the degree of EU added value in terms of volume, scope, role and process effects, together with the evidence which backs up our assessments. We respond to each evaluation question in turn below, providing our conclusions and the evidence supporting them, as well as illustrative examples from across the EU.

***Evaluation Question 5.1: Volume effect: Have the operations added to existing actions or directly produced beneficial effects that can be measured in terms of volume?***

#### **Key findings – EQ 5.1**

Support from ESF TO10 has **clearly had important effects in terms of increasing the volume of support** which would have been provided in its absence. Volume effects included: increasing the **number of participants** (teachers/trainers or learners) and learning establishments which could benefit from education, training or school/college improvement programmes; increasing the **geographical scope** of implementation of education and training initiatives; and allowing the **implementation of innovative education and training programmes at larger scale** (for example inclusive education, adult learning, programmes to tackle early school leaving).

Our evaluation has clearly shown that **ESF T010 has produced beneficial effects that can be mentioned in terms of volume**. Although it is not always easy to measure the volume effects in quantitative terms, this quantitative added value has been assessed in several cases and is strongly backed up by qualitative evidence from consultations and from examples of operations. The case studies (see Annex 1.4) also allow more in-depth examination of the volume effects in the Member States or regions concerned.

The results of the Public Consultation (see Annex 3) show that the vast majority of ESF participants, the general public, organisations managing/delivering ESF and other organisations have a positive perception of EU added value of ESF support for education and training in terms of volume effects. **87.2% of respondents from organisations directly involved in the management or delivery of ESF actions considered that 'more can be done than with national resources alone'**. Over 80% of respondents from organisations familiar with the ESF but not directly involved also held this view, as well as 73.9% of the general public with an awareness of ESF.

This positive view of the volume effects of ESF T010 funding is backed up by evidence from the targeted consultations (see Annex 1.2), both at EU and national level. Examples of volume effects mentioned by interviewed stakeholders included **expanded access (number of places and expanded opening hours) to services providing early childhood education and care**, vastly **increased numbers of teachers and educators being involved in teacher training**, and much **higher participation rates in adult learning**. National stakeholders in Hungary and Austria for example emphasised that ESF has vastly increased the numbers of adults and workers taking part in lifelong learning activities.

Although ESF funding should not substitute for national funding, some stakeholders did express the view that, in some Member States whose national education and training budgets were particularly hard hit by the economic crisis or other contextual factors, **ESF support allowed the education and training system to continue developing despite the grave impact of the crisis** had on all levels of education and the labour market. The case study on the Pomorskie region in Poland found for example that both ESF and ERDF helped to plug the gap left by significant cuts in the education and training budget allocated from central government to regions.

The case studies (see Annex 1.4) and the country mapping (Task 1) provide a wide range of concrete examples of volume effects from ESF T010 funding. Several case studies highlighted **important increases in the number or proportion of participants – including both learners and educational staff - who were able to benefit from different types of education and training**, for example in Lithuania (see Box 42 below).

## Box 42 Lithuania - volume effects from ESF TO10 support

### Lithuania – volume effects from ESF TO10 support

In Lithuania, several ESF operations have had **substantial volume effects**, for example:

- **Non-formal education 'basket' scheme:** since the introduction of this scheme in 2015, which provides vouchers of EUR 15 per child for use on extracurricular activities, the proportion of children participating in non-formal education has increased year on year. In 2015, 17% (58,000) of pupils used the basket, rising to 27.1% (over 93,000) in 2019<sup>178</sup>. According to the Education Management Information System<sup>179</sup>, 64.2% of children from general education schools participated in non-formal education programmes or engaged in extracurricular activities in general education schools in 2019/2020, compared to 49.3% in 2016/2017. The share of pupils/students in non-formal education was 26.2% in 2017 and 27% in 2018<sup>180</sup>. Stakeholders reported that the ESF operation has led to 'a dramatic increase in the number of children participating in non-formal education'.
- **Anti-bullying programmes:** thanks to an ESF-funded operation targeting anti-bullying, 689 schools introduced preventive programmes in 2017 and a further 1,666 schools in 2018, none of which are likely to have introduced a programme without the ESF support.
- **Time for Leaders 3**<sup>181</sup>: this operation, which promotes lifelong learning and the professional development of educational staff, has already involved over 20,000 staff including school administration staff (from preschool institutions to vocational education centres), teachers, municipal administration staff, employees of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports (MESS), higher education teachers, educational consultants, heads and participants of educational self-government institutions and associations, leaders of Lithuanian communities abroad and young people intending to pursue their careers in the education system. The operation allowed significantly more participants to benefit from training than would have done without the support of ESF.
- **Developing a safe environment in schools II**<sup>182</sup>: over the three years of this ESF operation, preventive programmes were implemented in 432 pre-school institutions providing pre-primary education programmes, and in 1,058 general and vocational education schools; psychological assistance was provided in 838 schools.

Examples of volume effects were also identified in a range of other EU Member States and regions including the following:

- In Slovenia, important volume effects from ESF TO10 funding were noted in particular in respect of the **increase in provision of adult learning programmes across the country**. Stakeholders interviewed for the case study indicated that as many as 90% of the activities implemented through ESF TO10 (under all IPs) would not be implemented in the absence of this funding. In a recent survey carried out by the ESF Managing Authority, 95% of respondents stated that co-financing European cohesion operations has a positive impact on the development of Slovenia<sup>183</sup>;

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<sup>178</sup> Source: Education Management Information System. <http://svis.emokykla.lt/en/>

<sup>179</sup> Education Management Information System <http://www.svis.smm.lt/en/>

<sup>180</sup> Lithuanian Official Statistics Portal <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/pradinis>

<sup>181</sup> [www.lyderiulaiikas.smm](http://www.lyderiulaiikas.smm)

<sup>182</sup> <http://www.sppc.lt/veikla/vykdomi-projektai/saugios-aplinkos-mokykloje-kurimas-ii/>

<sup>183</sup> SVRK. Report. Opinion polls on the topic of European cohesion policies, [https://www.eu-skladi.si/sl/dokumenti/studije-in-vrednotenja/svrk\\_porocilo18.pdf](https://www.eu-skladi.si/sl/dokumenti/studije-in-vrednotenja/svrk_porocilo18.pdf)

- In the North region of Portugal, stakeholders underlined that the large PiiCiE (*Plano integrado e inovador de combate ao insucesso escolar* - Integrated innovative plans for fighting school failure) ESF intervention (with a budget of some EUR 44 million) **would probably not exist at all without ESF support, and certainly not on this scale**. PiiCiE targets primary and secondary education students and develops a wide range of activities aiming at reducing school failure and early school leaving, increasing equity of access to education, improving the quality and labour market relevance of acquired skills, and at raising awareness regarding the importance of educational success. The initiative consists of 137 operations, 104 at the municipal level and 33 at the inter-municipal level (see Box A5-7 in Annex 5);
- In the Czech Republic, the case study also revealed that there were significant volume effects in terms of the **numbers of pedagogical staff who were able to take part in training** thanks to the ESF TO10 interventions;
- In the UK, **70% of people who participated in ESF-funded actions had not been involved in a mainstream national programme within the last 10 years**;
- In the Bretagne region in France, authorities have confirmed that there has been an **average quantitative increase of 35% in the hours of skills training provided** via the Regional Training Plan (*Plan regional de formation*) thanks to the funding from ESF TO10 (IP10.iii). The case study also revealed that the **numbers of young people identified as being at risk of early school leaving has increased** thanks to ESF support to fund the work of additional psychologists and training for specialist trainers;
- In Ireland, ESF TO10 funding provided the opportunity to **reach more participants, particularly those who are harder-to-reach and have a higher 'cost-per-unit'**. For example, more long-term NEETs or people in long-term unemployment were able to benefit from the Back to Employment Initiative (BTEI)<sup>184</sup> (see Box A5-26 in Annex 5);
- In the Polish Swietokrzyskie region, ESF TO10 funding has allowed beneficiaries to **upscale activities, for example creating additional pre-school education places or financing the provision of equipment** (within the ESF limits) and materials for schools;
- In West Wales and the Valleys (UK), **a greater number of participants have been able to be accommodated**, for example in apprenticeship training schemes or skills courses for adults;
- In Galicia (Spain), ESF TO10 funding has produced **important volume effects in terms of the numbers of pupils, mainly those with special educational needs, participating in programmes to prevent early school leaving**. These programmes are the Curricular diversification programmes (*Programas de diversificación curricular* - PDC) and the Programmes to improve learning and

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<sup>184</sup> <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/Further-Education-and-Training/Back-to-Education-Initiative-BTEI/>

school performance (*Programas de Mejora del Aprendizaje y del Rendimiento - PMAR*) (see Box A5-10 in Annex 5). During the 2017-18 academic year, 223 PMAR were carried out in 158 public schools, engaging more than 1,600 students.

***Evaluation Question 5.2: Scope effect: Have the operations broadened existing actions by addressing groups or policy areas that would otherwise not have been addressed?***

**Key findings – EQ 5.2**

There is a **clear scope effect** of ESF TO10 support to education and training across the EU, allowing Member States and beneficiary organisations to address new **policy areas and target groups** that would not otherwise have been addressed. **Target groups** which are addressed include young NEETs, early school leavers, children with low socio-economic status, low-skilled adults or adults with low qualification levels, migrants, Roma, people with special educational needs (SEN), people living in remote areas, pre- and post-doctoral researchers, as well as older workers and workers with obsolescent skills. **New (or less mainstream) policy areas** which have been able to be addressed thanks to ESF TO10 include inclusive education, adult learning, digitisation of education, non-formal education and training, development of 'soft' or transversal skills or civic education.

Although with slightly less positive results than in relation to the volume effect (see above), **the Public Consultation shows that a large share of respondents consider that ESF has a scope effect.** 61.8% of respondents from organisations directly involved in the management or delivery of the ESF considered that, thanks to ESF, 'new issues can be covered', as well as 56.5% of organisations familiar with ESF but not directly involved. 41% of individuals from the general public aware of the ESF but not receiving support also held this view. 52.5% of ESF participants also felt that 'without EU support there would be less or no attention given to people like me' and 44% that without ESF support 'there would not be enough money to pay for such actions'.

The case studies (see Annex 1.4), targeted consultations (see Annex 1.2) and the country mapping (Task 1) provide a **wide range of examples** of different types of scope effect derived from ESF TO10 funding. The examples identified principally concern addressing policy areas or target groups which would not otherwise be covered by existing provision.

In terms of **target groups**, the evidence collated from across the evaluation strands clearly shows that ESF funding has provided the opportunity for education and training providers to address more disadvantaged and harder-to-reach groups, in all Member States and across all education sectors and all IPs. Such groups include **young NEETs, early school leavers, children with low socio-economic status, low-skilled adults or adults with low qualification levels, migrants, Roma, people with special educational needs (SEN), people living in remote areas, as well as older workers and workers with obsolescent skills.** The additional cost and resources of reaching out to these groups and providing the sort of individualised or specialised

support which they require - not only to enrol in education and training but also to stay the course and achieve successful outcomes – often means that they are de facto excluded from standard education and training provision, whether within compulsory or non-compulsory education.

While many ESF operations include such **difficult-to-reach target groups** within the wider participants which they aim to involve in their actions, others focus specifically on these groups, such as the 'Voluntary 10th School Year' operation in the Mecklenburg region of Germany (see Box 8 in section 4.1) which has been particularly successful.

Many operations, particularly in central and eastern Europe also target the **Roma population**, such as the 'Your Class' operation in Bulgaria (see Box A5-1 in Annex 5) or the 'Support for pre-primary education of children from marginalised Roma communities' operation in Slovakia (see Box 27 in section 4.4).

Many operations also target **low-skilled and older workers**, particularly under IPs 10.iii and 10.iv. Slovenia for example implements a major initiative to develop basic competences for older workers (see Box 43 below and Box A5-28 in Annex 5).

#### **Box 43 Slovenia - developing basic competences for older workers**

Slovenia - developing basic competences for older workers

The rationale behind the operation is that there is a low and declining participation rates of adults in lifelong learning (LLL), particularly for the 55-64 age group and those with lower levels of education, who also have the greatest need to acquire new knowledge and skills that would allow them to (re-)enter the labour market and adapt to its evolving needs, in particular digital skills. This operation, through the public tender managed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, finances the implementation of the programmes for acquiring basic and professional competences targeting primarily adults with a low level of qualification, with a focus on those over 45 years of age.

The German federal OP also sought to have a focus on **disadvantaged adults** through the 'Continuing Education Grant' (see Box 44 below), though has encountered challenges in doing so.

#### **Box 44 Germany – Continuing education grant for low-skilled and low-income adults**

Germany – Continuing education grant for low-skilled and low-income adults

The 'Continuing education grant' is the second largest intervention in the Federal German OP, with an allocation of EUR 90 million of ESF funding. It aims at supporting people with a low income - including migrants, low-qualified, women, part-time employees through a salary limit of EUR 20,000 - to participate in (job-related) continuing vocational education and training activities by providing a financial incentive. The aim of reaching low-qualified and low-income earners has not however been reached. Further, demand for the grant decreased over time.

The evaluation<sup>185</sup> concluded that low-qualified people face additional obstacles (not only the financial one), meaning that there is a need for further accompanying measures.

The Spanish region of Galicia focuses on educational operations that reach more **isolated and rural areas**, reflecting the fact that the region's population is widespread across the territory and not highly concentrated. Without the support provided by ESF, these operations clearly could not reach the more isolated and remote areas. In Portugal, the ESF operation '+Superior' (EUR 4 million) also aims to incentivise and support participation in higher education in less populated regions.

In other regions or Member States, ESF support has provided the opportunity to widen the participants in education and training provision. In the Pays de la Loire region of France for example, **women and older workers** are targeted under IP10.iv, while offenders and ex-offenders are addressed under IP10.iii. An operation in Belgium also targets **prison inmates** (see Box 45 below and Box A5-19 in Annex 5).

