

European Social Fund in action 2000-2006:

SUCCESS STORIES

Active Labour market

Social Inclusion

Lifelong Learning

Adaptability

Women's participation

Employment & social affairs

ESF Policy Coordination, Employment, Local Development

European Commission

Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities
Unit A.4

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Repairing furniture offers way back into the community for ex-prisoners



Building a future for themselves: Ho&Ruck trainee at work

Project name

Ho&Ruck - Gebrauchtmöbel

Project duration

1984 - ongoing

ESF priority area

Active labour market policies

Country

Austria

ESF funding

€426,000

Total funding

€1,358,000

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

Former prisoners, long-term unemployed, (ex-)drug-users

Name of coordinating organisation

Ho&Ruck

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Social prejudice and lack of resources makes reintegrating ex-prisoners into society and employment a difficult process. Nevertheless, Ho&Ruck, a part ESF-funded company in the Tyrol, Austria, has been tackling this issue for the last 20 years through practical work and intensive courses that enable ex-prisoners to retrain for working life.

The focus of Ho&Ruck's activities is on transporting, repairing and re-selling second-hand furniture. On average, its trainees complete a one-year course, where they are taught basic skills in goods transportation, carpentry, furniture restoration and sales techniques. Company staff collect the furniture from the local community and, once it has been repaired by the trainees, they re-sell it from a warehouse for profit.

Learning through practical experience

"Our training programme is mostly informal and focuses on practical skills rather than theory," explains Ho&Ruck coordinator Wilfried Hanser-Mantl. "We've found through past experience that it is best to show our participants by practice what they can learn." At the end of a year, trainees come away with improved skills, a greater sense of how to work in a team and deal with the routine requirements of working life.

The men and women who join the training course come from all walks of life. Many have a history of personal problems, such as drug-addiction, debts, alcoholism, and have few qualifications. "We daily have to deal with people who are very stressed," says Mr Hanser-Mantl. "We therefore employ social workers and cooperate with external medical staff who can help us treat and advise those who are at particular risk. For example, drug addicts may be given non-harmful substitute drugs to help them break their addiction."

Social rehabilitation

This type of treatment is aimed not only at safeguarding the health of participants but also at reducing the risk of their losing employment and keeping them in a long-term stable situation. "Providing support in finding suitable living quarters for our participants is also part of our work. Some may live on camping sites or housing for the homeless when they join us – so we try to assist them in getting a flat," says Mr Hanser-Mantl.

In 2001/02, Ho&Ruck restored 2,500 square metres of an old, disused textile factory. At the start of the restoration project, 11 men worked on site, seven of whom eventually went on to build their own working spaces within the building. The company has a good success rate (41%) with reintegrating participants. Says Mr Hanser-Mantl: "We also feel that our greatest success is not just finding them employment, it is simply helping them to avoid returning to a life of a crime and delinquency – often the hardest problem for trainees to overcome."

Promoting local commerce and craftsmen



Stained-glass workshop organised within CREATIVE

Project name

CREACTIVE

Project duration

2001-2004

ESF Priority Area

Active labour market policies

Country

France

ESF Funding

€450,000

Total Funding

€1,380,000

ESF Funding Type

EQUAL

Target Group

Long-term unemployed

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A series of innovative initiatives has been undertaken by a group of organisations in France to encourage the long-term unemployed to find work, or even set up small businesses of their own. Working mostly in deprived areas of the country, the project pays particular attention to developing 'craftmanship'.

While unemployment figures may fluctuate, a small core of long-term unemployed always remains. The longer they are out of a job, the harder it is to find one. But a French project, CREATIVE, coordinated by ANPE (National Employment Agency), in towns such as Mulhouse, Neufchâteau, Lyon, Villeurbanne and Pantin, has set up three schemes to boost their entrepreneurial skills.

Small loans and driving licences

Operating through seven employment agencies, the project's first scheme runs a micro-finance organisation for individuals with a business idea but without the financial guarantees necessary to get a loan through a traditional bank. The loans offered by this special bank (ADIE) are no more than €5,000 in value. Even so, in 2003, they helped 75 participants, from lumberjacks to technicians, to set up their own business.

"This scheme has benefited many individuals who never thought they would be able to set up their own business because they had no financial means," says CREATIVE project coordinator Ms. Pierrette Catel.

On a smaller scale, the project also oversees a unique driving school model to help those with few qualifications to get a driver's licence - an additional skill for the job market. "The teaching is done in groups and is made as attractive as possible," says Ms. Catel. "After sitting the test for the highway code, successful participants, accompanied by a trainer, drive within the community, giving lifts to people who have mobility problems - like a social taxi."

Services to the community

Similarly, the third initiative, SEMAville, teaches skills to jobseekers that can be used immediately to practical effect in the local community. Running courses and practical training in arts and crafts, the project benefits individuals as well as producing art: one course resulted in the successful transformation of a hallway in a residential building of a deprived area.

CREACTIVE evaluates its impact and the needs of jobseekers through its own studies (undertaken by the Institut de l'Homme et de la Technologie) on the long-term unemployed and on a new national scheme to grant certificates based on 'acquired work experience' rather than exams.

National traineeships for new and emerging occupations



Training in beauty care: one of the traineeship programmes

Project name

National Traineeship Programme

Project duration

January 2000 – December 2006

ESF priority area

Active labour market policies

Country

Ireland

ESF funding

€85.55 million

Total funding

€143.60 million

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

Unemployed
Early school leavers

Name of coordinating organisation

FAS - National Traineeship Unit

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Many new and emerging industrial and commercial sectors have developed specialised training programmes for first-time job seekers and the unemployed. Over 4,000 people have completed the traineeship, improving their chances of finding work while also meeting the skills needs of the Irish economy.

"Ireland has long-established apprenticeship schemes within the traditional craft industries," says Frank Nugent, director of the national traineeship programme at FÁS (the National Training and Employment Authority). "However, there were several emerging occupations in the service or industrial sectors for which no formal training programme existed."

Meeting employer needs

The national traineeship programme was established in 2000 partly as a way of filling this training gap. It has relied on the close involvement of employer organisations, particularly in setting the training specifications and curriculum content. Some eight sector-specific traineeships have now been established, ranging from clothing manufacturing to financial advice and insurance brokerage.

The traineeships offer a flexible mix of on- and off-the-job training. The FÁS programme offers training in mentoring and coaching skills for nominated employees within the participating companies. For their part, companies are required to allocate a mentor and skills coach to each trainee that they host.

All the traineeships lead to national recognised qualifications and offer a gateway to career progression. Furthermore, a system of Accreditation of Prior Learning has been introduced to recognise and certify the skills of those employees working in the sector prior to introduction of the traineeship process.

Increasing accessibility

Between January 2000 and June 2003, 4,300 unemployed people completed a traineeship. "Most traineeships don't require high levels of educational qualifications, so we have been able to attract many early school leavers into these professions," says Mr Nugent. "We've also especially targeted women to encourage their entry into new and emerging occupations. The result has been over 50% female participation across all the traineeships."

Following the end of the ESF grant, the national traineeship programme continues to receive financial support from national government. Trainees receive the normal FÁS allowances during the course, and participating companies can apply for financial support to cover all or part of their trainee costs.

Employability for all: training for young job seekers



IT training in FORWARD

Project name

FORWARD

Project duration

January 2001 - December 2003

ESF priority area

Active labour market policies

Country

Luxembourg

ESF funding

€ 194,592

Total funding

€ 432,427

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

Young people

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Faced with an ever more competitive job market and slowing economic growth, Inter-Actions in Luxembourg has had to adapt its job training programme for young job seekers. Its efforts have paid off, with almost 60 % finding work on completion of the training.

Although Luxembourg still has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the European Union at 4.1 %, it has nonetheless been affected by the economic downturn of recent years. In absolute terms, the number of unemployed has increased from 4,964 in 2000 to 8,308 in December 2003. Of these, 21.8 % are under the age of 25.

Youngsters with few or no educational qualifications or from a disadvantaged background, find it hardest to access the job market. Employers can afford to demand minimum professional and personal skills, faced with an increasingly abundant labour supply.

Preparing for work

The association Inter-Actions has been working with unemployed youngsters since 1986. The three-year project 'FORWARD' (2001-2003) builds on this experience, while offering a training programme that reflects current labour market needs.

"Our aim is to equip a maximum number of young people with the tools to compete in the open job market," says Klaus Schneider, project manager at Inter-Actions. "We don't want them to become dependant on job support measures."

The training programme, originally foreseen as six months, was reduced to three months to increase the number of young participants that could benefit. "Our experience shows that in fact shorter, more intensive training courses give the participants a better chance of finding work afterwards," says Mr. Schneider.

FORWARD focused its training efforts on three key areas: social skills such as communication and presentation skills; information technology; and 'back office' support such as office administration, organisation of events, telephone and writing skills.

Opportunities for change

Some 74 people aged between 18 and 29 participated in the project, of which 72 % had left school at the minimum age with few or no qualifications. Around half the participants were Luxembourgish and the remainder of immigrant origin. Women outnumbered men by 3 to 1, attracted by the training in office-based work.

On completion of the training, 60 % of participants found jobs. "But the best measure of success is to see what the youngsters are doing 12 months later," says Mr. Schneider. "Of the 48 that completed the training at least 12 months ago, 24 are working and 17 have permanent employment contracts. It has surpassed all our expectations."

Stepping stone to professional and social integration



Establishing a work routine is a key project objective

Project name

Learning and work programme for unemployed in Den Helder

Project duration

May 2001 - December 2002
January 2003 - December 2004

ESF priority area

Active labour market policies

Country

The Netherlands

ESF funding

€187,000 (2001-2002)
€750,000 (2003-2004)

Total funding

€684,000 (2001-2002)
€1,500,000 (2003-2004)

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

Long-term unemployed

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As part of a package of initiatives to re-build the socio-economic infrastructure of the Dutch town of Den Helder, the municipality, together with a local training provider and consultancy, have developed a programme of personal support and training for those furthest removed from the job market.

Den Helder on the north coast of the Netherlands is undergoing a period of structural change. The Royal Navy, which has been the town's largest employer for over 175 years, recently faced budget cuts resulting in the loss of some 3,500 jobs. The town's relative geographical isolation also adds to its economic marginalisation.

Targeting the most vulnerable

At a time when jobs are scarce and competition fierce, those people who face particular challenges to enter the job market are likely to feel more alienated than ever. With the help of ESF funding, the municipality is helping to get this target group back on track.

"We're dealing with unemployed people who feel very far removed from the labour market," says Martin van Otterloo, project manager at the Triton Foundation (the training provider). "They usually face multiple problems - language difficulties, poor health, poor housing, debts, addiction, lack of education, and emotional or psychological disorders."

Over the period 2001-2002, the programme involved 82 individuals. There was roughly an equal balance of non-native and native Dutch, and men and women. The age of participants ranged from 16 to 65, with around 45% under 23. A second ESF grant has been awarded to the partnership for the period 2003-2004, which will allow the involvement of a further 132 individuals.

After registering with the project, every individual is interviewed to map his or her particular problems and needs. A personal programme is drawn up, containing mutual agreements on the support, activities, and rules to respect.

"Our emphasis is on keeping promises. We want the participants to develop social skills and self-discipline, as well as to get used to a working routine," says Frans van Iersel, the ESF coordinator. Job training is also on offer in the fields of metal work, carpentry, painting, graphic design, office skills and general services.

Commitment pays off

Only one in five of participants dropped out of the programme before completion which, given the complex problems faced by this target group, is a major success. Furthermore, some 40% of those who completed went on to find work or into further education or training. Another 37% are continuing with the programme.

Local traditions and flavours revive a rural economy



Trainees get marketing experience by promoting products in local fairs

Project name

S@bores e Tr@dições

Project duration

October 2001 - September 2002

ESF priority area

Active labour market policies

Country

Portugal

ESF funding

€102,118

Total funding

€136,157

ESF funding type

Objective 1

Target group

Unemployed women

Name of coordinating organisation

VALDELIMA - Cooperativa Polivalente de Desenvolvimento Rural

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Like other rural areas, the Lima valley in northwest Portugal has suffered from a decline in the economic importance of agriculture. However, a cooperative in the region is beginning to reverse this trend by capitalising on the growing consumer demand for traditional recipes and methods of production.

The region of northwest Portugal is characterised by small-scale farms that combine the production of cereals, fruit and vegetables with cattle breeding. However, faced with increasing competition from large-scale mechanised agriculture, many farmers have abandoned farming over the last few decades.

A niche market for local produce

But recent food scares, such as the well-publicised “mad cow” disease, have led many consumers to question the origin and quality of the food they buy. Farmers who continue to use traditional methods of production, in harmony with the local environment, are in a unique position to exploit this growing market demand.

VALDELIMA, a multifunctional agricultural cooperative, saw an opportunity to use high-quality produce from the region and to add value through the production of traditional marmalades and jams, as well as liqueurs and spirits.

“Consumers are increasingly looking for assurance in the origin and quality of the ingredients, as well as products that are made according to traditional recipes,” says Paulo Rodrigues, Executive Director at VALDELIMA. “The name S@bores e Tr@dições was selected for our range of projects as it means literally flavours and traditions but also carries the ‘@’ characters to reflect the merging of tradition with innovation.”

Job creation needs qualified staff

As with any new economic activity, people need training to support new businesses. ESF support was secured for a training action involving 12 women over a period of 14 months. The course focused on traditional recipes, health and safety, conservation and transformation techniques, basic accounting, and promotion and selling strategies. Many jams made during the course were taken to local handicraft and traditional product fairs where they received an encouraging response from the public.

Of the 11 women that completed the course, two now work in VALDELIMA and others were encouraged to start up their own new businesses. Says Mr Rodrigues: “Before this training course, there were no products, brands or workers, and this has all been stimulated through the training.”

VALDELIMA now has two shops and an on-line sales outlet together with other local producers (www.biolima.com). In 2003, product sales brought an income of approximately 70,000. Some 35% of this income was spent on buying ingredients from local farmers.

“Opening Pathways” for those at risk of exclusion



Active labour market

Social inclusion

Lifelong learning

Adaptability

Women's participation

Project name

Lugo, Abriendo Caminos

Project duration

March 2002-March 2003

ESF Priority Area

Active labour market policies

Country

Spain

ESF Funding

€839,113

Total Funding

€1,198,733

ESF Funding Type

Objective 1

Target Group

Women
Long-term unemployed

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To help tackle social exclusion, the City Council of Lugo in Spain established a programme called “Opening Pathways” offering training and employment support to the area’s most marginalised groups. The programme is now entering its third year, and the idea has been transferred to eight other Spanish regions.

The level of economic activity in the city and region of Lugo in northwest Spain remains low compared to the rest of Galicia and Spain. Unemployment in the city is particularly high (14 per cent), and those over the age of 45 are the most affected (30 per cent). Women are also poorly represented in the labour market.

The programme “Opening Pathways” began in March 2002 with support from the Spanish ESF operational programme for employment in Objective 1 regions. In March 2004, the third year of the programme was launched.

A targeted and personalised programme

“We owe our success largely to the level of participation of the most marginalised groups, and to the individual attention given to their employment skills,” says Isabel Villamor, one of the coordinators from the City Council of Lugo.

During the first year, 210 people were involved in the programme, of which 194 completed the training and 93 found work. Around 90 per cent of the participants were women, and nearly 18 per cent were over 45.

The training courses primarily focused on the delivery of social services to people with special needs such as children, the elderly, the sick, or people with disabilities. There are plenty of employment opportunities in these areas, and they often do not require high levels of formal qualifications.

Micro credit for business start-up

Besides its training and counselling services, the “Opening Pathways” programme also offered participants advice on how to become self-employed or to set up a business. To help them get started, the City of Lugo teamed up with a local financial institution to provide micro credits to local enterprises created as a result of the programme. Three such enterprises have now been established, mainly offering services to the elderly – a growing niche market due to the city’s ageing population.

In March 2003 the Council launched its second programme, offering 13 new courses in a range of professions for which local and regional demand is growing. New initiatives were also launched, including three pilot projects aimed at creating enterprises that provide home-care services, and activities to support teleworking for people with disabilities.

Encouraging the long-term unemployed back into work



Jan-Erik Falk, who is now employed in a blacksmiths making crowbars

Project name

The Job

Project duration

Part 1: Jan 2001 – June 2002

Part 2: July 2002 – Dec 2003

ESF priority area

Active labour market policies

Country

Sweden

ESF funding

Part 1: 2,205,000 SEK (€ 245,365)

Part 2: 2,212,000 SEK (€ 246,147)

Total funding

Part 1: 5,547,000 SEK (€ 617,252)

Part 2: 5,450,600 SEK (€ 606,525)

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

Long-term unemployed

Incapacity benefit claimants

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Individual action plans and counselling have helped some 75 people back into work after long periods of unemployment or sick leave. Called simply 'The Job', this project is breathing new life into a region of Sweden renowned for its high levels of unemployment and low economic activity.

Nordanstig is one of the most sparsely populated municipalities in Sweden. In a region characterised by high unemployment and a declining population, long distances between populated areas present an additional obstacle to finding a job.

Years without a job

Building on the experience of previous ESF projects, the Nordanstig Economic Association launched 'The Job' in 2001 targeting the long-term unemployed, or those receiving incapacity benefit. "One of our beneficiaries had been unemployed for 15 years, and seven to eight years of unemployment is not unusual among our target group," says Marga Edenståhl, project coordinator within the association.

As its name would suggest, the project has one main goal: helping beneficiaries to find a job. It is up to each individual to define their own employment goal and, with the support of a counsellor, to draw up an action plan on how to reach that goal. The steps may involve on-the-job training, further education, field trips or skills analyses. Support is normally offered for up to one year.

"Our cooperation with the employment centre, the community and the social security office has been particularly successful," says Ms. Edenståhl. "For example, we occasionally invite all the different actors together when we meet an individual client. It helps us to offer a personalised and 'joined-up' approach to employment support."

A high success rate

So far 151 individuals have benefited from the project, 75 of whom have found a job, while 29 have gone into full-time education. This success rate is much higher than originally anticipated, given that most of the beneficiaries had been out of work for such a long time.

Following the end of the ESF project, the Nordanstig Economic Association has signed an agreement with the social security office and employment centre which enables them to continue supporting the long-term unemployed or those receiving incapacity benefits for a further two years and nine months.

Re-training long-term jobseekers



Health & safety at work: Project participants learn more about it

Project name

Jobs for Wolverhampton

Project duration

July 2000-June 2003

ESF Priority Area

Active labour market policies

Country

United Kingdom

ESF Funding

£1.5 million
(€2.16 million)

Total Funding

£3.33 million
(€4.79 million)

ESF Funding Type

Objective 3

Target Group

Long-term unemployed

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Wolverhampton College

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A UK town with a high-level of long-term unemployment has benefited over the past three years from a project to improve local jobseekers' employability. Focusing on fine-tuning essential skills for getting a job, such as good interview techniques, the scheme has managed to give hundreds of long-term unemployed a helping hand back into employment, often in their preferred career path.

For individuals who are out of work for several months or more, through redundancy or lack of skills and experience, the job market can seem a daunting place. Often suffering from low self-confidence, they can sometimes present themselves poorly to a potential employer, and find it hard to get to, or beyond, the interview stage.

Getting through the interview

In the Jobs for Wolverhampton project based in the Midlands, England, some 580 long-term unemployed were provided with an opportunity to complete a 12-month-period of employment, which included customised training to enhance their prospects for mainstream work.

The training varied according to individual needs, but always provided advice on employability skills, such as CV writing or interview technique. After this, as project co-ordinator Marie Mathews explains, "Training ranged from qualifications in health and safety at work through to national vocational qualifications."

A customised approach

Beneficiaries of the project came from all walks of life, from out-of-work actors to construction workers. Says Ms. Mathews: "We held a needs assessment with each individual so that the training given fitted their future career plans. We took a customised approach towards their training, rather an off-the-shelf one."