#### **Box 45 Belgium (Flanders) – educational guidance for inmates**

Belgium (Flanders) – educational guidance for inmates

This ESF TO10 operation offers high quality educational guidance and support to inmates in three West Flanders prisons, with the aim of making re-integration easier following their incarceration. The operation works with participants in a series of one-to-one coaching sessions to explore their talents and interests. Participants are given the opportunity to gain qualifications and find further training.

In several Member States (e.g. Lithuania, Malta, Spain), ESF funding has also allowed support for **high-level pre- and post-doctoral students**, in order to increase the labour market relevance of their skillsets and boost the competitiveness of the national or regional economy, by providing high level skills in growth sectors (e.g. environment, new technologies). The ENDEAVOUR Scholarship scheme in Malta is one such scheme (see Box 46 below) or the 'Pre-doctoral training grant within the Galician University System (GUS)' in Spain.

#### **Box 46 Malta – scholarship scheme for researchers**

Malta – scholarship scheme for researchers

The ENDEAVOUR Scholarships Scheme, funded by ESF TO10 under IP10.ii, seeks to support good quality tertiary education and to ensure that the Maltese labour market is supplied with the right skills to help the economy compete at an international level. All students are eligible to apply for the scholarship. Key objectives of the ENDEAVOUR Scholarships Scheme are to: assist people to pursue further levels of academic research; improve the quality and relevance of the education system; reduce skills mismatches particularly within the priority economic sectors; support further research in science and technology; and increase the capacity and level of research, innovation and development activity in Malta. At the end of 2018, 775 participants had signed a scholarship grant amounting to EUR 7.4 million, of which 95% were

<sup>185</sup> BMAS (2019) Wirtschaftlichkeitsbetrachtung der Programmumsetzung der Förderprogramme im ESF-OP des Bundes; Studie im Rahmen der Gesamtevaluation des ESF-OP des Bundes in der Förderperiode 2014-2020 - Teil i: Evaluierung der Investitionsprioritäten

courses at MQF level 7 and 5% were courses at Level 8. Out of the 775 grant agreement awardees, 48% were women.

Examination of the case studies and country mapping evidence also reveals that several **policy areas** have been addressed thanks to support from ESF TO10, which would not have been able to be targeted, and certainly not to the same scale, with national or regional funding only. Some of these key policy areas include the following:

- ***Inclusive education/equal access to education***: the majority of Member States and regions that have chosen to focus on IP10.i, as well as many of those who have invested in IP10.ii, have used the ESF funding to increase the inclusivity of education provision whether at pre-primary, primary, secondary or tertiary levels. This involves providing wrap-around support and systems, including training of educational staff, for specific groups, for example those from low socio-economic status, those from migrant or minority (e.g. Roma) communities, and people with special educational needs or disabilities. Such support can reduce the risk of early school leaving and increase the likelihood of such groups continuing in vocational or mainstream tertiary education (through outreach and also financial support). A wide range of examples of ESF operations exist in this field (see Annex 5), which include the 'PuMPuRS' operation in Latvia or the 'Provision of scholarships to students from lower socio-economic background' operation in Croatia (see Box 47 and Box 48 below).

#### **Box 47 Latvia – 'PuMPuRS' - aid to reduce early school leaving**

Latvia – 'PuMPuRS' - aid to reduce early school leaving

This operation<sup>186</sup> promotes the establishment of a sustainable system of cooperation between municipalities, educational institutions, educators, support staff and parents or representatives of learners in order to identify early learners at risk of dropping out and to provide them with personalised support. Teachers are provided with the opportunity to professionally develop and strengthen their skills in dealing with learners. Methodological tools have been developed as part of this operation. A unified database has been established to ensure regular exchange of information at national, municipal, and educational level on the risk prevention measures taken and the results of those identified as being at risk of dropping out. At least 80% of the municipalities are expected to be involved, covering at least 665 general and vocational education institutions in Latvia.

#### **Box 48 Croatia – provision of scholarships to students from lower socio-economic background**

Croatia – provision of scholarships to students from lower socio-economic background

The Ministry of Science and Education awards three types of state scholarships to full-time university students in the Republic of Croatia: (1) state scholarships to students in STEM fields of science; (2) state scholarships to students based on socio-economic status and (3) scholarships to special groups of students, including students with disabilities, students under

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<sup>186</sup> <http://www.pumpurs.lv/>

guardianship, students who have been recognised as eligible for social housing services or children of people killed in the military conflict in Croatia.

- **Adult learning:** many Member States and regions have used ESF funding to invest in lifelong/adult learning, often with a particular focus on low-skilled adults or adults with obsolescent skills. For these countries, investment in lifelong learning could not have been carried out on this scale using national funds alone, so ESF investment has delivered significant added value. This is the case for example in Lithuania, which received country specific recommendations for four years running (2014-2017) on addressing insufficient provision of lifelong learning (see Annex 1.1); it was able to redress the situation through the allocation of the large majority of ESF funding (83%) to fund lifelong learning under IP10.iii (see case study in Annex 1.4). Portugal also invested strongly in the 'Qualifica' adult learning centres across the country, which would not have been able to be funded without ESF support. Estonia has also used ESF funding strategically to complement and enhance its national Lifelong Strategy; an example of an operation is set out in Box 49 below.

#### **Box 49 Estonia – Improving the availability of adult formal and non-formal learning opportunities**

Estonia – Improving the availability of adult formal and non-formal learning opportunities

Estonia has funded an ESF operation focusing on improving the availability of lifelong learning opportunities. The operation includes:

- 1) networking and outreach activities to identify the adults who have discontinued studies, reintegrate them in formal education and support their remaining in education;
- 2) the provision of high-quality and relevant training and retraining to increase the level of professional skills and develop key competences for lifelong learning (particularly ICT, language skills, social skills, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship and learning to learn).

- **Digitisation:** several Member States and regions have been able to use ESF funding to update their educational curricula, teacher and trainer skills and teaching resources, as well as the skills of students or workers, to better meet the needs of the mass digitisation of the economy and society. In several Member States, ESF funding has been able to be combined with ERDF funding to support digital infrastructure developments in parallel, as in the case of the Croatia e-schools operation (see Box 26 above). Similar major digital operations took place in other Member States, such as Hungary or Poland (see example in Box 50 below).

#### **Box 50 Poland – ICT education in primary schools in Daleszyce municipality**

Poland – ICT education in primary schools in Daleszyce municipality

This ESF operation aims at supporting three primary schools in the Daleszyce municipality, their students and teachers, through provision of ICT equipment and didactic materials, improving ICT competences of teachers and developing ICT competences among students, with inclusion of safety in the cyberspace and cyberthreats. As part of the operation, students will have the chance to participate in trips to technology parks, robotics workshops, and IT classes. Counselling classes were also provided.

Several Member States also invested ESF support to address the **digital skills gaps for workers** in certain sectors of the economy, to protect their jobs and boost competitiveness. The ESF has been an important source of funding in support of the 2016 Digital Education Strategy of Hungary. Another example is the 'Digital Skills Bridge' in Luxembourg (see Box 31 in section 4.4 above).

Examples of other policy areas which have been able to be addressed thanks to ESF include:

- **Civic education** e.g. the 'New Primary School' operation in Greece;
- **Expansion of childcare provision** in order to allow more women to return to the labour market e.g. several ECEC initiatives in Ireland;
- **Development of vocational courses in specific new sectors** or which require considerable initial investment in training and materials (e.g. electronics and automobile mechatronics in Portugal) or regular updating (e.g. draftsmen and designers in operation management and engineering, assistants in design offices, architectural firms or developers in the Bretagne region in France);
- **Non-formal education and training/extra-curricular activities**, e.g. in the 'Non-formal education basket voucher scheme' in Lithuania (see Box 42 above);
- **Development of transversal or 'soft' skills** e.g. 'Activating the Unemployed' in Spain, 'Soft Skills Training' in the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region in Italy or 'The Roma road to success through professional activity and education' in Lower Silesia in Poland.

Some EU stakeholders interviewed as part of targeted consultations have emphasised that the **scope effects are probably higher for some southern and eastern European countries**; while this is borne out to some degree by the research, there is however evidence of scope effects in other parts of the EU.

**Evaluation Question 5.3: Role effect: Have the operations supported innovation and the transfer of ideas that have been subsequently rolled out in different contexts? To what extent has the ESF contributed to structural changes in education and training national systems?**

#### Key findings – EQ 5.3

Funding from ESF TO10 has also had **important role effects** in terms of EU added value, with **many ESF TO10 operations supporting the transfer of ideas, as well as innovation, and contributing to structural change**. Although it is challenging to identify the origins of policies or practices, our evaluation has shown that **ESF investments have contributed to the transfer of ideas** through funding the piloting or wider implementation of ideas from other Member States or from regional to national level, e.g. early warning systems for early school leaving, systems for the validation of previous learning or digital education reforms. The transfer of ideas could be improved however by **greater support for transnational cooperation and peer learning** at EU and national level. **There is clear evidence that ESF actions have supported innovation in education and training** including various forms of modernisation of practices and policy in education and training (e.g. digitisation, inclusive education), targeting skills development in new or evolving sectors

of the economy (e.g. sustainable development, high-tech industries), testing new or alternative pedagogies (e.g. inclusive educational methods, use of theatre) and developing innovative training offers. **ESF TO10 funding has also led to structural changes** including: the development of local or regional education strategies; the rolling-out of new educational approaches and strategies nationwide; major structural investments in e.g. digital education, inclusive education, adult learning and dual learning; the establishment of sustainable links between business and education/ training; and the creation of networks and centres of excellence. Some factors were identified however which limited the potential for structural change, including **political changes, the slow start of the programming period and the small volume of ESF funding in some Member States.**

Our study concludes that **ESF TO10 investments have had important role effects in terms of EU added value.** ESF TO10 operations have **enabled the transfer of ideas** across and within Member States, as well as **supporting innovation in education and training systems**, and **contributing to structural change.** The results of the Public Consultation (see Annex 3) show that an important share of respondents believe that the ESF enables the testing of new approaches: 61.8% of respondents from organisations delivering or managing ESF felt that 'ESF enables experimenting with new ways of delivering services', as well as 56.5% of other organisations familiar with ESF but not directly involved, and 39.3% of individuals who are aware of the ESF but not receiving support in the general public.

Role effects in terms of **transfer of ideas** are always challenging to identify with absolute certainty given the difficulties in tracing the origins of policy or practice implementation, which can rarely be sourced to one specific influence. We can nonetheless ascertain that ESF has contributed to the transfer of ideas in a number of ways. For example:

- Poland has used ESF to adapt systems for the **validation of acquired competences** based on the French example;
- Several countries - including Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania - have introduced **early warning systems for early school leaving using ESF based on examples from other Member States** such as Austria, Belgium (Flanders), France and Sweden;
- Belgium is introducing a **database to monitor school dropouts** based on successful examples in other countries (e.g. Cyprus, Czech Republic, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Poland Slovakia, Slovenia, and United Kingdom<sup>187</sup>);
- **Croatia's major digital education reform** (the 'e-schools' interventions, see Annex 5), as well as similar investments in Hungary, were inspired by digital reforms and strategies in other Member States - such as Finland, France, Spain or Italy<sup>188</sup> - which also aided successful implementation.

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<sup>187</sup> Donlevy, V.; Day, L.; Andriescu, M.; Downes, P. (2019), Assessment of the Implementation of the 2011 Council Recommendation on Policies to Reduce Early School Leaving, European Commission, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/72f0303e-cf8e-11e9-b4bf-01aa75ed71a1>

<sup>188</sup> Eurydice (2019), Digital education at school in Europe, [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/eurydice/files/en\\_digital\\_education\\_n.pdf](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/eurydice/files/en_digital_education_n.pdf)

The Policy Delphi consultation process underlined that a **greater focus on transnational cooperation under ESF, as well as the organisation of more peer learning** (at EU and national level), would contribute to better transfer of ideas between Member States.

ESF has also had significant role effects in terms of generating and supporting **innovation**. For example:

- Some ESF operations directly target the **generation of innovation**, for example the 'School of the Future' operation in Estonia (see Box 51 below);

#### **Box 51 Estonia – School of the Future**

##### Estonia – School of the Future

The 'School of the future' ESF-funded operation aims to develop a new approach to learning by strengthening schools' capacity to innovate using evidence and to support teachers in becoming agents of change. In practical terms, teachers receive support to develop innovative solutions and assess their effectiveness based on evidence, analysed jointly with Tallinn University. Monthly seminars are held to reflect on the process of change and to prepare next steps. At the school level, a steering group of 4-6 members comprising teachers and school leaders follow up by developing specific plans to implement the innovative solutions identified.

- The modernisation of the education system in countries like Portugal is in part attributed to the **experimentation of pilot ideas** (generated particularly from exchanges within benchlearning and benchmarking with other Member States) which would be difficult to justify with limited national resources. This also underlines role effects in terms of transfer of ideas and structural change;
- Providing funding for innovative actions seeking to **target skills development for new or evolving sectors of the economy**. At federal level in Germany, these include for example the operation focused on 'Promoting education for sustainable development' (see Box 52 below).

#### **Box 52 Germany – promoting vocational education for sustainable development**

##### Germany – promoting vocational education for sustainable development

The ESF operation 'Promoting vocational education for sustainable development' (BBNE) is implemented under IP10.iv. Its overall aim is to raise awareness of the 'greening' of occupations, therefore funding operations that show how promoting sustainability is possible in everyday working life. The operation, which has an allocation of EUR 21 million covers two action areas: firstly, skills development across trades in the energy-efficient refurbishment of buildings and, secondly, 'Every job is green. Greening of jobs - access and possibilities for action', which aims to give young people the opportunity to learn about the greening potential of professions.