Some 75 per cent of leavers have since moved into employment, training or education and retention rates have been high. A recent evaluation of the project found that 91 per cent of beneficiaries were confident about their long-term employment prospects.

"Our first year was the hardest, as people were sceptical, viewing it as just another training programme. Once it was realised that there were job vacancies and real paid work involved, the recruitment became easier," says Ms. Mathews. Now plans are afoot to replicate the scheme at a regional level.

Social Inclusion

Promoting equal opportunities for all in accessing the labour market, with particular emphasis on those exposed to social exclusion

Computer training for the deaf or hard of hearing



A sign language interpreter works together with a hearing trainer

Project name

Get it

Project duration

January 2001-December 2003
(renewable annually)

ESF priority area

Social Inclusion

Country

Austria

ESF funding

€164,858

Total funding

€355,298

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

Deaf people and people with hearing impairment

Name of coordinating organisation

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Gehörlosenvereine im ÖGLB

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In Austria, the Styrian Association of the Deaf is helping people with hearing impairments improve their job skills through the project 'Get it'. The training courses enable the deaf and hard of hearing to achieve the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL).

Deaf people and people with hearing impairments often have difficulties in accessing training programmes due to their different communication needs. The majority are employed in lower-skilled occupations. 'Get it' aims to develop and provide training in data processing to improve their labour market skills.

Helping to compete

"It is still difficult for the deaf to complete appropriate training," says Petzi Panholzer from the Styrian Association of the Deaf. "Even if they do, they often lack the extra qualifications and training to be able to compete with able-bodied people."

The 'Get it' courses are offered by NOWA – the Network for Vocational Training and the Vocational Training Institute (bfi) in Graz. In 2003, 16 people participated in the course. In 2004, the number of participants rose to 43. "The courses run for nine months and are part-time to allow participants to follow their normal jobs," explains Ms. Panholzer.

The courses cover all seven ECDL modules, including special training in written German, as well as English and mathematics. They are held in small groups working with deaf and hearing trainers in Austrian sign language, assisted by a deaf co-trainer.

"All the participants are very satisfied with the courses," says Ms. Panholzer. "The use of Austrian sign language and a deaf co-trainer as additional support and the small group size are also perceived as very positive. They enjoy learning and improving their skills at home with the adapted visual manuals."

Positive side effects

According to Ms. Panholzer, the courses help the participants to increase their self-confidence as well as their interest in education and training. "Some of them could improve their position within their company, while others managed to keep and secure their jobs," she says. "Over the course of the project some companies started to enquire about further training possibilities to encourage and support their employees with hearing impairments."

The project also helps to overcome misunderstandings and prejudices against people with a hearing impairment. "Deaf people are still not accepted as equal and capable members of society - not only within general society, but also among public authorities," notes Ms. Panholzer.

Promoting social responsibility among local businesses



A poster campaign helps to spread the message

Project name

Social Act

Project duration

May 2002 - November 2004

ESF priority area

Social inclusion

Country

Belgium

ESF funding

€371,046

Total funding

€748,400

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

Disadvantaged groups

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Efforts to tackle marginalisation of disadvantaged groups in the labour market can only be successful if employers themselves are committed to equal opportunities. In the province of Eastern Flanders in Belgium, several companies have demonstrated this commitment by signing a "Social Act" – their individual action plan to support social inclusion.

Ghent has the lowest unemployment rate of the five major Belgian cities, at approximately 11%. Nonetheless several social groups are still under-represented in the labour market, notably immigrants, the low qualified, or the physically or mentally disabled.

Good for the community: good for business

"Involving these disadvantaged groups in the labour market is not just about achieving social objectives," says Jozefien Surmont, co-ordinator of the Social Act project within the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Flanders (KvKOV). "It's also about making the most of the human resources available and meeting employers' demands."

There have been several initiatives in Ghent designed to raise awareness among businesses of the need to promote equal opportunities, but the EQUAL project Social Act is perhaps the most ambitious so far.

"Our initiative started from the open employment platform 'Ghent, City at Work' which involves more than 80 member organisations," says Ms Surmont. "Together with 12 partners of this open platform, the KvKOV took on the task of coordination to facilitate the involvement of business and to act as a bridge with the social organisations."

Supporting management choices

In October 2003, the partnership launched the Sokratest - an online test that enables companies to measure their social performance. Some 30 companies have now completed the test. A free helpdesk service is also available to help companies identify ways of improving their social contribution.

Four companies have gone a step further and drawn up an action plan, or a so-called Social Act. By the time the project ends in November 2004, it is expected that at least 10 more companies will have signed a Social Act.

"We're asking companies to carefully examine their employment policy," says Ms Surmont. "Not just with regards to recruitment and selection procedures, but also with regards to internal promotions, training, the quality of the work environment and employee health and welfare."

The Social Act concept has been well received by companies and social organisations alike. Several partners have expressed an interest in its continuation, and organisations in the Netherlands and Italy are exploring ways of adapting the model to meet their own needs.



Nursing mentors support newcomers to the profession

Promoting diversity in the nursing profession



Active labour market

Social inclusion

Lifelong learning

Adaptability

Women's participation

Project name

Nursing studies for new Danes

Project duration

October 2002 - October 2005

ESF priority area

Social inclusion

Country

Denmark

ESF funding

€ 999,905

Total funding

€ 2,126,439

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

Immigrants/Asylum seekers

Name of coordinating organisation

UDC-gruppen

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In Southern Jutland several partners have developed an integrated approach to recruiting, training and retaining ethnic minorities in the nursing profession. The scheme has attracted widespread interest within the healthcare sector across the country.

Ethnic minorities are notoriously under-represented within the nursing profession in Denmark. Immigrants with limited language skills are more likely to be recruited as auxiliary staff, while those with a higher education level prefer to train as doctors, who are seen to have a higher status. This project aims to promote nursing and provide positive role models to encourage ethnic minorities to go into the profession.

A combined approach

To achieve this goal, nursing schools from Ribe, Vejle and Sønderjylland, together with a private consultancy and CVU-Vest in Esbjerg, have developed a three-pronged approach.

Firstly, they offer an introductory course in nursing, which gives participants the opportunity to experience what it's like to work in a nursing home and hospital prior to committing to professional studies. Some 30 people are participating in this introductory course, while a further 10 have gone straight into nursing school.

Secondly, existing nursing staff are being trained in intercultural awareness and conflict management. Some 50-60 nurses, who already act as educators or counsellors in their own workplace, are participating in the training course.

"This has proved really important for changing attitudes within the healthcare profession," says Bente Strager, project coordinator in UDC-gruppen ApS. "It gives nurses a new awareness of the intercultural issues at stake, and provides an opportunity for them to meet and share experiences."

Thirdly, a mentor scheme is supported, whereby 14 nurses, undergoing training in adult education, are given specific courses in tutoring and supervision. Their role is to guide new students, and help them overcome problems as they arise. Several mentors are themselves from a non-Danish ethnic background and have direct experience of the difficulties ethnic minorities face in the profession.

Reduced drop-out rate

"In the past 60% of ethnic minorities starting professional nursing studies have dropped out," says Ms. Strager. "With this scheme, we're seeing a much higher retention rate."

The project has attracted widespread interest. In October 2003, it was awarded a prize from the Danish Ministry of Refugees, Immigration and Integration Affairs for the best education initiative. Several regional authorities are considering replicating all or part of the scheme in their own healthcare system.

Emphasising the positive helps unemployed youngsters



Aktiv 2001 featured in a TV broadcast in August 2002

Project name

Aktiv 2001

Project duration

September 2001 - April 2003

ESF priority area

Social inclusion

Country

Denmark

ESF funding

1,700,382 DKK
(€ 228,681)

Total funding

2,381,147 DKK
(€ 320,236)

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

Long-term unemployed

Name of coordinating organisation

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Based on the results of the ESF-funded project, Aktiv 2001, social workers in the municipality of Nykøbing-Rørvig have adopted new methods of working with unemployed youngsters. By building self-esteem and a sense of personal responsibility, they have found more young people are willing to enter the job market.

Helping youngsters access the job market can be an uphill struggle when they are unmotivated and have little or no contact with people who work. Very often lack of self-esteem and fear of failure are the biggest barriers to finding work. The municipality of Nykøbing-Rørvig in north-west Sjælland in Denmark has therefore tried out a new approach to working with unemployed youngsters.

Everybody has something to offer

"Our focus has been to get young people to think about what they *can do* rather than what they *can't do* – so-called 'resource thinking,'" says Jørn Olesen, head of social and health services in the municipality. "Most of them have experienced so many failures in their lives. They have completely unrealistic expectations about the job market."

Aktiv 2001 was a pilot project involving 26 youngsters, all of whom faced multiple social problems and several were addicted to drugs. Over the course of 13 months, they took part in a training programme covering basic skills such as Danish, maths, English and computing, and a programme of physical exercise – including swimming, weight training and movement.

Regular motivational interviews were held with each individual, to help them identify their hidden talents and build a stronger belief in themselves and their abilities. Most of all, they were encouraged to take responsibility for themselves and their future.

"The youth and social workers involved in the project have changed their way of thinking as a result of this work," says Mr Olesen. "We call our approach the 'credo effect' - it is all about emphasising the positive and encouraging self-belief as opposed to using authority to change behaviour."

Closer to the job market

Of the 26 participants, five have found work and two have jobs that are publicly subsidised. Although the remainder are back on public benefits, Mr Olesen noted: "Almost all the youngsters are now more willing to find permanent employment. They are also more stable and self-reliant."

The approach is now being applied to the employment policy of the municipality, and different tried and tested methodologies are being used in new projects targeting young people.

Tolerance in the future workforce



Multipliers in a job training centre are taught methods to help adolescents develop trust, cooperation and social skills

Project name

Service & information for multipliers in schools and training centres

Project duration

November 2001 - October 2004

ESF Priority Area

Social inclusion

Country

Germany

ESF Funding

€549,318

Total Funding

€858,722

ESF Funding Type

Objective 3

Target Group

Trainers of young people

Name of coordinating organisation

Miteinander e.V.

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Youngsters entering the job market need the skills to work in a rapidly changing, multicultural environment. They are also among the first to be targeted by far-right groups and to fall prey to xenophobic ideas. Miteinander e.V. in Magdeburg, Germany is tackling this at an early stage by raising awareness among trainers and teachers working with this target group.

Like many other regions of Europe, Sachsen-Anhalt in the former German Democratic Republic is going through a difficult transition from its heavy industrial past to a modern day economy. Unemployment levels are high, offering fertile ground for the growth of far-right groups and xenophobia. Furthermore, for many years the region had few foreigners but the number looks set to increase with EU enlargement.

Prevention better than cure

Miteinander e.V. was established in 1999 to fight against right-wing extremism. In 2001, it was awarded funding through Germany's ESF-funded programme, XENOS, to run training courses that increase tolerance and intercultural awareness among young people.

"Rather than targeting the young people themselves, we're reaching out to teachers and trainers preparing youngsters for the job market," explained Mr. Georg Rohde, project coordinator in Miteinander e.V. "Many of them have been educated under the old system where intercultural awareness was not required. They often find it difficult to recognise signs of xenophobia among their students."

Since early 2002, about 100 training courses have been run within the project, each involving between five and 100 people, although typically no more than 15. Each course is tailored to the needs of the hosting institute and in most cases includes training in intercultural methods.

A wealth of information

Miteinander e.V. also publishes a range of books and information leaflets about anti-racism, far-right extremism and tolerance. The materials, knowledge and contacts developed over the course of this project will be available for use long after its completion.

Opening up the labour market to young immigrant school-leavers



Integrating into the workforce: Metal processing trainees

Project name

"BQM": Consulting & coordination centre for the vocational qualification of young immigrants

Project duration

September 2002 - August 2005

ESF Priority Area

Social inclusion

Country

Germany

ESF funding (total for 3 years)

€438,000

Total funding (total for 3 years)

€970,000

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target Group

Young people/Immigrants

Name of coordinating organisation

KWB
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In a German city where immigration is high and some local companies hire few non-ethnic Germans, an information centre – BQM – is working to increase the chances of the city's immigrant school-leavers entering the workforce.

In Hamburg, northern Germany, around 30 per cent of the city's school children are of immigrant parentage. Finding their way into the workforce is often hard. "No companies here would say that they have a policy of not recruiting immigrant school-leavers. Nevertheless, it is noticeable that our target group start job-training courses far less than other Germans do," says BQM project coordinator, Wilfried Kominek.

A wider job network

The traditional job-training course for non-academic school-leavers in Germany is a three year course split between further education and work experience in enterprises. "Many immigrant parents don't know about this course and teachers are not necessarily informed about how to get children on to them," says Mr. Kominek. BQM's role has been to help close this information gap, and build up contacts between teachers, social workers and enterprises, thereby widening the 'job network' for young immigrant people in Hamburg.

Some 1,500 enterprises now receive BQM's newsletter on the local labour market. The Centre is also developing a new training assessment centre, part of whose work will be to promote the use of a test devised by BQM, in cooperation with two social scientists, that can help both teachers and immigrant children assess their individual intercultural skills (i.e. tolerance and languages). BQM is keen to encourage its take-up by personnel departments in businesses as a way of selecting their young trainees and employees.

The benefits of vocational training

This, however, is only a part of the Centre's work. "Many companies do not consider job training as being important for their future," says Mr. Kominek. "So we've developed a documentary film that shows employers various views on vocational training, and gives advice to companies interested in hiring immigrants." This is complemented by the database www.ichblickdurch.de ("I get it") which gives teachers, social workers and young people information on preparatory training projects that could help young people to integrate into the workforce.

Fighting exclusion in small towns and communities



A training workshop from one of the pilot projects

Project name

Operation Work

Project duration

May 2002 - April 2005

ESF priority area

Social inclusion

Country

Finland

ESF funding

€1,261,410

Total funding

€2,522,819

ESF funding type

EQUAL

Target group

Long-term unemployed

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Pargas stad

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Four small towns in Finland are testing a new approach to reduce unemployment and social exclusion in their communities. The approach aims to build partnerships among different local actors, and to offer long-term, personalised guidance to the unemployed.

"Small towns in rural areas often face very different problems to those of big cities," says Anita Fagerström of Pargas municipality, overall coordinator of the project 'Operation Work'. "We have the feeling that national policies and programmes give priority to the big cities. Unemployed people in small towns and municipalities don't have access to the same level of services."

A shared experience

The idea of this project, which is supported by the Community EQUAL initiative, was to bring together municipalities from different parts of rural Finland which face similar problems. Together they would develop, test and evaluate new approaches to preventing marginalisation and encouraging employment.

The four municipalities involved are quite small (between 2,000 and 20,000 inhabitants). Two are rural communities in central Finland (Liestuore and Kinnula), while two are bilingual coastal towns in the west and southwest of Finland (Jakobstad and Pargas). Each municipality is implementing a pilot project to test a new approach called the 'Knowledge Voucher' among different target groups of long-term unemployed.

"The underlying principle of the Knowledge Voucher is that everyone should have access to a professional life," says Ms. Fagerström. "Our approach is to give long-term support and guidance, while respecting an individual's own initiative and autonomy."

Each pilot project involves a skills counsellor who helps the client discover their existing skills and make choices about future job or training options. Special emphasis is also given to 'guidance networks' involving representatives from local government, social services, businesses and the third sector, which includes non-government and non-private sector organisations.

So far 165 individuals have benefited from the project, of which 89 are now back in education, working or in a job training scheme.

A test-bed for the future

The project also had an important evaluation and feedback component. "The involvement of the University of Jyväskylä has been very successful," says Ms. Fagerström. "The research results are making an important contribution to the project's on-going development and internal evaluation."

Now in its final year, the project is focusing primarily on fine-tuning and transferring the 'Knowledge Voucher' model to other rural and small municipalities, not only in Finland but also across Europe.

New network helps socially-excluded access the labour market in Greece



Social services network office in the Kozani municipality, Greece

Project name

Establishing a Social Support Services Network

Project duration

2003-2006

ESF priority area

Social inclusion

Country

Greece

ESF funding

€ 11,550,000

Total funding

€ 15,400,000

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

Socially excluded unemployed

Name of coordinating organisation

- Managing Authority of O.P. Health and Welfare
- Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity, Division of Social Security

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Under a bold new employment and social reform initiative, the Greek Government, in cooperation with the European Social Fund, is establishing a network of municipal offices around the country dedicated to helping people living on the margins of society gain access to the labour market, as well as to the social services system. So far, approximately 70 social support services offices have opened.

The disabled, abused women, ex-offenders, refugees...these are just some of the many social groups who can find it hard to contact social services and access the labour market on their own. As a way of encouraging them and others into employment, the Greek Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity is opening a network of offices around Greece to advise and refer people on where they can receive help in accessing the labour market as well as specific social services (i.e. social benefits schemes, health, mental health and social care services, and vocational training) according to their particular situation.

A cross-section of beneficiaries

A small team of specifically trained social workers, psychologists and sociologists are employed in each centre. Apart from providing counselling and information, the offices, operated by municipal or inter-municipal enterprises, are also monitoring the number and type of applications they receive.

"The type of people going to the centres varies according to the region," says Director of the Managing Authority Thanos Papanastassiou. "In each office, we have installed software that will provide valuable statistics in the long term on how much they are being used and by whom." Initial statistics suggest that, of around 18,000 applications for assistance received so far, approximately 10% come from ethnic minorities, 9% from resident aliens and 6% from single parent families. "You have to remember that these offices are a relatively new concept in Greece, and will take longer to catch on in certain areas. Some mayors we have talked to have been reluctant to our setting up offices in their municipality, as they are prejudiced against the benefits of such schemes," he adds.

On track to empower the socially-excluded in finding work

Nevertheless, the project is expanding and gradually taking root in the country. "The results are much better than expected. We've opened approximately 70 offices to date and look set to open a further 80 in the near future," says Mr Papanastassiou. "The services offered by the offices, which are co-funded by the ESF and the Greek Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity, will be provided for two years. At the end of this period, the municipalities are committed to maintain operation and funding of the offices."

Greek language training for immigrants



Studying the Greek language opens up other opportunities for immigrants

Project name

Greek language for immigrants

Project duration

January 2001 - December 2003

ESF priority area

Social Inclusion

Country

Greece

ESF funding

€21,915,236

Total funding

€28,127,835

ESF funding type

Objective 1

Target group

Immigrants/Asylum seekers

Name of coordinating organisation

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There has been a large and rapid influx of immigrants into Greece since the early 1990s. Ensuring their access to the official labour market and social integration has become an important political priority. A language training initiative has helped almost 7,000 immigrants to learn Greek, increasing their chances of finding permanent and secure employment.

Greece's immigrants, almost all of whom have arrived in the last 15 years, now account for approximately 7% of the country's population. In 2001, an official census registered almost 800,000 resident foreigners, more than half of Albanian origin. Furthermore, the number of asylum seekers is steadily growing, with approximately 9,000 applications for asylum received in 2003.

Poor language skills limit opportunities

Most immigrants are absorbed into the informal economy, for example in the construction industry or in household services. Their jobs tend to be temporary, low paid and poorly regulated. Without adequate training and language skills, many immigrants find it difficult to enter the official labour market and as a result many remain on the margins of society long after they have moved to the country.

The ESF-funded initiative 'Greek language for immigrants', is part of a wider policy to encourage the social and economic integration of the immigrant community. Phase 1 of the project took place in 2003 and involved almost 7,000 immigrants. A second phase began in 2004 targeting 7,600 immigrants. In both phases, approximately 60% of participants were women.

"Helping immigrants to learn the Greek language is one of the most important first steps towards finding work and combating social exclusion," says Dimitris Psallidas, project coordinator within the Ministry of Employment & Social Protection. "This initiative is vital if immigrants are to settle and integrate into Greek society."

Further support is available

The Operational Programme on employment and vocational training, under which this initiative is funded, also supports several complementary measures targeting the immigrant community. For example, on completing a language course immigrants may apply for a traineeship, other lifelong learning opportunities, or for assistance in finding employment or setting up in business.