- Many other examples of ESF operations (see Annex 5) **targeting innovative sectors** can be found e.g. the 'BioInnovation' operation in West Wales and the Valleys (UK) (see Box A5-31), the 'ProMediu' operation (see Box A5-18)

providing vocational training of students in the field of environmental protection and monitoring in Romania, or the 'Future of Work' operation (see Box A5-23) in Germany which complements the high-tech 'Innovations for Germany' strategy to ensure an appropriate technical and social modernisation of the working world;

- The **testing and introduction of new or alternative pedagogies** and teaching approaches. This was highlighted in particular as added value in the case study on the Pays de la Loire region in France (see Annex 1.4). Other examples of innovative approaches used in ESF operations include for example the 'Move up' operation in Italy (see Box 53 below) or the innovative approach to supporting children with special educational needs implemented in Hungary (see Box 54 below).

### Box 53 Italy – New perspectives for students

#### Italy – New perspectives for students

An ESF operation aimed at secondary school pupils, teachers and parents throughout the Piedmont region of northern Italy offered students new perspectives and 'alternative destinations' in life. The 'Move up' operation used a wide range of innovative activities to promote equal opportunities, focusing on respect for diversity, the prevention of violence and bullying at school, and an enhanced awareness of how to use new web technologies. A touring theatre workshop gave pupils the opportunity to act out and analyse their experiences, finding their own answers to problems of intolerance and aggression. Another innovative tool was a multimedia camper van, which travelled 6,590 km from school to school across Piedmont.

### Box 54 Hungary – Innovative approach for school to work for children with special needs

#### Hungary – Innovative approach for school to work for children with special needs

A major ESF operation in Hungary (ESF budget of EUR 2.85 million) has taken a new approach to educating special needs children in order to boost their later career possibilities. Several hundred pupils and their parents living in the Miskolc region have been participating in the operation, which is also dedicated to training teachers in new inclusive educational methods and promote networking and teamwork among them. The operation places special emphasis on the involvement of the parents and the wider community to increase acceptance of people with special needs<sup>189</sup>.

- Innovation has been generated through the **introduction of new policies** such as digitisation and inclusive education in education and training (see above section on scope effects);
- Stakeholders interviewed as part of the targeted consultations have highlighted **other examples of innovation** supported by ESF including the introduction of a system for the validation of non-formal learning in Spain;
- Support for **adapting the training offer** to be more attractive to potential participants, particularly in terms of VET provision under IP10.iv. In the Pays de

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189 More information: <https://www.kormany.hu/hu/emberi-eroforrasok-miniszteriuma>

la Loire region of France, stakeholders also developed an innovative offer for apprenticeship training, in order to better meet regional needs, under IP10.iii.

ESF T010 has also contributed to **structural change** in education and training systems, as also discussed in section 4.1 (evaluation question 1.2) and section 3.1 above. For example:

- Support for the development of **local or regional educational strategies** or networking of key stakeholders. The Pomorskie region of Poland developed a regional education strategy thanks to ESF support. In the Czech Republic, ESF support also funded the established of local and regional action plans for education (see Box 55 below). This type of strategy also leads to process effects (see subsequent section of this report);

### Box 55 Czech Republic – Local or regional educational strategies

#### Czech Republic – Local or regional educational strategies

The local action plans for education development (LAPs) and the regional action plans for education development (RAPs) are the most successful interventions financed by the Czech OP. These plans set up partnerships among local (LAPs) or regional (RAPs) stakeholders (teachers, directors of schools, municipalities, regions, parents), enable wider communication among them, and improve strategic territorial planning in education, and finding appropriate solutions to local educational problems by exchanging experience and solution views among stakeholders.

- In the French regions of Bretagne and Pays de la Loire, ESF provided a strong contribution to the organisation of **inter-establishment seminars**, as well as opening up of education and training providers to the local environment, in particular local employers;
- Support for **rolling-out or decentralising new approaches and strategies** across the territory. For example, stakeholders in the Norte region of Portugal (see case study in Annex 1.4) underlined the important role played by the ESF in ensuring the roll out of ideas in different territorial contexts;
- Support for **major investments in teaching resources, curricula and upskilling** of teachers to support the introduction of innovative policies such as digitisation or inclusive education in education and training (see section on scope effects);
- Support for **major reforms** such as inclusive education (as discussed in the section above on scope effects) or the testing and introduction of dual learning. For example, in Belgium (Flanders), dual learning was tested through ESF and is now implemented community-wide since 2019/2020, after the three-year pilots partially financed by ESF;
- Support for structural changes to **better link business and education/training**. For example, in Slovenia (see case study in Annex 1.4), ESF support has been instrumental in modernising and improving the Slovenian education system and policy, particularly through the integration of activities aiming to improve linkages between the education system and the labour market

(tertiary education and VET in particular). Support for aligning education and training with labour market needs was an important area across many other Member States and regions under IP10.iv (and often IP10.iii), including for example the Pomorskie region of Poland;

- The establishment of **formal networks and centres of excellence** in the field of education or training, for example the national network of regional centres of competence in VET in Croatia (see Box 56 below).

#### **Box 56 Croatia – regional centres of VET competence**

##### Croatia – regional centres of VET competence

Croatia adopted the national network of regional centres of competences in VET whose purpose is to designate centres of excellence that will implement programmes of regular vocational education and training, lifelong learning, and other forms of formal and informal education. In July 2018 25 VET schools were appointed to the Regional Centres of Competences in VET in the sectors of tourism and hospitality, mechanical engineering, electrical engineering and computing, agriculture and health, with the aim of achieving a balance between regional presence and high levels of quality.

Our research has nonetheless highlighted that there were **factors which limited the potential for structural change**. In some Member States (e.g. Lithuania), the potential for structural change was limited by the slow start of the programming period. In other Member States, political change has hindered structural change: in Hungary for example, the competence-based curriculum which had been prepared using ESF funding was discarded after a change of government. The relatively small size of ESF funding in some countries, such as Luxembourg, was also a limitation on the scope for making lasting structural change.

***Evaluation Question 5.4: Process effect: Have Member States administrations and participating organisations derived benefits from being involved in the operations? To what extent the effects of ESF support under TO10 are likely to continue after the end of the funding, both at individual, institutional and policy level?***

##### **Key findings – EQ 5.4**

Our study concludes that there are **several important process effects generated by ESF TO10 support which are likely to lead to sustainable improvements in the effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation of education and training services**. Such effects include: the establishment of closer links and cooperation between education and training providers and the wider community; improvements to the governance of education and training at national, regional and local levels; improvements to teacher/training skills and recruitment; development of new tools and processes for managing and monitoring learning processes; increasing employer engagement in learning and raising awareness of the importance of key education and training priorities e.g. tackling early school leaving, upskilling of workers. The evidence suggests that there is a potential to increase process effects by ensuring process interventions are implemented at appropriate phases in programming/curricular development, by focusing on capacity building in less economically

developed Member States, by promoting greater involvement of target groups in ESF planning, monitoring and implementation and by increasing the visibility of ESF support.

**In terms of sustainability**, the study concludes that **many of the positive effects of ESF TO10 support are likely to continue after the end of funding**. There is a strong likelihood of ongoing benefits at individual, institutional and policy level. For **individuals**, sustainable impacts are likely to include improved life chances and labour market opportunities through the qualifications, skills and experiences gained through participating in ESF-funded programmes, including gaining access to further learning or employment experiences. For **institutions**, longer-term benefits from ESF funding are likely to be seen thanks to improvements to the skills of teachers and trainers, new teaching methods and approaches, the availability of new tools to monitor and manage learning processes, the establishment of links with the wider community (including employers) and investments in new curricula and materials. At the **policy level**, the introduction of major new reforms in education and training in particular are highly likely to lead to sustainable policy impacts in these areas. The support for local and regional actions in particular policy areas (e.g. early school leaving) is also likely to lead to sustainable impacts at local and regional level.

The research carried out for this evaluation has shown that the planning, implementation and monitoring of ESF TO10 has also led to **clear process effects for administrations and beneficiary organisations**. While some of these benefits are common across different types of ESF funding implementation, there are clear benefits under TO10 for stakeholders involved in delivering and managing education and training which are **likely to continue to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the delivery of those services in future**. The structural changes mentioned in the above sub-section will also ensure the ongoing impact of funding under ESF TO10.

Process effects which have been identified during the evaluation research, particularly in the case studies (see Annex 1.4), the targeted consultations (see Annex 1.2) and the mapping (see Annex 1.1) include the following:

- **Establishing closer links and cooperation between schools, training providers, teachers/trainers and other stakeholders**, such as NGOs working in relevant fields (e.g. NGOs focused on people with disabilities, supporting migrant communities, etc.). This was noted for example in the German region of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern or, as noted above (previous section), in the French regions of Bretagne and Pays de la Loire. In Portugal, there is an increased awareness of the importance of integrated interventions and cooperation in the field of education, fostered by ESF operations such as PiiCiE (*Plano integrado e inovador de combate ao insucesso escolar*) (see Box A5-7 in Annex 5). The Czech authorities plan to apply the experience gained through the implementation via the ESF of the local and regional action plans for education development (LAPs and RAPs) (see Box 55 above) to the implementation of national education policies. In Poland, ESF has been used to better align training with labour market needs. These new forms of cooperation have improved the effectiveness of implementation of education and training and are likely continue beyond the ESF funding period.
- **Improvements to the governance and organisation of education and training** at national, regional, and local levels. In the Pomorskie region of

Poland, the governance capacity of the local governments has been enhanced by having the responsibility of distributing funds to all schools in their area. In other regions, such as the Bretagne region in France, the ESF has reinforced the structuring of the training offer across the territory, with a particular focus on local needs and quality.

- **Improvements to the skills and recruitment of educational staff.** For example, the 2019 evaluation<sup>190</sup> carried out on ESF TO10 in the German region of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern concluded that the initiative under IP10.i of providing longer-term vocational training for teachers in regional, comprehensive and vocational schools had a strong process effect, helping to support the creation of a concept of educational language (*Sprachbildungskonzept*). In Portugal, improvements to teacher recruitment processes were also brought in thanks to the ESF TeSP (*Cursos Técnicos Superiores Profissionais*) operation. In Poland, short- and medium-term process effects were also observed, however the need for certain conditions to ensure their long-term impact were also underlined (see Box 57 below).

#### **Box 57 Poland – upskilling of educational staff**

##### Poland – upskilling of educational staff

In Poland, at the individual and institutional level, the skills acquired by the school management and supporting staff during the OP KED (Knowledge Education Development) financed training courses are expected to improve the teaching outcomes in the short- to medium-run. However, as confirmed by the mid-term evaluation<sup>191</sup> of the educational component of the programme, some of the trainings are very short and require the introduction of other complementary measures to be introduced. Hence, in the long-term, their continuation will depend on a number of factors including: a) continuing trainings which support teachers in applying the new knowledge they gained and tools introduced; b) better adapting the scope of the training to current needs; and c) adapting the form of the continuing training needs (e.g. smaller interactive workshops or the provision of advice rather than conferences).

- **Development of new tools and processes to monitor and manage learning programmes.** In Ireland for example, ESF non-financial data requirements have influenced the development of the Programme Learner Support System (PLSS) database. Thanks to the database, the further education and training (FET) sector has much better information on the people accessing its courses, and the outcomes and impact of ESF operations are easier to measure. In the Portuguese North region, one organisation has created an IT platform for the management of traineeships that will serve as a benchmark for schools without ESF funding. Expertise and tools for monitoring learners has also

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190 BMAS (2019) Wirtschaftlichkeitsbetrachtung der Programmumsetzung der Förderprogramme im ESF-OP des Bundes; Studie im Rahmen der Gesamtevaluation des ESF-OP des Bundes in der Förderperiode 2014-2020 - Teil i: Evaluierung der Investitionsprioritäten

191 Ministry of Investments and Development (2019). Ewaluacja mid-term postępu rzeczowego i finansowego Programu Operacyjnego Wiedza Edukacja Rozwój 2014-2020 (PO WER) oraz wyliczenie wartości wskaźnika rezultatu długoterminowego, [https://www.power.gov.pl/media/78644/Mid-term\\_RK\\_11\\_09.pdf](https://www.power.gov.pl/media/78644/Mid-term_RK_11_09.pdf)

been developed in the Pays de la Loire region in France thanks to ESF T010, for example at the University of Angers and the National Council for Private Agricultural Education (CNEAP).

- **Employer engagement in training.** Due to the co-funding requirements and the availability of partial funding of training activities for businesses, employers have become more aware of the importance of investing in skills as a 'marketable' value. This has been described as leading to 'change in mindset' and 'strategic shift' which is likely to continue beyond the scope of ESF funding. This was noted for example in the 'Skills for Growth' ESF operation in West Wales and the Valleys (UK).
- **Raising awareness on key priorities in education and training.** In many Member States and regions, ESF T010 investments have had a particularly important process effect on raising awareness about key issues in relation to education and training, which should keep them high on the agenda in future. These include raising the profile of the importance of for example adult learning (e.g. Lithuania, Romania, Slovenia) or early school leaving (e.g. Bulgaria, the Bretagne region in France, Poland, Slovakia).

In some instances, the potential for stronger process effects was **limited by different factors**. For example, in Lithuania, ESF funding was allocated to teacher training even though the general education curriculum had not yet been updated. Some stakeholders, for example in Portugal, considered that the process effects have diminished over time since most organisations managing ESF have already adjusted to the requirements and professionalised; this was not however the majority view.

**In terms of sustainability**, the study concludes that **many of the positive effects of ESF T010 support are likely to continue after the end of funding. There is a strong likelihood of ongoing benefits at all three levels: individual, institutional and policy.**

Firstly, at **individual level**, our study has clearly shown that ESF T010 has had immediate impacts on a large number of individuals across the EU. As seen in Section Three of this report, there were around 9.5 million participations in funded programmes by the end of 2018. As seen in section 4.1 above, the initial results indicators show that, on leaving the ESF T010-supported programme, some 3.15 million participants had gained a qualification, over 800,000 participants had engaged in education and training, and over 230,000 had found employment. These positive impacts on individuals are confirmed by the Public Consultation (see Annex 3 and section 4.1), with a large proportion of ESF participants reporting that the support had made a positive difference to their situation; over half said that, without EU support, there would be less or no opportunities for people in their situation. Key outcomes which individual respondents cited were: learning new skills and/or getting a qualification, feeling more confident, starting a new education or training course, and improving employment conditions, such as increasing salary or receiving a promotion.