Guiding deaf people on the professional path



Deaf and hearing colleagues communicate in the workplace

Project name

Supporting professional integration of deaf people

Project duration

2000-2006

ESF priority area

Social Inclusion

Country

France

ESF funding

€344,778

Total funding

€738,581

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

People with hearing impairments

Name of coordinating organisation

Union régionale des associations de parents d'enfants déficients auditifs

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A project in south eastern France has helped more than 1200 deaf people develop a professional future via a coaching service which guides them through the process of career planning, training and finding work. Spearheaded by a regional voluntary organisation, the project helps those with hearing impairments along all stages of the professional path.

The deaf and hard of hearing face a number of barriers to integration in a normal work environment, including communication difficulties, weak literacy, and potential misunderstanding of their capabilities by employers. As a result, unemployment rates among those with hearing impairments are, at 39%, around four times the French national average.

URAPEDA-PACA, an association dedicated to helping the deaf and their families in the Provence-Alps-Côte d'Azur region, runs a personalised coaching service to assist individuals plan a professional future.

Career planning, training and work

"The process includes developing a plan of action tailored to the individual, identifying potential training opportunities and finally finding placements with employers," explains Chantal Matheron, Director General of the association. "Our objective is to help deaf people integrate into a normal working environment, so we also provide a follow-up service to support people once they have found work."

The project has assisted 525 deaf people during the past year, and takes on more and more cases every year. During 2003, a total of 65 individuals were enrolled in training programmes, and a further 146 were placed with employers. Links have been established with 82 different training centres, and with 151 employers.

Helping a diverse range of people

While the service is open to all those with hearing deficiencies, the majority of people seeking assistance have severely impaired hearing or are entirely deaf. Half of these are women. The project places particular emphasis on helping young people, with a third of those assisted under the age of 26.

"We hope to expand this further in the future by supporting a block release programme combining work and study," says Noëlline Koprivnjak, head of the project. "Our ultimate aim is to support the social integration of all deaf people through training and work, and to encourage a more diverse group of users."



A second chance for early school leavers



Project name

YOUTHREACH

Project duration

2000-2006

ESF priority area

Social inclusion

Country

Ireland

ESF funding (2000 - 2003)*

€46,695,593

Total funding (2000 - 2003)*

€81,369,816

ESF funding type

Employment & Human Resources
Operational Programme

Target group

Young people with few
or no qualifications

Name of coordinating organisation

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Young school-leavers, with few or no qualifications, are being given a second chance to access general education and vocational training through the national initiative YOUTHREACH. Some 4,600 young people participated in 2003, of which around 75% have gone on to undertake further education and training, or to enter the labour market.

Every year in Ireland around 2,000 children leave secondary education with no qualifications. Another 1,000 do not transfer from primary school. Furthermore, around 11,000 youngsters, some 15% of all school-leavers, have not gained a leaving certificate.

"It's these young people that are the most vulnerable in the labour market," says Dermot Stokes, YOUTHREACH national coordinator in the Department of Education and Science. "Research shows that the unemployment rate is 47.5% for those entering the labour market with no qualifications, compared with 9.6% for those with a leaving certificate."

Building confidence and competence

YOUTHREACH is the national response to the needs of unqualified early school leavers aged between 15 and 20, and is designed to offer a combination of general education, vocational training and work experience. Some 76 YOUTHREACH centres are located throughout the country, mostly in disadvantaged areas in both rural and urban communities.

"We focus heavily on developing participants' sense of self-worth and identity, as well as pride in their own abilities and work," says Mr Stokes. "They also get to choose from a range of different vocational training options, from photography to sports, from hairdressing to computing."

A 'flexible friend' in training

Fifteen years after its first centres opened, YOUTHREACH is now a well-established national programme within a range of measures that respond to disadvantage in the mainstream education and training system. It is increasingly acknowledged by practitioners in the field as the 'flexible friend' in education and training.

The young people themselves highly value their experience on the programme. One young Galway man who left school at 14 said: "Since leaving YOUTHREACH I have never been out of work and I am currently serving my apprenticeship as a motorbike mechanic. I have always loved motorbikes and it's great to be able to work at something I really like."

The YOUTHREACH programme is continually being developed to increase its flexibility and accessibility. Since 2002, part-time options and childcare services have been made available to improve access for young parents and those already in work.

* Excludes certain expenditures being processed at the time of writing.

Written in June 2004 – project reference: B15-IE4

Starting a new life after serving time



Project name

Multi-training in Is Arenas prison

Project duration

March 2003 - February 2004

ESF priority area

Social Inclusion

Country

Italy

ESF funding

€130,147

Total funding

€260,294

ESF funding type

Objective 1

Target group

Former prisoners

Name of coordinating organisation

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The reintegration of ex-offenders into working life has been the main aim of an Italian project to provide professional training to prisoners prior to release. Courses were offered to 29 inmates nearing the end of their sentences at Is Arenas prison in Sardinia.

Experience shows that many prisoners face severe difficulties in reintegrating into professional life after serving time, due both to low qualifications and lack of direction in their working lives. This suggests there is a real need for professional training in prisons to help prepare inmates for a return to the labour market once their sentences end.

A return to working life

The Sardinia region and Enaip Sardegna, a regional network of training institutions, put together two courses offering prisoners professional qualifications in mechanics and food technology. The courses were aimed in particular at those in the final phase of detention, soon to be faced with the challenge of re-entering working life. They were introduced at Is Arenas prison following an initiative by the prison authorities and the local police chief.

"The training courses were made up of theoretical and practical components and lasted 600 hours," explains Eligio Cincotti of Enaip Sardegna. "As well as technical topics, they covered general skills like informatics and also included practical information on opportunities and difficulties in the labour market."

Facilitating integration

In addition to providing professional skills, the training was also designed to help individuals readapt to society more generally. "Our aim was to help reintegrate prisoners as human beings and as workers," says Mr Cincotti. "As well as preparing them for the outside world, the courses helped to promote integration within the prison. The trainers, half of whom were women, played an essential role in ensuring the success of the project."

Five out of the fifteen prisoners following the mechanics course obtained the final qualification, while the others were unable to finish due to ending their sentence or moving to another prison. Similarly, five of the fourteen food technology students were able to complete their course. The project intends to monitor the progress of the former prisoners over the next two years.

Promoting an active working life for the over 45s



Active labour market

Social inclusion

Lifelong learning

Adaptability

Women's participation

A campaign poster promotes work for the over 45s

Project name

Over 45

Project duration

June 2002 - June 2004

ESF priority area

Social Inclusion

Country

Italy

ESF funding

€587,208

Total funding

€1,174,416

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

Older people, women

Name of coordinating organisation

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In the region of Friuli Venezia Giulia, north-east Italy, people over the age of 45 are receiving a helping hand to prolong their participation in the labour market. Through EQUAL project 'Over 45', 265 people have participated in training, while 157 have re-entered the labour market with help from the project.

While the official number of unemployed in the region of Friuli Venezia Giulia is 3,000, in reality the number is likely to be far greater. "We are faced with an ageing population and declining industry," says Paola Catalano, coordinator of the EQUAL project Over 45. "Furthermore, our industry is dominated by small businesses that don't have a huge capacity to absorb new workers, and the jobs created within the service and trade sectors tend to be temporary and insecure."

Unemployment highest among older women

In such a competitive labour market, people over 45 are often the first to be excluded. Women in particular find it difficult to access the job market and more than half the population of women aged between 55 and 64 are unemployed. Often the public employment services fall short of the needs of this target group.

EQUAL project 'Over 45' aimed to fill the gap by supporting older job seekers in finding employment and encouraging local employers to recruit older people. Nineteen contact points were set up across the town of Trieste in local health centres, housing associations and other service centres not normally connected to job search. Some 1,226 people registered their interest, and 955 took part in counselling sessions focusing on the individual's technical and professional skills and work expectations.

A specialised training programme attracted some 265 participants, and included classes in basic English, computing, self-empowerment, designing a CV and preparing for an interview.

Finally, 25 people have taken part in five-month work placements, giving employers the chance to test the new employees, and giving trainees practical work experience. Three of the seven people who have completed their placement have received permanent employment contracts.

Local association takes up the challenge

"We're now publishing a brochure on our results and have presented a proposal for a law to the regional government based on our experience," says Ms. Catalano. "We've also supported participants in setting up their own independent association - which is now becoming a reference point on unemployment among older people."

Closing the gap through networking



Proactif share their experience with partners in Finland

Project name

Reseau RPM

Project duration

November 2001–December 2003

(a project extension Jan 2003 – Dec 2004 is funded through the Luxembourg government)

ESF Priority Area

Social inclusion

Country

Luxembourg

ESF Funding

€564,112

Total Funding

€1,128,225

ESF Funding Type

EQUAL

Target Group

Long-term unemployed, homeless, ex-offenders

Name of coordinating organisation

Proactif

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Professional integration programmes can often exclude the most marginalised. In Luxembourg, a number of associations are working together to ensure that individuals facing varied and multiple difficulties do not fall through the net.

A cycle of dependency is difficult to break. Those suffering from social exclusion need special attention before they can access the job market. Steps such as improving their living space, self-empowerment and socialisation need to be taken.

Complementary services

"It's quite difficult for any single organisation to find solutions to the range of problems faced by this target group," explains Robert Schadeck, project coordinator from Proactif. "By working together, we've found that each organisation can contribute their own specialisation, so we can better meet each individual's needs."

The project involves six partners. Proactif and Forum pour l'Emploi focus primarily on employment integration, while Caritas and Centre Emmanuel offer counselling and psycho-social support including housing for the homeless. The other non-governmental organisation involved in the project, Diskus, specialises in support for ex-offenders.

The national employment administration is also a key partner. "We want to ensure that our activities are complementary to existing professional integration programmes," says Mr. Schadeck. "For example, we hope our assessment system that takes account of an individual's psycho-social characteristics will be adopted at national level. It will help the employment services support and monitor an individual's social integration as well as their (re-)entry into the labour market".

Practical and psycho-social assistance

In addition to this more strategic activity, the project partners give practical support to beneficiaries suffering different forms of exclusion. They accompany them in social activities, organise collective events, offer volunteering opportunities, or guide them in practical issues (housing, health or hygiene).