**Our study finds that these immediate results of participation in ESF-funded operations are likely to have lasting impacts on the lives and life chances of the majority of individuals involved.** This investment in their capital of skills,

knowledge and experience, including gaining access to further education and training and employment, as well as building confidence and self-belief, and obtaining qualifications, will place them in a stronger position on the labour market and in society for the long-term. Such sustainable impacts are likely to occur for the all of the main participant groups. For example:

- By staying in education, young people at risk of early school leaving will gain qualifications and skills which will enhance their chances of finding employment or going into further training, hence improving their long-term prospects for employment and meaningful engagement in society;
- Digital skills acquired by young people will improve their access to knowledge and likelihood of accessing further education opportunities, enhancing their long-term labour market prospects;
- The skills and qualifications gained by teachers and trainers will sustainably improve their skillset and can lead to increased job satisfaction as well as improved career opportunities going forwards;
- Skills and qualifications acquired by adult learners will also remain as capital for maintaining their employment, changing jobs or sectors, finding employment or going into further training.

Secondly, the study findings also point to sustainable impacts of ESF TO10 support at **institutional level**. Many of the effects on institutions already discussed above (process and role effects) are likely to have a long-lasting impact. For example:

- Improvements to the competences of teachers and trainers are likely to contribute to long-term improvements of the institutions in which they work, for example through improved teaching skills and methods, increased awareness of how to deal with diversity, better organisation and more innovation. Once new approaches and methods are introduced, evidence suggests that it is unlikely that institutions will 'slip back' to old ways and instead will continue a positive trajectory of ongoing improvements;
- The tools to monitor and manage learning processes which have been introduced thanks to ESF TO10, together with the training for staff to use them, will remain in place and continue to ensure a culture of continuous improvement, long after the ESF funding has finished;
- The links established with other organisations and the wider community (families, communities, NGOs, employers, other education and training providers, etc.) will also remain in place, and continue to provide a more effective and integrated context for the educational or training activities;
- The investments in new teaching curricula (e.g. Croatia), resources and methods will benefit institutions for many years beyond the end of ESF funding.

Thirdly, our study finds that there are many **policy impacts** of ESF TO10 funding which are also highly likely to have sustainable positive effects. In particular, the ESF investments for major education and training reforms will benefit the country's education and training systems for many years beyond their initial introduction.

Examples highlighted in our study include the ESF support provided for: the establishment of the Maltese systematic approach to addressing early school leaving (see Box 2); the testing and introduction of the dual learning system in Belgium (Flanders) (see role effects above); the New Start programme to ensure that VET schools in Greece better adapt to the needs of students from more vulnerable backgrounds (see section 4.1); or the introduction of a major digital education reform in Croatia<sup>192</sup> (see Box 26). At local and regional level, sustainable policy impacts are likely to be seen through for example the local and regional action plans on early school leaving that have been introduced thanks to ESF T010 support (see section 4.1, evaluation question 1.6).

Although the study has underlined a lot of process effects and a good prognosis in terms of sustainable impacts of the ESF support, the Policy Delphi process underlined **a number of factors linked to process elements that could further increase EU added value and the sustainability of the impacts of ESF T010 support**. These included:

- A greater focus on **capacity-building in less economically developed Member States**, which could increase the added value of ESF through allowing more effective and efficient use of funds, and better dissemination of learning;
- More **structured involvement of representatives of target groups**, particularly those representing the least educated, in ESF programming, monitoring and implementation could increase the EU added value of ESF support;
- **Greater visibility of ESF support for education and training**. By providing greater visibility to the benefits of ESF funding, more stakeholders may apply for funding support for actions;
- **Increasing the effectiveness of partnerships** at all levels of implementation. Partnerships – both in terms of ESF management or implementation (related to operations) - do not always include – or sufficiently actively involve - all relevant actors at national/ regional/ local level, including labour market stakeholders, representatives of target groups (especially the low-skilled and least educated) and NGOs;
- Providing education and training organisations with **tools to make their social usefulness and impact apparent**, through for instance self-assessment, benchmarking against other organisations to identify areas for improvement, and using evidence gathered to strengthen dialogue with policymakers and to promote the quality of services to the general public and relevant stakeholders.

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<sup>192</sup> <https://www.e-skole.hr/en/>

## 5. GOOD PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNT

This section summarises the key lessons from the evaluation in relation to each of the key evaluation criteria, highlighting some examples of good practices.

### 5.1. Effectiveness

#### *Positive lessons: what works well*

##### ***At the level of overall programme performance***

- OPs performing well at this stage of the programme cycle were underpinned by **a strong strategic approach** that informed the prioritisation and targeting of resources to address specific needs. There are also benefits if programme strategies **are integrated and embedded into national (and regional) strategies** for education and training, as shown by many of the case studies of operational programmes for example in Germany, Portugal, and Spain.
- The analysis highlighted the importance of **collaborative governance models** at the regional level involving all the key stakeholders at the programme design stage. This includes the Managing Authority (MA), local and regional authorities and key partners such as NGOs and social partners. Involving stakeholders in this way allows operations to be more relevant to local needs realities, which in itself was a positive lesson in the delivery of specific operations.
- Programmes also benefited from strong links and **good working relationships between education and employment ministries/departments** at the national and regional level.
- The **management capacity of the MAs** has been critical in the stronger performance of TO10 operations. The application of **robust ongoing monitoring and evaluation systems** has allowed MAs to react quickly when operations are not meeting their targets for example by improving communication tools and adapting funding criteria where this is necessary, for example in the Federal Germany OP.

##### ***General implementation of all types of operations***

- Some of the most successful and promising practices have shown that a **central role for local, regional and national governments** in the delivery of operations has been effective in generating longer-term changes. This leadership role ensures that delivery approaches are developed and coordinated at a wider level. Examples include the Curricular diversification programmes (*Programas de diversificación curricular* - PDC) and Programmes to improve learning and school performance (*Programas de Mejora del Aprendizaje y del Rendimiento* - PMAR) (both Spain – see Box A5-10 in Annex 5) or the Preventive Programmes in Lithuania (Box 10 & Box 42).

##### ***Investment Priority 10.i (early school leaving)***

- The provision of intensive and tailored support to individuals over a longer-term period based on detailed risk assessments of pupils at risk of dropping out leads

to better results in the longer-term. Such interventions are considered costly in terms of human and financial resources. However, benefits are seen to be longer lasting and more effective. Examples include the Voluntary 10th Grade Class, Regional Germany OP (Box 8) and the Federal Germany OP's operation 'Graduation and continuation – Education chains up to the vocational training qualification' (Box A5-35 in Annex 5).

- Training for educational staff to recognise and understand the potential problems that children from disadvantaged groups such as alternative or travelling communities face have been effective. For example, the Slovakia National OP 'Schools that are open to everyone' operation (Box A5-9 in Annex 5); and targeted education/training for disadvantaged learners within education and training systems and pupils with special needs. Such operations aim to ensure adequate educational curricula to meet the diversity of interests, expectations, capacities and needs of students and are important in ensuring sufficient focus on diversity and inclusion.

### ***Investment Priority 10.ii (tertiary education)***

- The use of clear criteria to identify vulnerable students in need of financial support, as illustrated by the Croatia National OP's support for the provision of scholarships to students from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Box 7 and Box A5-13 in Annex 5).
- The use of dedicated support for students coming from vocational education streams to improve access including specific teaching materials that aim to improve their academic performance, as shown by the Support for Student Success project (France) (Box 11 and Box A5-14 in Annex 5).

### ***Investment Priority 10.iii (lifelong learning)***

- Targeted education approaches to address the education needs of those with minimal or no educational qualification and school leavers through **second-chance education opportunities** for adults with low levels of qualifications have shown the potential for positive long-term results. One example is the Back to Education initiative in Ireland (see Box A5-26 in Annex 5).
- The **quality of detection of vulnerable groups who need support and follow-up on an individual basis** (for example Pays de la Loire OP, France) is crucial to the achievement of successful results.
- Established **trust and cooperation between all stakeholders, particularly the private sector and stakeholders responsible for VET and apprenticeship policies and educational providers**, including in defining curricula and providing apprenticeships. One example can be found in the Pays de la Loire OP, France (see case study in Annex 1.4).

### ***Investment Priority 10.iv (Labour market relevance)***

- Counselling by career start **mentors with continuous, individual support from school through to the vocational training** stage. This can involve providing **adequate support mechanisms for mentors and their development needs**, including in student assessments, setting minimum educational knowledge and adequate distribution of the formal assessment competencies between the business and education sector, etc. **Ensuring VET curricula are modified in cooperation with employers**, as seen for example in the Career Entry Support operation in Germany (see Box A5-35 in Annex 5)).
- Ensuring SMEs are able to participate, e.g. through interface institutions and I by training institutions to approach companies.
- Partnership development amongst universities and employers.

### ***Points for improvement***

#### ***General implementation of all types of operations***

- There is a need for more systematic **consultation with target groups in the initial phases of planning training programmes** and correctly diagnosing the participants' needs as well as the labour market needs.

#### ***Investment Priority 10.i (early school leaving)***

- In the implementation of operations focused on disadvantaged groups, it is important to **develop stronger partnerships with relevant support services (beyond schools)** that enable the needs of vulnerable children to be addressed through a variety of activities such as after-school support, or support for parents, counselling, or other types of social measures.

#### ***Investment Priority 10.ii (tertiary education)***

- In order to develop appropriate support mechanisms for particular groups, there is a need to develop **more consistent interpretations** at local, regional and national levels of who might be considered as vulnerable, disadvantaged or under-represented.
- There is a need for **greater focus on financial support and guidance, counselling and mentoring services** to support disadvantaged groups in accessing tertiary education. This can be supported by embedding requirements for higher education institutions (HEIs) to widen their student base into national HE funding formulas and by supporting the development of teaching staffs' pedagogical skills to address the needs of non-traditional students.
- **Students' transition from secondary to tertiary education should be considered more systematically.** In addition, HEIs and community stakeholders could **collaborate more effectively** to understand how non-traditional attainments might be suitable for HE, for example, there is potential

for ESF to support the recognition of prior learning (RPL) schemes<sup>193</sup> that would benefit non-traditional learners.

***Investment Priority 10.iii (lifelong learning)***

- **Financial support and incentives are not always sufficient** in addressing the barriers to participation in training for people with low qualifications. It is important that operations face the wider obstacles faced by low-qualified people and address the need for further accompanying measures. **Allowing adequate time for the outreach/fieldwork and provision of flexible approaches in counselling.** The collaboration with partners in this regard, particularly employers to recognise the added-value of investing in elderly and lower-skilled employees, can contribute significantly to outreach.
- The evaluation has highlighted that operations risked focussing on 'low hanging fruit', supporting people who need only minimal support anyway and leaving aside the more problematic cases. It was suggested that this could be overcome by **improving participation by civil society organisations**, NGOs, and local stakeholders, that provide learning opportunities to the most vulnerable.

***Investment Priority 10.iv (Labour market relevance)***

- There is a need to develop **stronger partnerships between employers, social partners, and education providers in order to improve coordination and integration of the VET system.** There were challenges relating to the creation of partnerships between vocational education, universities, and employers, as well as the inclusion of employers in development of curricula and implementation of VET education. The problem with creation of partnerships is caused by the **limited understanding of the universities and employers of the benefits from this kind of cooperation, lack of structural incentives** as well as limited administrative resources of the universities to engage in such partnerships.
- It is important to recognise the **problems experienced by small companies** (especially in sectors of economic activity with a high potential for job creation) **in forging partnerships with training institutions**, owing to insufficient resources and therefore to improve the incentives for small companies to participate.

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<sup>193</sup> Recognition of prior learning (RPL) process used by universities to evaluate skills and knowledge acquired outside the traditional classroom for the purpose of recognising competence against a given set of standards, competencies, or learning outcomes.

## 5.2. Efficiency

### *Positive lessons: what works well*

- **Intermediary bodies and wider partnerships arrangements have an important role to play** in supporting the efficient delivery of operations. It has been shown that specialist sectoral organisations can play a key role in supporting the engagement and service delivery of beneficiary organisations to ensure a good level of take up amongst participant individuals and organisations, and in ensuring a successful targeting approach (see Box 17)
- **Smaller beneficiary organisations benefit from more intensive support and capacity building on ESF administration.** This could provide particular benefits for organisations that have stronger links with vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. For example, as shown by the Slovenia National OP and West Wales and the Valleys (UK) OP case studies, measures have been introduced to improve the administrative and management processes of a range of beneficiaries.

### *Points for improvement*

- **There is currently limited comparative data on the cost-effectiveness of operations.** The limitations of the comparative analysis emphasise the need for robust cost-effectiveness analysis to be undertaken at the level of operations at appropriate points during their implementation and particularly when comprehensive and robust results data has been collected on the individuals supported.
- A **high number of implementing partners can act as a constraint on efficient delivery.** There is evidence from the case studies that funding a high number of partners contributes to the administrative burden, delays implementation, and increases the risk of engaging with organisations that had limited capacity to deal with the procedural requirements of ESF.
- **Gold-plating continues to create inefficiencies** by creating additional administrative barriers for ESF project managers or potential beneficiaries. The 'room for interpretation' in the legislation at EU level, gives national authorities the chance to make rules stricter.
- There is a high **perceived cost of operations to support graduate retention rates** relative to the benefits that can be measurable over a short-term time horizon. Scholarships for students have a relatively high cost per participant ratio and the real benefits can only be measured over a longer-term period. This suggests that more **research (and dissemination) is required to understand the specific economic benefits of investments in tertiary education operations.**

### 5.3. Relevance

#### *Positive lessons: what works well*

- The **programming process** of the European Structural and Investment Funds has been key in supporting relevance. Education and training challenges and key target groups in need of support were identified at the planning stage in the Partnership Agreements by all Member States based on thorough needs assessments. This ensured that funding choices and the design of ESF TO10 operations in the Operational Programmes were **strategically steered from the outset** towards the relevant challenges and the relevant groups in need of support in the education and training field. In **Romania**, for example, the need for supporting vulnerable children is strongly identified in the Partnership Agreement. This translates into planned actions in the Operational Programme Human Capital, where vulnerable groups are a focus of operations under TO10 across all Investment Priorities, starting from pre-primary through to secondary (vocational and general) and post-secondary education. The same can be said for **Greece**, where vulnerable groups are a target of operations under all Investment Priorities in the Operational Programme Human Resources Development, Education and Lifelong Learning (see Box 19).
- The **European Semester country specific recommendations** related to education and training **have been well-reflected in ESF TO10 planned operations**. The groups identified as in need of support in the country specific recommendations between 2012 and 2018 are largely also identified in ESF TO10 planned operations. This shows that **the European Semester is a strong framework for ensuring that ESF operations are relevant to target groups** in need and to tackling the challenges they face, as was confirmed by a range of stakeholders consulted, across both EU and national levels. In **Czech Republic** for example, activities planned under the OP address multiple CSRs (from 2013, 2016, and 2018) to target disadvantaged groups at risk of exclusion. The OP aims to improve the openness of the education system at all levels to children, pupils, and students with disabilities, as well as those from a lower socio-economic background. In **Malta**, CSRs from 2012 to 2015 consistently point to the need to further improve basic skills attainment and reduce early school leaving, which is well reflected under ESF TO10 actions that under IP10.i to reduce early school leaving and improve basic competences.
- The possibility of **adjusting planned operations** has worked well in ensuring that ESF operations remain relevant throughout the programming period to target groups and their needs, despite socio-economic changes and other changes to the implementation context. Member States were able to respond to changes in the implementation context and generally did so – either through substantial reprogramming of the Operational Programmes – as in **Spain**, see Box 58 below, or through smaller but significant changes to operations during implementation. An example of the latter can be seen in **Portugal** where, under the regional OP Norte, adult training courses were adapted to be delivered in the evening instead of during the day, as participants were increasingly unable to

attend classes during working hours given that they were more likely than at the start of the programming period to have a job.

### **Box 58 Spain – Reprogramming to address early school leaving**

#### Spain – Reprogramming to address early school leaving

In **Spain**, the national Operational Programme was reprogrammed in December 2018 to allocate funding to specific objectives not initially programmed under TO10 but in increasing need of support, such as the prevention of early school leaving at primary school level, where a new measure was introduced targeting pupils and teachers. The flexibility of the OP was deemed even higher, given the fact that changes in political priorities is a complex undertaking for Spain due to its strong regional governance which requires it to deal with multiple administrative levels, actors and implementation modalities.

- The **broad scope in the design of the Investment Priorities** allowed Member States to tackle a range of challenges with ESF TO10. By covering a broad range of policy areas across various education levels throughout the life cycle, the Investment Priorities allowed diverse education and training needs in different Member States or region to be tackled with ESF TO10. This has been widely praised by national and EU stakeholders alike for allowing **flexibility in the programming** and thus increasing the relevance of ESF TO10 planned operations to the needs of target groups.
- The **Partnership Principle** of the European Structural and Investment Funds has been important in supporting increased relevance of actions to target group needs. It helped to ensure that Member States consulted, albeit to different degrees, key partners when designing ESF TO10 operations – as in the example from Czech Republic in Box 24 above. It also pushed Member States to outline their plans for consultation with key partners during implementation and monitoring of the actions.

#### *Points for improvement*

- The lack of **meaningful or substantial partner involvement** has been identified as the main area for improvement in relation to the relevance of ESF actions supporting education and training. Whilst it did set in motion consultative processes in the design of ESF TO10 operations, **the Partnership Principle was not fully implemented in practice**, with stakeholders pointing out some examples of surface-level consultation processes that hindered meaningful engagement of partners across all areas of programme design, implementation and monitoring.
- **Capacity-building of key ESF and education and training stakeholders** can be increased. This is to allow stakeholders such as social partners and civil society organisations - on EU, national regional and local level – to be able to contribute in a more meaningful way to the design, implementation and monitoring of ESF TO10 operations and thus support increased relevance to target group needs.
- **Diversifying the stakeholder groups that are consulted** is also an important area for improvement. Public authorities, especially from the national and

regional levels, are generally overrepresented in consultation activities and committees at the expense of the general public, civil society, social and economic partners, and local authorities. Training institutions, vocational schools, higher education institutions and other education and training-relevant stakeholders should also be more involved.

- There is room to increase the relevance of planned operations under Investment Priority 10.ii to **disadvantaged groups**. Individuals facing multiple barriers to accessing education were less targeted under operations under Investment Priority 10.ii. **Widening participation in higher education** needs to truly include and retain the diversity of the student body. This can be facilitated by **wide consultation** when developing new ESF TO10 projects and operations in the higher education field.
- For increased relevance of operations under Investment Priority 10.iv in particular, a more **systematic examination and analysis of training needs** should be undertaken based on concrete and up-to-date information on the skills required in the various sectors of economic activity in different territories. To this end, it is important to encourage **institutional dialogue mechanisms** between local authorities, social partners and other regional and local actors. This should then be applied to the preparation of vocational education reforms, including new curricula, in cooperation with social partners.
- **Certain skills and competences** that are relevant to Member States' education and training needs **have not received enough attention** under ESF TO10 planned actions.
  - Under Investment Priority 10.iii for example, **basic skills** deficiencies of many European citizens, specifically adult workers that are at risk of exclusion in an increasingly polarised market, should be more vigorously addressed.
  - In light of COVID-19 and the gaps it has exposed in education and training systems, **digitalisation of learning** and **distance learning** could also receive greater policy focus.
  - Under Investment Priority 10.iv, **continuing education, postgraduate (re)training and professional reorientation** could receive greater policy attention. Tools to validate competences to support the development of flexible re-skilling and up-skilling pathways in the labour market deserve increased attention in this context.

#### 5.4. Coherence

##### *Positive lessons: what works well*

- ESF TO10 investments, across all Investment Priorities (IPs), have proved to be **an effective mechanism for supporting the concrete implementation on the ground of key EU education and training policies and initiatives**, such as the Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training

(ET 2020), the New Skills Agenda for Europe<sup>194</sup> or the Digital Education Action Plan<sup>195</sup>. For example, ESF TO10 operations which are in line with the Digital Education Action Plan include the 'e-Schools' initiative in Croatia<sup>196</sup> (see Box 26) or the ADA programme in Spain<sup>197</sup> (see Box 59 below).

### Box 59 Spain – ADA programme

#### Spain – ADA programme: reinforcing the Digital Education Action Plan

The ADA programme, run by the Spanish Women's Institute at national level, implements ICT training in schools to promote the interest of girls in technological careers, particularly in ICT. The programme is clearly coherent with Action 8 of the Digital Education Plan (Training in digital and entrepreneurial skills for girls).

This alignment supports the concrete implementation of policies and priorities mutually agreed at EU level in national education and training systems, ensuring that all Member States, regions and beneficiaries have the means to implement the latest developments and priorities, to the ultimate benefit of target groups. See section 4.4 (evaluation question 4.1) for further detail.

- It has been possible to ensure the ongoing coherence of ESF TO10 with other EU education and training policies and priorities which have emerged since the beginning of the programming period thanks to the **broad scope of all the Investment Priorities, focusing on different education sectors, as well as the ability to introduce mid-term adjustments to OPs**. For example, as seen in section 4.4 (in relation to the Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals), ESF TO10 funding was able to be used to support the integration of migrants into education and training, although the migrant crisis did not happen until 2015 (after the ESF programming period had begun). Examples of ESF operations targeting newly-arrived migrants since this date include the 'Yrk In'<sup>198</sup> project in Sweden (see Box A5-30 in Annex 5) or 'B3 Education and Consultation' ESF operation<sup>199</sup> in Baden-Württemberg (Germany) (see Box 20).
- As discussed in section 4.4 (evaluation question 4.4), the European Semester **country specific recommendations (CSRs), the country reports and ET 2020 benchmarks provide a robust mechanism for facilitating coherence** between ESF TO10 and the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020), as well as the goals of Europe 2020. For example, as seen in section 4.3 (evaluation question 3.1(a)) above, Germany includes explicit support for migrants in the national OP and in nine out of the 16 regional OPs, following repeated CSRs (2014, 2015, 2018, 2019) citing the need to improve educational outcomes and skills levels of disadvantaged groups. In Croatia, the OP is coherent with the repeated CSRs (2014-2015, 2017-2019) to improve the quality and labour market relevance of the education and training

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<sup>194</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223>

<sup>195</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/digital-education-action-plan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/digital-education-action-plan_en)

<sup>196</sup> <https://www.e-skole.hr/en/>

<sup>197</sup> <https://bit.ly/2X4rCd5>; <http://www.inmujer.gob.es/areasTematicas/SocInfo/Programas/Ada.htm>

<sup>198</sup> <https://www.esf.se/Resultat/Projektbanken-2014-2020/Alla-Projekt/Ditt-val---ratt-val/>

<sup>199</sup> <https://www.netzwerk-iq-bw.de/de/>

system for both young people and adults. This coherence contributes to ensuring the relevance of ESF TO10 support to the actual needs of target groups in different Member States, and forms part of a coherent national approach to meeting those needs (as discussed in section 4.4 (evaluation question 4.5)). In the period 2012-2019, the highest number of CSRs (95) in the field of education and training were issued in the field of labour market relevance, corresponding to IP10.iv; the next highest number (66) related to the fields covered by IP10.i (early school leaving and equal access to education); followed by 34 CSRs related to lifelong learning (the field of IP10.iii); and then only 8 CSRs relating to tertiary education (the field of IP10.ii). Coherence with CSRs was overall good across all IPs; we did find more cases of non-coherence in the fields of IPs 10.i and 10.iv, but consider that this is mainly a reflection of the larger number of CSRs and Member States concerned. Further detail can be found in Annex 1.1.

- **Key factors contributing to internal coherence** of ESF TO10 with other Thematic Objectives (TOs), other Operational Programmes (OPs) and between TO10 Investment Priorities (IPs) include: rigorous planning at programming stage; ensuring alignment of interventions with country specific recommendations (CSRs) and national strategies; clear lines of responsibility and good communication between authorities managing different TOs/IPs/OPs; and strong intersectoral coordination between key ministries and wider stakeholders. The role of the European Commission is also key in ensuring that Thematic Objectives within OPs are coherent with each other and do not have overlaps or duplication. Examples of effective coordination leading to strong regional coherence of Thematic Objectives 8, 9 and 10 are provided in the Portuguese Norte region (see Box 33) or in West Wales and the Valleys (UK) (see Box 34). Improved internal coherence contributes to greater efficiency in the use of available funding. See section 4.4 (evaluation question 4.2) for further detail.
- **Synergies between ESF TO10 and ERDF funding can provide very valuable and complementary support to major reforms and structural change** in the field of education and training, for example in major reforms in early childhood education and care (ECEC) or digital education e.g. in Slovenia or Croatia (see Box 38). Such reforms provide important benefits to learners, teachers and, ultimately, should contribute to improving the Member State's overall performance in relation to key education benchmarks. Ensuring the provision of digital education for all children is crucial in bridging the digital inequalities which exist. Many of the positive examples of combining ERDF and ESF TO10 funding were found in IP10.i, corresponding to improvements in ECEC or school education, however examples were also found relating to other IPs, such as the development of regional centres of vocational competence in Croatia funded under IP10.iv. See section 4.4 (evaluation question 4.3) for further detail.
- **There is good coherence and complementarity between ESF TO10 and Erasmus+ in the texts, and several good examples of synergies exist in practice**, for example with ESF being used to provide top-up support for disadvantaged students and support their mobility under Erasmus+, or upscale Erasmus+ projects. Many of the positive examples relating to combining ESF TO10 and Erasmus+ funding were found in IP10.ii, such as the ESF operation

supporting 'Internationalisation of higher education' in Lithuania (see Box 39). However the study also found examples relating to other IPs, in particular operations on adult learning under IP10.iii, such as the Slovenian 'GOAL' project (see Box 40). Erasmus+ National Agencies are also sometimes ESF Intermediary Bodies (e.g. FRSE in Poland) which has the potential to lead to interesting synergies. See section 4.4 (evaluation question 4.3) for further detail.

- **Ex-ante conditionalities for ESF did lead to structural reforms in the field of education and training in some Member States or regions**, e.g. Czech Republic, Estonia, or Greece. For example, in the Czech Republic, a detailed action plan for inclusive education was implemented to fulfil the ex-ante conditionalities on early school leaving, addressing the repeated country-specific recommendation on the need to include disadvantaged children (including Roma) in mainstream schools. However, in some cases, complying with the ex-ante conditionalities delayed the start of ESF programme implementation. Most of the ex-ante conditionalities related to inclusive education or early school leaving, linked to IP10.i, however there was an ex-ante conditionality linked to lifelong learning (IP10.iii) in Estonia. For further detail, see section 4.4 (evaluation question 4.4).
- As seen in section 4.4 (evaluation question 4.5), **coherence with national and regional strategies was facilitated by the European Semester process and the situation analyses in the Partnership Agreements**. As a result of these processes, coherence with national and regional strategies on education and training was overall good.

### **Points for improvement**

- As seen in section 4.4 (evaluation question 4.3), despite the strong potential for mutual added value and examples of good complementarity with some funds (e.g. ERDF, Erasmus+), synergies with them are often **hampered by difficulties in articulating different funds** including different application processes and timeframes, differing timelines and rules for implementation, different partnership arrangements (e.g. obligatory transnational partnerships under Erasmus+), the complexities of working with two Managing Authorities on a joint action, fear of accusations of double funding, and insufficient communication on how to articulate the funds at all levels (EU, national, Managing Authorities/National Agencies).
- As also seen in section 4.4 (evaluation question 4.3), despite good levels of coherence in the legal texts, **examples of using the potential synergies with other EU funds**, such as other European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and other funding instruments such as AMIF or the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions (Horizon 2020), **are limited**. The research suggests that greater cooperation between key stakeholders managing the funds both at EU and national level could help to increase coherence in implementation.
- As seen in section 4.4 (evaluation question 4.1), although there is good alignment on paper with the objectives of **EU policy tools such as ECVET, EQF and EQAVET**, **there are rare examples of use of these tools in ESF T010 operations or programming**, especially compared to Erasmus+ projects. This

is potentially due to the lack of priority for transnational cooperation under ESF which limits the need to align activities with EU frameworks.