Almost 400 individuals were supported in 2003, through over 600 different activities. In around 70 per cent of cases, the project has succeeded in stabilising the individual's social and/or professional situation.

Over the coming year, the partners aim to combine different empowerment measures into an officially recognised three month programme. Participants must commit to 40 hours per week, and will receive a small financial compensation in return. Other project tasks include installing a database developed in 2003, further training and assistance for trainers, stronger collaboration with prisons, and widening the network of volunteers.

People with mental disabilities acquire skills for the workplace



Park life: new employment for an ex-Ligue HMC trainee

Project name

1. Bureau Service
2. Assisted Employment

Project duration

January 2000 - December 2003/
extended to Dec 2004

ESF priority area

Social inclusion

Country

Luxembourg

ESF funding

Bureau Service: €131,324
Assisted Employment: €666,638
Total: €797,962

Total funding

Bureau Service: €291,832
Assisted Employment: €1,481,417
Total: €1,773,249

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

People with intellectual disabilities

Name of coordinating organisation

Ligue HMC asbl

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Based in the town of Capellen, southwest Luxembourg, two projects dedicated to integrating people with learning difficulties into society and employment have been set up. Providing close supervision and work experience, the schemes are so successful that the coordinating organisation is now expanding its activities to two new regions of Luxembourg.

People with intellectual disabilities need time to understand, and adjust to, new situations and new demands. Consequently they can find entering the workforce a difficult and challenging undertaking. To ease their integration into employment, the Ligue HMC asbl in Capellen, Luxembourg, has set up a "protected workshop" where people with varying degrees of mental disability can improve their skills and receive assistance in finding a job.

A simulated work environment

Among other workshops, day centres and housing projects, the Ligue offers two key schemes: the first – the *bureau service* - enables participants to gain work experience in a simulated office. Supervised constantly by an educational assistant, they learn how to use computers, the Internet and e-mail, as well as how to print business cards and brochures. "We like to keep the office small – around five to six people can work in it at any one time – to keep a close eye on how individuals are developing and to defuse any problems immediately," says project coordinator Roland Kolber.

At the same time, the Ligue HMC runs a larger scheme – "*emploi assisté*" (assisted employment) - dedicated to helping individuals secure work outside the centre. The centre offers pre-training to participants in a supervised workshop before they visit a potential employer. "We've now managed to secure jobs for people in old peoples' homes, small private businesses and the town park," says Mr Kolber. "There, they carry out simple maintenance tasks, such as gardening, cooking or cleaning."

Support always close at hand

Under this work scheme, a qualified instructor accompanies an individual to their initial meetings with the employer to allay any fears on either side. The new employees then either receive a weekly visit from their instructor to check no problems are developing, or they work together in a small group (four people), with an instructor permanently by their side.

"We're now planning to replicate our schemes, that are no longer funded by the ESF but by local authorities, in two other regions of Luxembourg. It shows that the project is working and, most importantly, our trainees are being accepted into the workplace by local employers," says Mr Kolber.

A helping hand for asylum-seekers



Learning on the job: a participant on an ASTI scheme

Project name

"Franchir les obstacles"
(Overcoming obstacles)

Project duration

May 2002 -December 2003
(extension until June 2004)

ESF priority area

Social inclusion

Country

Luxembourg

ESF funding

€ 150,630

Total funding

€ 301,260

ESF funding type

EQUAL

Target group

Asylum-seekers

Name of coordinating organisation

ASTI

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While the legal situation of asylum-seekers in Europe varies from country to country, they all face the common problem of "mainstreaming" themselves into new societies with minimal or no support and guidance. Helping them through this in Luxembourg, however, is an EQUAL project run by the Association de Soutien aux Travailleurs Immigrés (ASTI), a non-governmental organisation.

Arriving in Europe unsure of their rights and often alone, asylum-seekers face a mountain of obstacles to overcome before they can feel truly integrated into the society of their host country. "Franchir les obstacles/Overcoming obstacles" has been working on changing this situation by providing asylum-seekers with opportunities to improve their language and computer skills, as well as their chances of entering the labour market, and society as a whole.

Learning the language opens doors

Between 2002 and 2003, some 21 asylum-seekers took part in this project, and another 25 took part in 2004. "They came from all over – south-east Europe, Asia and Africa – and they were all very keen to take part," says Monica Terzi, ASTI project coordinator. As a first step to integrating participants into their new surroundings, and assisted by Luxembourg's Centre de Langues, ASTI organised several hours of French language classes. "Learning the language of the host country is a great way to find a place in a new society and, through language, its culture," says Ms Terzi.

At the same time, the project organised computer classes for the students and arranged for six-month work placements in local companies. "Although we were successful in this, it was some of the hardest work we had to do, as the work could not be paid. Consequently, the participants wanted us to find them work that would benefit them in the long term," says Ms Terzi. Nevertheless, placements were found and gave participants confidence in looking for work elsewhere.

Becoming part of the community reduces isolation

As part of its holistic approach to the asylum-seekers' situation, the project also took participants on theatre trips and group activities to bring them into closer contact with the community and other members of the group. Says Tatyana Novosselova, an ex-participant: "This project made me feel less alone during a difficult period of my life – and I hope the work experience and my new knowledge of French will provide a useful link to my future life."

The results and lessons learnt from the project are being fed into the European transnational partnership ASY CULT, also dedicated to the integration of asylum-seekers in the EU, of which ASTI forms a part.

Opening up the job market to people with learning difficulties



In the workshop: a trainee improves his skills under simulated work conditions

Project name

VO Practical Training

Project duration

January 2002 - December 2003

ESF priority area

Social inclusion

Country

The Netherlands

ESF funding

€151,900

Total funding

€334,337

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

Students with learning difficulties

Name of coordinating organisation

Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

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A chance is being offered to students with learning difficulties to boost their self-confidence, improve their skills and access the job market through the "Praktijkschool Hulst" college in the Netherlands. Providing intensive supervision and aftercare, a high percentage of course participants go on to paid employment.

Education on its own is not sufficient to prepare some young people for the job market. Sometimes extra help is required to get a foot on the career ladder. In the Hulst area of the Netherlands, students with an IQ of between 60 and 80 who have seriously fallen behind in certain subjects are being offered assistance through special education courses run under the aegis of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

Entitled "VO Practical Training", the project offers students experience in environments which closely resemble a real work situation. Under simulated conditions, students can practice their trade and improve skills required on the shop floor - for instance, working in a team and handling difficult customers. This way, by the time students approach the job market, they already have work experience.

A real job at the end

But experience is not the only goal of the project. It also strives to find a work placement for its participants. Says project coordinator Karel Kerckhaert: "When we successfully negotiate a work placement in Hulst, it is on condition that it is converted into a permanent job upon completion. If an opportunity comes up before the training is finished, we take it. You have to capitalise on every chance."

Supervising the work placements effectively – with one member of staff taking care of eight students – is demanding. The same goes for the aftercare needed to ensure students keep their jobs. "Sometimes people in this somewhat vulnerable group stay away from work if there are problems," says Mr Kerckhaert. "In most cases, we intervene by referring students to agencies and offering practical solutions." Former students are free to call on the college for aftercare for a period of two years after leaving.

Convincing results

Results from this project are very promising. In the years 2002-2003, 25 out of 30 students have found work, with the number expected to rise to 30 by the end of the year. Says Mr Kerckhaert: "We've been involved in this kind of training for 10 years now, and 94% of our students go on to paid employment."

Professional integration of people with disabilities



A disabled employee in the carpentry workshop

Project name

Gaia Vocational Rehabilitation Centre

Project duration

Annual programme

ESF priority area

Social inclusion

Country

Portugal

ESF funding

€3,875,618

Total funding

€5,167,491

ESF funding type

Objective 1

Target group

People with disabilities

Name of coordinating organisation

Gaia Vocational Rehabilitation Centre

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An organisation in northern Portugal is challenging the view that people with disabilities cannot have an active social and professional life. Every year almost 2,000 people access their services, which include vocational training programmes and support for finding a job or setting up in business.

Disability has traditionally been seen from a medical viewpoint as something that needs to be treated. The Gaia Vocational Rehabilitation Centre (CRPG) in northern Portugal, however, takes a very different perspective.

"As we see it, disability is not the cause of the problem, it is rather the relationship between disabled people and their environment," says Jerónimo de Sousa, director of CRPG. "We are therefore working not only to help disabled people develop their capacities, but also to change the way society, and particularly employers, view disability."

Working in partnership

CRPG was established in 1992, as the result of a partnership between the Institute for Training and Employment, a governmental agency, and two private organisations run by and for people with disabilities. Today they have almost 2,000 clients per year, to whom they offer a range of services from rehabilitation and the prescription of technical aids, to vocational training and employment support.

"In 2002-2003, we conducted a survey to evaluate the impact of the vocational rehabilitation services on clients' quality of life," says Mr de Sousa. "We interviewed some 2,500 people with disabilities who have used, or are using, those services. Almost all respondents claimed that, since taking part in CRPG and other institutions' activities, they participate more in society, they vote more, and that their economic situation has improved."

Creating self-employment

One of the employment support services offered by CRPG is assistance with setting up a telework business. Established two years ago, 18 people with disabilities have now completed the programme and another 10 have just started. "We provide facilities and technical support as well as training in business management and contacting and negotiating with clients," says Mr. de Sousa.

A wide range of vocational training options are also on offer, tailored to individual needs and rehabilitation plans. Of the 770 clients that completed a vocational training between 1992 and 2003, 70% have either found work or set up their own business. Sheltered employment is also available in a carpentry workshop run by CRPG, where 14 of the 22 employees are disabled.

"We are appealing to the 'socially-responsible' consumer market, as well as being competitive in price and quality," says Mr de Sousa.