- As seen in section 4.4 (evaluation question 4.5) and emerging from the Policy Delphi process (see Annex 1.6), coherence with national priorities and policies in the field of education and training could be improved through **a wider and more meaningful involvement of national and regional stakeholders in ESF TO10 programming, monitoring and delivery**. Stakeholders could include representatives of target groups (including the least educated groups), labour market stakeholders and other key actors in the field of education and training at national and regional levels.
- The **absence of formal or strategic links between the ET 2020 Open Method of Coordination (OMC) under ET 2020 and ESF** has limited the potential for greater concrete implementation of innovation and transfers of ideas and experience emerging from the mutual learning processes. Further detail can be found in section 4.4 (evaluation question 4.1).
- **Factors which hindered internal coherence** of ESF TO10 with other Thematic Objectives (TOs), other Operational Programmes (OPs) and between TO10 Investment Priorities (IPs) included insufficiently comprehensive planning, over-separation of management responsibilities (e.g. separate Managing Authorities for different Thematic Objectives or OPs), insufficient coordination, and weak intersectoral cooperation to tackle cross-cutting policies (e.g. early school leaving). In some Member States, better coordination of national and regional OPs could avoid the potential for overlaps or duplication. See section 4.4 (evaluation question 4.2) for further discussion.

## 5.4 EU added value

### *Positive lessons: what works well*

- As seen in section 4.5, there is a good degree of EU added value from ESF TO10 interventions, across all Investment Priorities, for education and training systems in the different Member States and regions, with a strong body of evidence pointing to volume, scope, role and process effects. This confirms the importance of EU support to national and regional education and training systems and providers.
- As seen in section 4.5 (evaluation question 5.1), ESF investments in education and training can substantially increase the volume of support available to identified target groups. There was strong evidence of ESF funding enabling a much greater number of individuals (learners or teachers/trainers) to participate in education and training services than would have been the case under national provisions. The increase in volumes of participants was particularly marked across the EU for certain target groups including children of pre-school age, young people at risk of early school leaving or NEETs, adult learners including low-skilled workers and educational staff (e.g. teachers, trainers, school managers, counsellors, other support staff). Many examples of volume effects

exist across the different Member States, including the 'Time for Leaders'<sup>200</sup> ESF operation in Lithuania which has already involved over 20,000 educational staff (from pre-school institutions to vocational education centres) in lifelong learning and ongoing professional development (see Box 42). The increase in volume included providing programmes in priority areas which would not have existed without ESF funding at all, such as the PiiCiE operation in Portugal (see Box 60 below and Box A5-7 in Annex 5).

### **Box 60 Portugal – volume effects of the PiiCiE programme**

#### Portugal – volume effects of the PiiCiE programme

In the Norte region of Portugal, the large PiiCiE (*Plano integrado e inovador de combate ao insucesso escolar*) ESF intervention (with a budget of some EUR 44 million) would probably not exist at all without ESF support, and certainly not on the scale which it has been implemented. PiiCiE targets primary and secondary education students and develops a wide range of activities aiming at reducing school failure and early school leaving. It consists of 137 operations, 104 at the municipal level and 33 at the inter-municipal level.

- Although volume effects were most visible – and most often cited – for large-scale interventions across schools (or pre-schools) in IP10.i, the study noted volume effects under all IPs, with particularly strong volume effects relating to adult learners under IP10.iii (and sometimes IP10.iv).
- As seen in section 4.5 (evaluation question 5.2), ESF TO10 provided the opportunity for education and training providers to address a wider range of disadvantaged and harder-to-reach groups, in all Member States and across all education sectors and all Investment Priorities. Such groups include young NEETs, early school leavers, children with low socio-economic status, low-skilled adults or adults with low qualification levels, migrants, Roma, people with special educational needs (SEN), people living in remote areas, as well as older workers and workers with obsolescent skills. The additional cost of reaching out to these groups and providing the sort of individualised and cost-intensive support which they require often means that they are de facto excluded from standard education and training provision, whether within compulsory or non-compulsory education. Examples include the Bulgarian 'Your Class' ESF operation (see box A5-1 in Annex 5) or the German 'Voluntary 10th School Year' operation (see Box 8).
- As also seen in section 4.5 (evaluation question 5.2), ESF TO10 funding, predominantly under IP10.ii, has also enabled support for people with higher levels of education such as pre- and post-doctoral students, in order to increase the labour market relevance of their skillsets and boost the competitiveness of the national or regional economy, by providing high level skills in growth sectors (e.g. environment, new technologies). The ENDEAVOUR Scholarship scheme in Malta is one such scheme (see Box 13) or the 'Pre-doctoral training grant within the Galician University System (GUS)' in Spain.

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<sup>200</sup> www.lyderiulaikas.smm

- As also seen in section 4.5 (evaluation question 5.2), **ESF TO10 funding, across all Investment Priorities, allowed a focus on policy areas in the field of education and training which would not have been addressed, or certainly not to the same degree, without support from ESF TO10.** Some of these policy areas include inclusive education (IP10.i and IP10.iv), adult/lifelong learning (IP10.iii), digital education (IP10.i), civic education (IP10.i and IP10.iii), the development of vocational courses in new sectors (IP10.iv), non-formal or informal education ((IP10.i) or transversal competences (all IPs). Examples include the 'PuMPuRs'<sup>201</sup> operation targeting early school leaving in Latvia (see Box 47), or the 'Digital Skills Bridge'<sup>202</sup> ESF operation in Luxembourg aiming to support the development of digital skills for workers affected by digital transformations (see Box 31).
- As seen in section 4.5 (evaluation question 5.3), **ESF TO10 support, across all Investment Priorities, has also driven and supported innovation in education and training across the EU.** Different types of innovation which have been fostered thanks to ESF include experimenting pilot ideas to modernise education and training systems, developing new skills in new sectors (e.g. bio-innovation), testing and implementing new pedagogies or working on the image of vocational education and training. One example of an innovative approach implemented thanks to ESF funding is the 'School to Work'<sup>203</sup> operation in Hungary (see Box 54). An ESF operation in Estonia called 'School of the Future' aims specifically to strengthen schools' capacity to innovate and to support teachers in becoming agents of change (see Box 51).
- As seen in section 4.5 (evaluation question 5.3) and section 4.1 (evaluation question 1.2), **ESF TO10 has also led to a number of structural changes in education and training systems** including rolling-out or decentralising new approaches or policies, the development of local or regional educational strategies or networks, major investments in teacher training and teaching resources to support the introduction of new policies or reforms, creating better formal linkages between business and education/training, or the establishment of centres of excellence in VET. Examples exist under all IPs and include the development of local action plans for regional development in the Czech Republic (see Box 55) or the establishment of the network of regional centres of VET competence in Croatia (see Box 56).
- As seen in section 4.5 (evaluation question 5.4), **ESF TO10 has also led to benefits for Member State administrations and participating organisations** which are likely to lead to sustainable improvements in the effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation of education and training services. Such outcomes include: the establishment of closer links and cooperation between education and training providers and the wider community; improvements to the governance of education and training at national, regional and local levels; improvements to teacher/training skills and recruitment; the

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201 <http://www.pumpurs.lv/>

202 <https://www.skillsbridge.lu/>

203 More information: <https://www.kormany.hu/hu/emberi-eroforrasok-miniszteriuma>

development of new tools and processes for managing and monitoring learning processes; increasing employer engagement in learning; and raising awareness of the importance of key education and training priorities (e.g. tackling early school leaving, upskilling of workers). Examples include the implementation of a major operation to upskill educational staff in Poland (see Box 57) or the development of a new Programme Learner Support System database to monitor and manage learning programmes in Ireland (see case study in Annex 1.4).

- As seen in section 4.5 (evaluation question 5.4), **support provided by ESF TO10 is likely to produce sustainable, long-term impacts at individual, institutional and policy levels.**

### **Points for improvement**

- As seen in section 4.5 (evaluation question 5.3), certain factors limited the potential of ESF to support structural change, including the slow start of the programming period, political change, and the relatively small size of ESF funding in some countries.
- As seen in section 4.5 (evaluation question 5.3) and in the Policy Delphi process (Annex 1.6), the lack of support for transnational cooperation under ESF TO10 is likely to have limited the potential for transfer of ideas between Member States.
- Similarly, as seen in section 4.5 (evaluation question 5.3) and in the Policy Delphi process (Annex 1.6), the lack of a strong focus on peer/mutual learning or dissemination of good practice at EU and national level weakened the opportunities for transfer of knowledge and innovation between and within Member States.
- As discussed in section 4.5 (evaluation question 5.3) and emerging from the consensus of the Policy Delphi validation process (see Annex 1.6), a greater focus on capacity-building in less economically developed Member States could increase the added value of ESF through allowing more effective and efficient use of funds, and better dissemination of learning.
- More structured involvement of representatives of target groups, particularly those representing the least educated, in ESF programming, monitoring and implementation could increase the EU added value of ESF support. This point is also presented in section 4.5 (evaluation question 5.3) and emerges from the consensus of the Policy Delphi validation process (see Annex 1.6).
- As discussed in section 4.5 (evaluation question 5.4) and emerging from the consensus of the Policy Delphi validation process (see Annex 1.6), enhancing the scope and effectiveness of partnerships at all levels has strong potential for improving the added value of ESF support. Partnerships – both in terms of ESF management or implementation (related to operations) - do not always include – or sufficiently actively involve - all relevant actors at national/ regional/ local level, including labour market stakeholders, representatives of target groups (especially the low-skilled and least educated) and NGOs. The benefits of partnerships have been seen in the study, for example on the local and regional education strategies established in the Czech Republic (see Box 55).

- Added value could be enhanced by providing education and training organisations with tools to make their social usefulness and impact apparent, through for instance self-assessment, benchmarking against other organisations to identify areas for improvement, and using evidence gathered to strengthen dialogue with policymakers and to promote the quality of services to the general public and relevant stakeholders. This point is also presented in section 4.5 (evaluation question 5.4) and emerges from the consensus of the Policy Delphi validation process (see Annex 1.6 for further detail).

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

### 6.1. Main findings

The importance of education and training - in order to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth - is recognised in the Europe 2020 strategy<sup>204</sup>. Two of the Europe 2020 headline targets focus specifically on education and training: reducing early school leaving and tertiary education attainment. The European Pillar of Social Rights re-affirms the priority focus on education and training<sup>205</sup>.

Investing in education and training for all is clearly a key priority for the European Union. Alongside other key funding mechanisms, **EU support to education and training is provided by the European Social Fund (ESF) via Thematic Objective 10 (TO10)**. TO10 supports investments in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning through **four Investment Priorities (IPs)**: IP10.i - reducing and preventing early school leaving and promoting equal access to education; IP10.ii - improving the quality and access to tertiary and equivalent education and training; IP10.iii - enhancing equal access to lifelong learning for all age groups; and IP10.iv - improving the labour market relevance of education and training systems.

**Many challenges remain in the field of education and training** across the EU. At the start of this ESF programming period, there remained a long way to go to reach many of the headline targets of the **EU strategy framework for European cooperation on Education and Training (ET 2020)**<sup>206</sup>. Further progress has been achieved since 2014, however significant differences persist between Member States, regions and population groups, and some targets have not yet been reached, such as early school leaving or adult learning.

To contribute to tackling these challenges, **total planned expenditure on TO10 (including EU and national co-financing) for 2014-2020 is approximately EUR 39.2 billion**, equivalent to 32% of total planned funding for the ESF. Of this, the largest planned allocation (29.1%) is to IP10.i, followed by IP10.iii (27.4%) and IP10.iv (26.2%), with the smallest planned allocation to IP10.ii (17.3%). The highest financial allocations were for Portugal and Poland (just below EUR 4 billion each) and the lowest to Luxembourg (EUR 7.9 million) and Cyprus (EUR 28.8 million). More than half (51.4%) of total TO10 funds are allocated to less developed regions.

Overall, our study found that there was a **relatively high degree of relevance of ESF TO10 programming to the needs of education and training systems and relevant target groups**, including a range of disadvantaged groups. Programming remained relevant throughout the programming period to date. Ensuring relevance to needs was fostered by a **number of factors** including the needs analyses in Partnership

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<sup>204</sup> European Commission (2010), Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, COM (2010) 2020

<sup>205</sup> The first principle of the EU Pillar of Social Rights is that 'everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions to the labour market', [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en)

<sup>206</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52009XG0528\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52009XG0528(01)&from=EN)

Agreements, a flexible approach to programming, allowing adaptation of Operational Programmes and planned actions to any changing needs of Member States/regions, and a close alignment of ESF TO10 priorities with the European Semester and its country specific recommendations in the field of education and training. The study found that the European Semester is a strong framework for ensuring that ESF operations are relevant to target groups. **Improvements to relevance could however be made through enhanced consultation with actors closer to the needs of target groups**, such as NGOs, social partners, and training providers. Whilst these actors were involved and consulted to some extent – in part thanks to the partnership principle enshrined in the ESI Funds – there is room for more meaningful consultation and more engagement with a broader range of actors in the needs assessment, programming and implementation stages.

Our analysis of **effectiveness** of implementation has shown that there has been **positive progress in the financial implementation of ESF TO10**, however that there are large differences in performance across countries, OPs and IPs. Overall, across the EU, 27% of planned resources under TO10 were spent by the end of 2018, which is in line with the total EU28 ESF expenditure rate and expectations for this stage of the programming period. **Output performance is also broadly in line with other ESF Thematic Objectives**, with 9.5 million participations by the end of 2018 (35% of total ESF participations).