National programme for the Spanish Roma Community



More young Roma are accessing vocational training programmes, facilitating their entrance into the labour market

Project name

ACCEDER: Fight discrimination against the gypsy community

Project duration

2000-2006

ESF Priority Area

Social inclusion

Country

Spain

ESF Funding

€23.1 million – Objective 1
€8.4 million – Objective 3

Total Funding

€45 million

ESF Funding Type

Objective 1, Objective 3

Target Group

Gypsy community

Name of coordinating organisation

Fundación Secretariado General Gitano

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Thanks to a successful pilot programme in Madrid in 1998-1999, 13 Autonomous Communities in Spain are now participating in the programme 'Acceder', which aims to facilitate the Roma community's access to training and employment opportunities. Already, almost 17,000 people have benefited from the programme, a third of whom have found employment.

There are estimated to be over 600,000 Roma in Spain today. They have complex and diverse origins and often very different social and cultural identities. The community in general has suffered for many years from social prejudice and stereotyping. However, the last few years have seen a major shift in perceptions as more and more of the Roma community access the labour market and education and training.

Taking greater responsibility

This shift is in no small part due to the efforts of the national Gypsy foundation (Fundación Secretariado General Gitano - FSGG). Recognition of their role was reflected in the award of a grant from the ESF Operational Programme against discrimination to run a nationwide programme targeted specifically at the Roma community. "This is a big step forward in giving greater responsibility to the actual target groups and their representatives in deciding and implementing active labour market policies," explained José Manuel Fresno, director of FSGG.

Results speak for themselves

Now just half way through the six year programme, the results have exceeded all expectations. Some 47 employment offices have been supported in 44 municipalities in 13 different Autonomous Communities. The total number of beneficiaries has reached almost 17,000 while the original target for the project was 15,000 for the 6 years. Furthermore almost 10,000 work contracts have been agreed as a result of this programme, 45 per cent of which are for more than three months.

Access to training and education opportunities for the Roma community is another key objective. So far some 3,600 people have enrolled in training with support from the programme, 83 per cent of them Roma and 60 per cent of them women.

As Mr. Fresno says, "the positive impact of Acceder is clear. The long-term perspective of this programme allows a greater and more lasting impact on this target population and on society in general. The ESF Operational Programme has made this possible."

Job support for people with disabilities



Giving an equal chance to people with disabilities

Project name

Supported employment for people with disabilities

Project duration

January 2000 - December 2006

ESF Priority Area

Social inclusion

Country

Spain

ESF Funding

€3,144,347

Total Funding

€4,491,924

ESF Funding Type

Objective 3

Target Group

People with disabilities

Name of coordinating organisation

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Región de Murcia

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Enabling people with disabilities to have an active economic and social life is a key political priority of the regional government of Murcia in Spain. A six-year programme supported by the ESF Operational Programme is helping this become a reality.

There are around three and a half million people in Spain with a physical or mental disability, representing nine per cent of the population. Murcia is among the Autonomous Communities with the highest prevalence of disability, alongside Castilla-Leon, Andalucia and Galicia.

The guiding principle of the regional government of Murcia is that people with disabilities and their families should have the same rights and freedoms as the rest of its citizens, including access to an active social economic and social life.

Supported employment: an individual approach

This programme focuses on 'supported employment' for people with disabilities. "This approach not only has a high success rate in the number of people with disabilities accessing the job market, but also the jobs tend to be more secure, and new employees have fewer problems in adapting to the work tasks," explains Constantino Sotoca, officer in the Regional Service for Employment and Training (SREF) within the Autonomous Community of Murcia (CARM).

The programme works on the model of intensive and personalised support for each individual. Non-profit, specialised organisations are contracted to work with a minimum number of people with disabilities – at least four per full-time employee in the case of mental disabilities, and at least six in the case of physical disabilities. Their role is to prepare the client for employment and help them find a job. Once in a job, the support person may learn and perform the work tasks required of the client, to guide and support him or her during the initial adaptation period.

Private companies employing people with disabilities are entitled to financial support provided they comply with certain criteria. For example, they must commit to a minimum of three years in the case of indefinite employment contracts, and report annually to the SREF.

Concrete results

Since the programme was launched in 2000, service providers have worked with 3,200 people with disabilities. Some 410 of them have found employment, of which 150 are women and all are under the age of 30. In most cases the jobs have lasted between six and 12 months. It is expected that around 4,000 people will benefit from this programme over its lifetime and that at least 700 people will find work.

Integrating immigrants into the Swedish workforce



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Preparing for the workforce:
immigrants gain self-confidence through training

Project name

Employment service
rehabilitation and training

Project duration

January 2001 – December 2002

ESF Priority Area

Social inclusion

Country

Sweden

ESF Funding

SEK 1,570,000
(€174,705)

Total Funding

SEK 3,310,000
(€368,327)

ESF Funding Type

Objective 3

Target Group

Long-term unemployed
Immigrants/asylum seekers

Name of coordinating organisation

The Employment Office of
Rehabilitation and Education

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Immigrants from around Europe, Africa and the Middle East have been given individual coaching through work placements and new jobs thanks to a project devised by the Blekinge labour exchange. Interpreting between employers and participants formed a key component of the scheme.

By the mid-1990s, nearly 950,000 of Sweden's 8.8 million inhabitants were people born in another country. While some immigrants are well integrated into Swedish society, a significant proportion of them, particularly those with little or no knowledge of the language, still find it difficult to find work. This reinforces their feelings of exclusion, can damage their self-confidence and make it even harder for them to integrate in the long-term.

Coaching each step of the way

In Blekinge county, around 400 kilometres south of Stockholm, attempts to minimise immigrant social exclusion has been carried out by the local labour exchange. Focusing on immigrants who had poor language skills in Swedish and in some cases, mental or physical difficulties, it took a highly intensive, hands-on approach to the problem.

Two people worked full-time with the immigrants and saw each participant individually to get a good understanding of their needs. Together, they devised a personal employment plan for the participant to follow. The individual was accompanied by a coach to their work placement and then to their new place of work to support them through the difficult earlier stages of finding, and staying in, a new job.

Spreading good practice

The work placements were varied, from manual work in fish processing to learning structural design. And clearly the attempt to boost self-confidence worked. Around 130 immigrants took part in the scheme, 101 found work and four have set up in the restaurant business or opened a shop.

"The project was so successful," says Mr. Leif Ottosson, project coordinator at the Blekinge project, "that it is being duplicated by other employment offices all over Sweden. The government has decided to give a great deal of money to make this possible."

Career choices for people with disabilities



Toby chooses the catering business for his vocational training

Project name

Vision 21 (Cyfle Cymru)

Project duration

2001-2002

ESF priority area

Social inclusion

Country

United Kingdom

ESF funding

£215,000

(€320,350)

Total funding

£685,719

(€1,021,721)

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

People with disabilities

Name of coordinating organisation

Vision 21

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One individual's vision has become a pioneering social enterprise in Wales. Vision 21 runs a wide range of projects including a café, garden centre, retail outlet, pottery and carpentry workshop, where people with disabilities have access to vocational training and supported employment.

The idea behind Vision 21 stems from Barry Shiers' desire to treat people with disabilities with respect and to give them opportunities to move forward in their lives.

"As a social worker in Cardiff back in 1989, I was increasingly angered by the way people with disabilities were put together in large groups and given pointless tasks to occupy them," says Mr Shiers, now director of the company Vision 21. "I started to teach basic woodturning skills to a few disabled students on a part-time basis. From there, we set up a small charity in 1991 offering different vocational training options."

Real-life work setting

Some 13 years later Vision 21 has 15 ongoing projects throughout Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan and, in any one week, involves around 175 students with disabilities. Students can choose from a wide range of practical training options from gardening to office administration.

"All our training programmes lead to some kind of qualification," says Mr Shiers. "We have also teamed up with an employment agency, 'Quest', that helps disabled people into employment once they've finished the training."

The results are impressive. Of the 80 students who completed their training between July 2001 and December 2002, 75 gained a qualification and 20 entered work on leaving the project.

High-quality products for export

The financial support offered through the ESF has helped to get the projects started but, as Mr Shiers pointed out, Vision 21 places a strong emphasis on self-sufficiency. "All of our projects are income generating. In our carpentry workshop, we are producing small Celtic harps aimed at the tourism sector. We also produce high-quality bespoke kitchens, which are even exported to France," he says. The ESF contribution to its overall budget has therefore dropped from 45% to 20% in the recent funding round.

Vision 21 has attracted much interest locally and abroad. Several local authorities in Wales are interested in setting up similar schemes and Vision 21 employees have been involved in a number of international exchanges. "We've also recently established a network of social enterprises in Wales, which already has a membership of 28," says Mr Shiers. "It is an exciting time in our development."

Bytes centres make IT learning fun and creative



In Bytes centres young people use computers to develop their own interests and skills

Project name

Bytes project

Project duration

October 2002 – March 2004

ESF priority area

Social inclusion

Country

UK

ESF funding

£114,089
(€170,282)

Total funding

£175,522
(€261,973)

ESF funding type

Northern Ireland Programme For Building Sustainable Prosperity

Target group

Disadvantaged young people

Name of coordinating organisation

The Bytes Project

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Unemployed young people from some of the most socially deprived areas of Northern Ireland are benefiting from drop-in centres where they can learn IT skills while carrying out different community projects. There are now 10 such Bytes centres, two of which received support through the European Social Fund.

Poleglass (West Belfast) and Ballybeen (East Belfast) both suffer from high unemployment and poverty. The former is a predominantly nationalist area, the latter predominantly Protestant – and the community divide is still strong. Two new Bytes centres were opened in October 2002 in both areas, offering activities that motivate youngsters to step off the poverty cycle and bring the two sides of the community together.

Using ICT to develop personal interests

The centres are open to 16-25 year-olds who are registered unemployed. There are no referrals – the youngsters usually hear about the centres through word-of-mouth – and there is no obligation to attend. Some are casual users who come in only occasionally, while others are regular users who commit themselves to completing a specific project. Everybody who registers at a centre is given personal computer space, and works on an individual personal development portfolio assisted by the centre's Development Officer.

Young people have the opportunity to work towards a recognised qualification in ICT that is entirely portfolio-based. They choose the topic and then develop their skills around it, such as searching the Internet, producing graphics or typing a document.