While implementation is still ongoing and comprehensive results data are still materialising, the evaluation has nevertheless highlighted some **significant results achievements**. By the end of 2018, 801,096 participants had engaged in education/training and 3.15 million participants had gained a qualification upon leaving. The study has identified some notable achievements at the level of Investment Priorities in particular countries. In terms of Investment Priorities, **IP10.i (early school leaving) and IP10.iii (lifelong learning) have been more successful both in terms of direct results and the potential for longer-term systemic change**. The relative success of these priorities appears to relate to their stronger alignment with national and regional strategic priorities.

The study also finds that ESF TO10 has **effectively addressed the needs of young people generally**. For **low qualified adults, NEETs, people in employment and the unemployed**, the evaluation has highlighted successful examples of operations and promising practices, however overall effectiveness is regarded as more mixed for these groups as the evaluation has highlighted particular engagement challenges within some Member States such as developing appropriate outreach mechanisms and supporting more intensive and integrated approaches.

The **modelling of ESF TO10 impacts** based on RHOMOLO<sup>207</sup> simulations suggests that the programme will **add 0.16% to European GDP by 2023** (which amounts to roughly EUR 18 billion) compared to the baseline, and **around 170,000 additional**

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<sup>207</sup> RHOMOLO is the spatial computable general equilibrium model of the European Commission, see for details: <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/rhomolo>

**jobs**, as final macro-economic impact, on top of the positive results for participants in ESF operations.

Many **successful types of operations** have been identified - ranging from support to vulnerable learners and the teaching staff that work with them, to digital innovations in the classrooms, to local action plans to address early school leaving. The evaluation evidence highlights a variety of **success factors and challenges in relation to the specific Investment Priorities and types of operations**. Common success factors were identified as:

- Local, regional and national governments adopting a central project delivery role (particularly for early school leaving);
- Strong coordination and the involvement of local and regional stakeholders, who can tailor programmes to specific needs (early school leaving operations, lifelong learning);
- Provision of intensive and tailored support to individuals over a longer-term period of time (early school leaving, lifelong learning).

Challenges included reaching some of the hardest-to-reach groups and some cases of a lack of sufficient capacity for effective management.

The evaluation has identified a number of key **success factors in the overall performance of OPs** including:

- The capacity to deliver ESF education and training programmes on the scale required;
- A strong strategic approach at programming level;
- Strong coordination processes involving the Managing Authority, local and regional authorities and key partners such as NGOs and social partners from the design stage; and
- Building the capacity of staff in beneficiary organisations on how to access, implement and monitor the funds.

**Key challenges** included:

- Overlaps with the ongoing implementation of the previous ESF programme;
- Limited management capacity in MA and beneficiary organisations to deliver the against the TO10 targets; and
- Perceived barriers at the national level, for example in gaining the consensus of regional and national stakeholders, in adjusting OP actions to address emerging training and education needs.

The analysis of **efficiency** has shown that the **average TO10 expenditure to date per participant is EUR 1137** (ranging from EUR 729 under IP10.i to EUR 2,754 under IP10.ii), and per result s is EUR 2,378, with large variations across countries. A note of caution should be attached to cross-country comparisons however given that it is still early in the programming cycle. Understanding the reasons for such large variations would require a detailed examination of cost data covering all key operations and all Member States. The limitations of the comparative analysis emphasise **the need for robust cost-effectiveness analysis to be undertaken at the level of operations** by Managing Authorities at appropriate points during their implementation and particularly when comprehensive and robust data has been collected on the individuals supported. Qualitative analysis has shown that **factors that can foster efficiency**

include the use of intermediary bodies, wider partnership arrangements, including specialist sectoral organisations, and simplified cost options (SCOs). There was also evidence however that too many partners involved in implementation can contribute to the administrative burden and delays. **ESF administrative requirements are considered to be proportionate** to the benefits achieved. Nonetheless, there is recognition that these requirements can be **complex and time-consuming, thus onerous for smaller beneficiary organisations**, for example those working with specific target groups or schools.

The study also shows that ESF T010 has a **good overall degree of internal and external coherence**. It is **well aligned with other EU policies** and initiatives in the field of education and training and has supported their concrete implementation on the ground. There is also a **good degree of coherence with the education-related European Semester country specific recommendations (CSRs)** which are well reflected overall in the situation analyses of Partnership Agreements. The **fulfilment of ESF ex-ante conditionalities did lead to structural reforms** in education and training, although also caused some delays in ESF implementation (e.g. in Romania).

ESF T010 is **internally coherent with other ESF-funded TOs (TOs 8 and 9) and between IPs** within T010. **Coherence with other EU funding instruments in the field of education and training is more mixed**: while there is often good coherence in the legal texts, evidence of synergies in implementation varies, and **a variety of challenges in articulating different funds were identified**. Good examples of coherence in implementation were nonetheless found in particular with ERDF and Erasmus+, however only to a very limited degree with other funding instruments (e.g. Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions).

Our study concludes that ESF T010 has generated **a good degree of EU added value across all dimensions**, with substantial evidence pointing to volume, scope, role and process effects, as well as to **the sustainability of impacts at individual, institutional and policy level**. There were **important volume effects** in terms of the participation of target groups (teachers and learners), the number of actions, and widening the geographical scope and scale of implementation of key programmes. **Scope effects were also clear**, particularly for broadening actions to wider target groups, including many disadvantaged groups (e.g. Roma, older workers, low-skilled adults), and addressing policy areas which were not previously high priorities on the agenda (e.g. inclusive education, adult learning, non-formal education).

ESF T010 also had **important role effects** in supporting the **transfer of ideas**, the **introduction of innovations** (e.g. digitisation, new pedagogies), and **structural reforms** such as the development of local or regional education strategies or the rolling-out of new educational approaches and strategies nationwide; major structural investments in e.g. digital education or adult learning. Role effects could however potentially be further enhanced through a greater focus on peer learning, transnational cooperation, visibility of ESF support, and dissemination of results of ESF-funded operations.

**Many process effects** from ESF T010 investments are also in evidence including:

- **Improvements to governance and organisation of education and**

- training**, such as supporting a better regional organisation of the offer of training (as in the Bretagne region of France);
- **Establishing closer links and cooperation between schools and training providers with other stakeholders at local/regional or national level** (e.g. NGOs, employers, social partners, community leaders, other education/training stakeholders);
  - **Improving the skills and recruitment processes for teachers and trainers** (e.g. training in new pedagogies, digital skills, updating teaching skills, new teacher recruitment processes); and
  - **The development of new tools and processes to monitor and manage learning programmes** e.g. tools for monitoring the progress of VET learners in Ireland or an IT platform for managing traineeships in Portugal.

***Many of the positive effects of ESF support to education and training are likely to be sustainable after the end of funding.*** There is a strong likelihood of ongoing benefits at individual (e.g. skills, qualifications), institutional (e.g. new curricula, training materials) and policy level (e.g. educational reforms, local action plans).

## **6.2. Reflections for the next programming period**

We set out below a number of forward-looking reflections for the next programming period based on the lessons emerging from the study. The reflections, which do not seek to be exhaustive, have been grouped into some key needs emerging from the study:

- Fostering a strategic approach to programming ESF support to education and training;
- Maintaining a strong focus on disadvantaged learners;
- The need for better cooperation and consultation at all levels;
- Increasing impact through a greater focus on mutual learning and dissemination;
- Improving the management capacity for ESF support to education and training.

The section concludes with some reflections in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. While the pandemic did not fall within the reference period of the evaluation, its impact on the world of education and training warrants reflection in relation to future ESF support in this field.

### ***Fostering a strategic approach to programming ESF support to education and training***

**Managing Authorities (at national and regional level) should be supported (e.g. through guidelines, support from the Commission, training) to adopt a strategic approach in programming ESF support for education and training. The strategy should systematically take into account relevant country specific recommendations (CSRs), ET 2020 indicators and existing national/regional strategies.** As seen in our analysis of effectiveness and relevance (sections 4.1, 4.3), OPs which perform well are underpinned by a strong strategic approach that informed the prioritisation and targeting of resources to address specific needs. The programming process of the European Structural and Investment Funds has been key in supporting

the identification of education and training challenges and key target groups in need of support at the planning stage in the Partnership Agreements by all Member States based on thorough needs assessments (section 4.3). Ensuring coherence with the country specific recommendations and benchmarking against the ET 2020 indicators has also proved an effective mechanism to support programming (section 4.4). As seen in sections 4.1 and 4.4, effective programme strategies are also clearly aligned and embedded into national (and regional) strategies for education and training.

**ESF support should continue to be targeted on priority policy areas in the field of education and training, particularly those identified in country specific recommendations.** As seen in section 4.5 (scope effects), ESF funding has allowed Member States and regions to focus on policy areas (e.g. inclusive education, non-formal education, adult learning) in the fields of education and training which would not otherwise have been addressed, or certainly not to the same degree, without such support.

**It will be important to continue to ensure the possibility to support major educational reforms,** such as the introduction of new curricula, digital transformations of learning, creating more links between business and education/training or the establishment of VET centres of excellence. As seen in sections 4.1 (effectiveness) and 4.4 (role effects), the study has underlined the important contribution of ESF TO10 to funding structural changes in education and training systems, particularly in less economically advanced and newer Member States.

**Managing Authorities should also have the possibility to adjust programming, including certain targets and indicators, to reflect changing or urgent needs in education and training.** As seen in our analysis of effectiveness (section 4.1), the lack of ability to adjust targets limited flexibility in some cases. As seen in sections 4.3 (relevance) and 4.4 (coherence), the scope of the current Investment Priorities allowed flexibility within each policy field, increasing the ability to meet the needs of target groups and education and training systems. The clear framework of the Investment Priorities, corresponding to the major education and training sectors, allowed diverse education and training needs in different Member States or region to be tackled with ESF TO10. As seen in section 4.4 (coherence), the overall clear delineation between the Investment Priorities also helped to ensure clear programming and minimise potential overlaps.

**Policymakers at all levels (EU, national and regional) could seek more systematic ways of using ESF support to support the implementation of new policies in the field of education and training.** Although our study found (as seen in section 4.4) that ESF operations were well aligned with key EU and national policies in the field of education and training, we did not find evidence of a systematic approach to facilitate this coherence. The texts establishing new policy initiatives could for example include a greater focus on the possibility of using ESF to support implementation on the ground, and the Commission could communicate these new priorities, for example at ESF Monitoring Committees, emphasising the possibility to use ESF as a channel to implement these common EU priority areas on the ground at national and regional level.

**It will be important to 'future-proof' the focus of ESF support by identifying – on an ongoing basis – the skills and competences which are increasingly relevant to Member States' education and training needs.** Currently, this could include for example basic skills deficiencies, digitalisation of learning and distance learning (see the section on COVID-19 below) or professional reorientation and postgraduate re(training) under lifelong learning priorities.

**In general, ESF funding for education and training could include a stronger emphasis on generating innovation in education and training.** Although, as seen in section 4.5 (role effects), different types of innovation have been fostered thanks to ESF TO10 (e.g. skills in new sectors, new pedagogical approaches, improving the image of types of education), there is scope for a stronger focus on generating innovation in education and training in the next programming period e.g. by emphasising innovative approaches in assessment criteria for applications and in the communication to potential beneficiaries.

### ***Maintaining a strong focus on disadvantaged learners***

**Within this broader strategic approach, it will be crucial to maintain the focus on disadvantaged learners, and, in particular, increase the focus on those with complex needs and facing multiple disadvantages, across all education sectors.**

As seen in our analysis of effectiveness (section 4.1), there has been mixed success in reaching the hardest-to-reach groups, and this focus has proved more challenging to achieve in some sectors (e.g. tertiary education), but beneficiaries must continue to be encouraged to reach out to and support specific groups. The Policy Delphi validation exercise (see Annex 1.6) highlighted the temptation to focus on 'low-hanging fruit', meaning individuals with some disadvantaged features, but in reality, requiring minimal additional support, leaving aside those with the most complex difficulties. Effective programming mechanisms to consider could include:

- Giving higher priority to funding applications focusing on disadvantaged learners;
- Requiring all funded projects to ensure that the needs of the most disadvantaged are considered by e.g. closer collaboration with expert NGOs and wider support organisations, writing specific strategies, introducing more intensive monitoring, carrying out training for beneficiaries;
- Disseminating effective examples of taking into account the needs of disadvantaged groups.

**Future ESF support should ensure support for the operations which have been shown to be effective in reaching and supporting vulnerable groups** in all sectors of education and training. As seen in section 4.1 (effectiveness), these include for example:

- Intensive and tailored support to individuals, including counselling from mentors;
- Training for educational staff to recognise and understand the potential problems that vulnerable learners face;
- Targeted education/training for disadvantaged learners;
- Alternative pathways to completing education and training including second chance education;

- Developing stronger partnerships with wider support services beyond learning establishments;
- Detailed risk assessments of pupils at risk of dropping out;
- Financial support and incentives to stay in education;
- Recognition of prior learning;
- Greater investment in the prevention of early school leaving at pre-school and primary level;
- Whole school education approaches and multidisciplinary teams of staff;
- Creation of more flexible pathways between education and professional/practical training.

As underlined in the Policy Delphi validation exercise (see Annex 1.6), **such approaches should also be vetted to ensure that there is no stigma attached to approaches which target vulnerable groups**. Financial support and incentives are not always sufficient in addressing the barriers to participation in training for people with low qualifications. It is important that operations face the wider obstacles faced by low-qualified people and address the need for further accompanying measures.

**Greater cross-sectoral cooperation between education, health, labour market, and social services to address the complex needs of target groups should be fostered.** As seen throughout the report, and underlined in the Policy Delphi consultation (see Annex 1.6), the lack of meaningful or substantial partner involvement has been identified as one of the main areas for improving the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and added value of ESF actions supporting education and training. As underlined in section 4.3 (relevance), the Partnership Principle should be fully implemented in practice, with real and ongoing engagement of key relevant stakeholders in the field of education and training at all levels, rather than surface-level, tick-box consultations, including collaborative governance models. Such stakeholders should include representatives of target groups (including the least educated groups) and labour market stakeholders, including employers.

**Future ESF support to education and training should also consider more support for cross-sectoral initiatives**, as highlighted in the Erasmus+ mid-term review report<sup>208</sup>. In order to facilitate more flexible learning pathways, particularly for disadvantaged learners and to allow a more inclusive approach, supporting collaboration between different education and training sections (e.g. tertiary education and schools, vocational and tertiary education), is of growing importance. More funding could also be provided, where relevant, to cooperation with organisations from other sectors e.g. youth, justice, health, sports.

### ***Need for better cooperation and consultation at all levels***

**Needs identification could be further improved by diversifying the stakeholder groups that are consulted both at the planning stage and throughout implementation.** As underlined in our Policy Delphi consultation exercise (see Annex

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<sup>208</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/FR/TXT/?uri=COM:2018:50:FIN;>  
<https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/swd-e-plus-mte.pdf>

1.6) and the relevance analysis (section 4.3), better targeting of programming could be achieved by consulting wider groups such as civil society (including smaller NGOs representing specific target groups), social and economic partners (including representatives of SMEs), the general public, local authorities, education and training stakeholders and target groups themselves (and/or their representatives). In particular for priorities related to labour market relevance (currently IP10.iv), a more systematic institutional dialogue on skills shortages and needs should be established with labour market actors, including social partners, also at regional and local levels. More diverse stakeholders should be actively involved in monitoring the implementation of ESF support to education and training.

**Greater cooperation between DGs at EU level, and ministries and agencies at national level, responsible for education, training and the labour market would provide real added value to the delivery of ESF support to education and training at all levels.** Currently, as seen in sections 4.1 (effectiveness), 4.3 (relevance) and 4.4 (coherence), and underlined in the Policy Delphi exercise (Annex 1.6), this cooperation has not always been optimal, with over-separation of responsibilities and priority areas. Greater collaboration across stakeholders representing different education and training sectors (early childhood education, school education, tertiary education, vocational education and training, lifelong learning) should also be actively fostered.

**Much closer synergies should be facilitated with other EU funding mechanisms in the field of education and training**, such as Erasmus+, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) or the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions. As seen in section 4.4 (coherence), although examples of successful synergies between ESF and other funding instruments exist, they are relatively rare, and several barriers to cooperation exist. Stakeholders managing the funds (both at EU and national level) should cooperate more closely in order to remove the obstacles to effectively articulating the funds, including different application processes and timeframes, differing timelines and rules for implementation, different partnership arrangements, the complexities of working with two Managing Authorities on a joint action, fears of accusations of double funding, and insufficient communication on how to articulate the funds at all levels. The possibilities of 'one stop shop' mechanisms could be explored.

### ***Increasing impact through mutual learning and dissemination***

**Supporting more structured peer learning across key education and training themes, with greater direct involvement of ESF TO10 beneficiaries at both EU and national level** could greatly enhance the potential for transfer of ideas between and within Member States. As seen in section 4.5 (role effects) and underlined in the Policy Delphi (see Annex 1.6), such peer learning processes, which could be virtual or in-person, or based on written sharing of good practices, could be structured around key EU education and training policy areas, emerging priorities or on specific sectors. Opportunities could also be sought to link peer learning within ESF education and training to established mutual learning processes, such as the ET 2020 (or its future replacement) Working Groups, exchanges organised under the Apprenticeship Support

Services<sup>209</sup> or European Vocational Skills Weeks<sup>210</sup>, peer learning within Erasmus+, or the Mutual Learning Programme<sup>211</sup>.

**Allowing more scope for ESF funding for transnational and cross-border cooperation, as well as mobility projects for disadvantaged learners,** under future ESF support to education and training could also enhance the EU added value and contribute to the transfer of ideas and innovation (as seen in section 4.5 (role effects) and emphasised in the Policy Delphi exercise (see Annex 1.6). More support for language learning could also contribute to enhancing transnational exchange. This could also facilitate better cooperation with transnationally focused EU funding instruments such as Erasmus+ or Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions (Horizon 2020). A greater focus on transnationality will also ensure greater alignment with EU policy tools (such as ECVET, Europass and EQF) which have a greater transnational focus. Such support would also allow a stronger ESF contribution to the current development of the European Education Area<sup>212</sup>.

**Adopting a greater focus on dissemination of results and good practices, with a robust consideration of success factors, challenges and transferability** – at EU, national, regional and operation level – also has potential to inspire other potential beneficiaries and ensure that lessons learnt for addressing key education and training challenges and specific target groups are better shared among the community of practitioners, as seen in section 4.5 (role effects). A focus on dissemination would also ensure **better visibility** of the (major) contributions of ESF to education and training across the EU and could foster greater absorption and improved funding applications. As seen in section 4.1 (effectiveness), there was evidence of non-awareness of the opportunities offered by ESF support for education and training by potential beneficiaries.

**A greater focus on the individual dissemination of results for specific education and training operations could also contribute to finding sustainable opportunities to fund successful innovative operations beyond ESF funding,** through mainstreaming into national or regional policies, or attracting other sources of funding (employers, national funding, etc.). As underlined in the Policy Delphi validation exercise (see Annex 1.6), education and training organisations could also be provided with tools to make their social usefulness and impact apparent, through for instance self-assessment, benchmarking against other organisations to identify areas for improvement, and using evidence gathered to strengthen dialogue with policymakers and to promote the quality of services to the general public and relevant stakeholders.

**Fostering more systematic links with the ET 2020 Working Groups could also bring strong mutual benefits.** As seen in our study (section 4.4), no clear synergies were found between ESF TO10 and the ET 2020 Working Groups, which operate across all the fields covered by ESF TO10. The outcomes of the Working Groups, which include practical guidance documents and frameworks targeting education and training

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<sup>209</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1147&intPageId=5235&langId=en>

<sup>210</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?eventsId=1451&catId=88&furtherEvents=yes&langId=en&>

<sup>211</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1047&langId=en&>

<sup>212</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area_en)

stakeholders, should be used in the implementation of ESF operations. Similarly, ET 2020 Working Group Experts should be made more aware of the potential of the ESF to support innovative actions in education and training, with greater cooperation for example between Commission Working Group Coordinators and ESF Units.

### ***Improving the management capacity for ESF support to education and training***

**The management capacity of ESF should be further supported and developed through a range of measures.** As seen in sections 4.1 (effectiveness) and 4.2 (efficiency), the management capacity of ESF Managing Authorities (MAs) and beneficiary organisations is critical in the stronger performance of TO10 operations. Actions to improve the capacity of MAs and beneficiary organisations could include the following:

- The application of robust ongoing monitoring and evaluation systems has allowed MAs to react quickly when operations are not meeting their targets for example by improving communication tools and adapting funding criteria where this is necessary;
- More capacity-building could be provided for Managing Authority staff, key national/regional education and training stakeholders and beneficiaries to ensure that management of funds is effective and efficient, leading to improved delivery;
- Among beneficiary organisations, particular support could be provided to those with more limited administrative capacity or experience with managing EU funds, including for example SMEs, smaller NGOs, or schools;
- Efforts also need to continue to relieve the administrative burden – generally, but in particular on smaller organisations - including for example pursuing and improving simplified cost option models, which have been shown to help.

**ESF monitoring mechanisms should better capture and measure the performance of** specific types of operations in the field of education and training. As seen in section 4.2 (efficiency), this could be achieved by building on the more detailed typology of operations that was developed in this study in order to provide a finer grained understanding of how funding is allocated under each investment priority. More specific results indicators could also be developed to reflect the specific objectives associated with different types of operations. A more detailed typology and more specific indicator set would allow more comparative analysis of the cost-effectiveness of types of operations and contribute to greater learning on efficiency.

### ***Taking into account the impact of COVID-19***

The COVID-19 pandemic has already had a substantial impact on education and training systems. It has forced a digitalisation of education, disrupted school and university attendance and pushed education and training systems to explore new ways of teaching and learning. Whilst it is too early to fully assess these impacts, this section presents

some provisional reflections on the ways that the ESF could adapt to tackle the challenges and seize the opportunities of a post-COVID world of education<sup>213</sup>.

- **Increased focus on digital skills.** The forced move to digital learning has exposed the high levels of digital illiteracy still present in EU countries. The ESF in the future could focus more on digital learning and digital skills, as well as related skills such as critical thinking, not only of learners and teachers across all sectors of education and training, but also of the wider public.
- **Developing blended learning tools.** Effective distance learning does not only require digital skills. The ESF could support education and training systems to develop new blended learning educational strategies that ensure an effective balance between classroom and online learning in terms of methodologies and modalities. Integrated packages of support for blended learning would need to include, for example:
  - access for all learners and teachers to ICT and the internet;
  - training teachers on pedagogical methods for teaching effectively at a distance;
  - ensuring educational institutions have adequate and secure platforms, with protection of confidentiality, data security and IT support teams;
  - ensuring access to quality digital teaching resources such as online libraries.
- **Better responding to the needs of vulnerable groups.** The crisis has highlighted that online learning is not accessible to all learners and that a move to digital learning is likely to disadvantage vulnerable groups. It can also be a poor substitute for vulnerable groups with high support needs. These groups are also more likely to be at greater risk of isolation in the absence of regular and structured contact with schools and education authorities. Additional support to vulnerable groups from teachers, teaching assistants, social workers, psychologists, and other professionals would be important in this context. The ESF could play a role in promoting more accessible and inclusive remote teaching in the future through, for example:
  - a greater emphasis on outdoor education to avoid an overreliance on digital learning which is not always accessible to all learners;
  - more play-based learning at home;
  - a greater focus on non-formal education, including extracurricular activities;
  - provision of summer camps for those missing school;
  - a greater emphasis on family literacy and involvement of families in education and training systems, where possible.

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<sup>213</sup> Views on the impact of COVID-19 and future implications for the ESF were asked of the respondents to the Policy Delphi consultation which took place in May 2020. See the Synopsis Report for more detail.

- **Promoting equity in education.** The pandemic is likely to magnify inequity in education, particularly if it leads to an economic crisis that may impact national education budgets. ESF has a role to play in continuing to support equal access to quality education, including to early childhood education and care. In the field of tertiary education, for example, students already disadvantaged are likely to suffer disproportionately. ESF funding could be more widely used to provide scholarships or top-ups to these students.
- **Focusing on reskilling and upskilling.** COVID-19 has already led to rising unemployment levels in European countries, which is likely to worsen as the economic impact of the crisis unfolds. In this context, lifelong learning is crucial in preparing individuals to re-enter the labour market and re-adapt to new working arrangements and changing needs on the labour market. Issues related to the provision of guidance and counselling also deserve particular attention.

### **6.3. Key methodological lessons for the ex-post evaluation**

The evaluation has collected a wide range of quantitative and qualitative evidence on the progress of the ESF Thematic Objective 10 operations. A key limitation of the evaluation however has been the availability of evidence on the quantitative impact of the specific operations taking into account the benefits that would not have taken place without the programme (moving from analysis of gross to net benefits). The evaluation has been undertaken at the interim stage in the programming period (as 27% of expenditure has been executed within the period of the study up to the end of 2018). Even where operations are progressing well, limited data on their results are currently available. The ex post evaluation should therefore allow scope to develop more robust evidence to be able to compare effectiveness across different types of operations

While quantitative analysis is limited in showing the overall effects of ESF expenditure on Europe 2020 targets at this stage of the programming period, significant impacts can occur through ESF support for the development of sustainable innovative measures and system level changes. The evaluation has highlighted the potential of ESF TO10 funding in supporting systemic change; however, evidence will need to be collected at a later stage on the extent to which such operations have been upscaled or mainstreamed in order to provide more robust evidence on their potential contribution towards progress against the EU level targets.

As there are a range of challenges in conducting an impact analysis at the level of all TO10 operations, the next best alternative is to maximise the number of counterfactual impact evaluations conducted at the level of specific operations. However currently there are only limited counterfactual impact evaluations available at the country level that have focused on education and training operations. The evaluation has therefore relied to a large extent on self-reported evidence of impacts and stakeholder perspectives on the most successful operations alongside existing evaluation evidence and surveys that have also used similar self-reporting and qualitative methods.

It should be expected however that more robust evaluation evidence will be available at the programme level for the ex post evaluation allowing a more robust overall assessment of impacts by types of operation. The European Commission Joint Research

Centre have supported Managing Authorities on identifying which of the specific programme operations are suitable candidates for counterfactual impact evaluation and can support them at the implementation stage..

The limitations of the comparative analysis under the efficiency criterion also emphasise the need for robust cost-effectiveness analysis to be undertaken at the level of operations at appropriate points during their implementation and particularly when comprehensive and robust data has been collected on the individuals supported. While programme monitoring data allows an overall assessment of cost-effectiveness for specific outputs and results indicators, with some evidence from the case study research presented on specific operations, the current level of evidence makes it difficult to provide a robust comparison of cost-effectiveness across operations. The analysis of cost per participant shows a strong variation across Member States and within countries. Understanding the reasons for such large variations would require a detailed examination of cost data covering all types of operations across a sample of Member States which has been difficult to achieve with the limited resources for the study. The ex post evaluation will provide a further opportunity to examine the reasons for the variation in cost differences across specific categories of operations based on individual evaluations studies.

## **ANNEXES**

All annexes are delivered as separate documents to the main report.

**[Annex 1.1: Mapping of T010 operations](#)**

**[Annex 1.2: Assisting the Commission in the consultation process](#)**

**[Annex 1.3: Cost-benefit analysis](#)**

**[Annex 1.4: Individual case study reports](#)**

**[Annex 1.5: Country factsheets](#)**

**[Annex 1.6: Policy Delphi synopsis papers](#)**

**[Annex 2: Synopsis consultation report](#)**

**[Annex 3: Public consultation analysis](#)**

**[Annex 4: Detailed methodology](#)**

**[Annex 5: Overview of good practices](#)**

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