"Using ICT in a way that is creative and fun can really motivate young people to go on to further personal development," says Patricia Haren, Project Director for Bytes. "Our aim is to encourage them back into further education or into employment."

Working with the community

Participation in community projects, particularly cross-community activities, is also very important. "We have staff dedicated to developing projects involving both sides of the community," says Ms Haren. "Also each centre has an advisory group involving local representatives. They have a say in the centre's activities, which helps to build more trust between the wider community and its young people."

Every week around 100 young people use the Poleglass Bytes centre, while about 40 go to the smaller Ballybeen centre. Since opening in October 2002, some 24 young people have obtained a qualification, 67 have moved into employment and 44 into full-time training. The Bytes centres have recently received continuation funding from the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning.

Lifelong Learning

Promoting and improving training, education and counselling as part of a lifelong learning policy

International standards for Human Resource Development



The IIP team at the Federation of Austrian Industry

Project name

Investors in People

Project duration

October 2003 - March 2006

ESF priority area

Lifelong Learning

Country

Austria

ESF funding

€155,399

Total funding

€289,435

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

Employees in companies

Name of coordinating organisation

Austrian Federation of Industry

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Introducing the internationally- recognised standard 'Investors in People' (IIP) in Austrian companies is the aim of the Austrian Federation of Industry. The standard is one of the most developed and useful tools in supporting companies in their Human Resource Development (HRD) efforts.

Lifelong learning not only enhances quality of life but is also becoming a key factor in company success. The quality standard 'Investors in People' is a certified framework which aims to improve performance, better exploit a company's human capital and further develop human resources. Furthermore, it supports efforts to show that investment in people is effective.

Introduction in Austria

The Austrian Federation of Industry has been introducing the 'Investors in People' standard in 12 companies in Austria ranging from private services, to public service, industry or biotechnology.

"Our target has been to involve a wide range of companies of different sizes, branches and with different levels of Human Resource Development. This helps us to broaden our experience of the standard in different environments as a basis for its further promotion and wider use after the pilot phase," explains Holger Heller, project coordinator from the Austrian Federation of Industry.

IIP is based on a management plan, involving certain indicators and development phases, which have to be implemented by the companies themselves during a period of about 9 to 18 months. The Austrian Federation of Industry together with the consultancy enterprise Pendl & Piswanger provides professional assistance and support.

The professional approach and the involvement of employees in the implementation of the standard is highly valued. Furthermore a specific IIP circle has been set up to support exchange of experience among the participating companies and to offer training on request.

Different development stages

"Most of the pilot companies have already passed the diagnoses phase and are in the process of finalising the action plan or have already started to implement it. We estimate that some of the pilot companies will achieve the standard already in 2005," says Heller. "The evaluation towards the end of the pilot will be done by external consultants, specifically trained and certified as IIP assessors. Our next milestone will be to work out a detailed business plan in order to prepare a smooth transition from pilot to permanent phase."

According to the project coordinator, feedback from participating companies has been very positive and the steps made so far show them to be highly motivated to achieve good results.

Learning at the heart of human resource management



Deceuninck now has a room dedicated to training

Project name

Excellent Learning

Project duration

January 2001 - December 2002

ESF priority area

Lifelong Learning

Country

Belgium

ESF funding

€282,162

Total funding

€1,254,052

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

Employees
Employed at risk

Name of coordinating organisation

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The six-year human resources management programme "Deceuninck Career Guidance" is gradually revolutionising attitudes among all Deceuninck's employees. Training and learning lie at the heart of the programme, where support from the ESF and regional government of Flanders is making a vital contribution.

A world leader in PVC products for the construction industry, Deceuninck NV, took the ambitious step in 2001 of launching a "Career Guidance" programme, which promises a complete overhaul of the company's human resources management strategy. It is affecting all the 650 employees, based at the firm's headquarters and manufacturing plant in Hooglede-Gits, Belgium.

"The impact is being felt at every level in our company," says Marc Michels, Deceuninck's Human Resources Director. "It represents a policy shift that has very practical implications on employee tasks and responsibilities, and our work organisation."

Changes in policy and practice

Training and learning are now considered systematically for every project and every employee. The company aims to instil a culture of lifelong learning, so that every employee takes responsibility for his or her own professional and personal development. Whereas training traditionally focused on management staff, the emphasis has now shifted to involving all staff, particularly shop floor workers and administrative staff. Managers have responsibility to anticipate training needs and ensure they are met and followed up. The type of training on offer has also changed from being more classroom-based and theoretical, to being focused on practice and learning-by-doing.

With financial support from the ESF and Flemish regional government, Deceuninck organised 2,510 training days between 2001 and 2002, and 2,188 days in 2003. Approximately 550 staff were involved in the first phase, and 450 in the second. Of these, around 75% are shop-floor workers, 18% administrative or sales staff, and 7% management. Training is offered in five key areas: information technology, technical skills, production processes, communication and management, and induction training.

Recognising the value of learning

"We're definitely seeing more employees taking an interest in learning opportunities," says Mr Michels. "For example, we recently launched an enquiry to assess the interest in German language training. Over 80 people responded positively, even though it will be organised outside work hours."

The Career Guidance programme lasts until 2006, during which time Deceuninck will apply for annual subsidies from the ESF and regional government for their training activities. According to Mr Michels: "Public support has helped change the perceptions of management staff. Now our social responsibility is seen as equally important as our economic contribution to the region."

Harnessing the learning potential of new technologies



Students learning through new technologies

Project name

Distance learning

Project duration

June 2002-September 2004

ESF priority area

Lifelong learning

Country

Belgium

ESF funding

€828,959

Total funding

€1,675,967

ESF funding type

EQUAL

Target group

Employees, learners

Name of coordinating organisation

University of Liège

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A partnership led by the University of Liège is testing and developing new educational methods to promote lifelong learning in Belgium. The project aims to widen access to education and training opportunities through the use of distance learning.

Traditional methods of learning have tended to exclude a large section of the population whose access to training and education is limited by geographical and time constraints. But new information and communication technologies offer considerable scope for extending learning opportunities to a much wider group of people. E-learning nevertheless involves a significant shift in learning culture, both on the part of trainers and students.

Broadening access to learning

The University of Liège joined in a partnership with training institutions (FOREM and IFAPME) to develop techniques for using distance learning in education and training. The project is targeted especially at those lacking access to traditional learning, and aims to define educational methods that take full advantage of new technologies.

"Our project has produced a number of concrete results," explains project coordinator Marie-France Brundseaux. "We have developed three online training courses and set up a web-based manual on distance learning techniques."

Distance learning courses have been set up in the fields of car electronics, training for trainers and international commerce. A total of 51 students followed the course in international commerce during 2003, for which a separate e-learning website has been established. The course tries to involve employers as far as possible in the training process and has already stimulated considerable interest from the business sector.

Learning from experience

"A key aim of the project was to collect and share the expertise developed by the partners," adds Ms Brundseaux. "We carried out a study of distance learning methods which provides advice based on real experience, ranging from setting up a new course to evaluating its performance. The study is now available in the form of a manual on our website."

"In the future we hope to expand our activities and are now developing a single portal for distance learning in Belgium, bringing together the various resources of the different organisations working in this field."

Tailored ICT training for transport companies



On-site at Andreas Andrasen A/S, Padborg DK (photographer: Steen Larsen)

Project name

Global ICT Competencies

Project duration

October 2001 – August 2003

ESF Priority Area

Lifelong Learning

Country

Denmark

ESF Funding

1,122,277 DKK
(€150,664)

Total Funding

2,906,177 DKK
(€390,151)

ESF Funding Type

Objective 3

Target Group

Employees

Name of coordinating organisation

AOF SYD Aabenraa

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The ICT training programme launched by Andreas Andrasen A/S in Jutland, Denmark has attracted much interest within the road transport industry. Some 150 employees have been trained, improving the company's global competitiveness and its staff's job satisfaction.

To maintain competitiveness in today's globalised market, companies are replacing many time-consuming tasks with information and communication technologies (ICTs). In the road transport industry, for example, ICTs can dramatically improve fleet management and contract delivery. However, to be effective, investment in new technologies must be accompanied by investment in upgrading staff ICT skills.

A first in the road transport sector

Large-scale staff training projects are still relatively uncommon in the road transport industry. But Andreas Andrasen A/S decided to break with tradition by investing in a set of training modules tailored to the needs of its staff and overall mission. Its expected return on this investment: to maintain and increase its market share in the transport of perishable goods, and to increase staff competencies in ICTs leading to greater job satisfaction, flexibility and understanding of the full range of company tasks.

"Without the assistance provided through this ESF project, Andrasen A/S would never have had the time or resources necessary to develop such a training programme. As their ICT needs are so different from other commercial sectors, there are no external providers," reports Helle Hockerup, the project developer in AOF SYD - a branch of the Danish Workers' Educational Association and partner of Andrasen A/S.

Out of the company's 500 employees, 150 took part in the training, each receiving an 'Andrasen license' on its completion. Compulsory modules were offered in booking, purchasing, resource management and finance, and specialised modules in bookkeeping, customs and tax, and archiving. Seven employees in the Luxembourg office also participated in the training through an e-learning course. In future, new employees will go through the same training, giving all staff a common ICT knowledge.

Beyond the immediate result of raising staff competencies in ICT, the project has increased staff appreciation of the importance of on-going training and brought in highly qualified staff, attracted by the ICT tools and training provision.

Spreading the word

And the benefits are not just confined to Andrasen A/S. Following a presentation of the project, Ms. Hockerup said: "Padborg International Transport Centre has expressed real interest in using our results to build appropriate ICT training concepts for some of their 142 member companies that operate across the transport sector."

Filling the training gaps in remote areas



Trainees in the flexible learning programme

Project name

Network for flexible teaching and courses

Project duration

March 2002 - June 2004

ESF priority area

Lifelong Learning

Country

Denmark

ESF funding

€648,476

Total funding

€1,644,086

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

Unemployed

Name of coordinating organisation

Regional Municipality of Bornholm

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A network of organisations is offering individual training opportunities for unemployed people around Nexø, on the east coast of the Danish island of Bornholm. Some 350 people have benefited so far, improving their chances of finding work as well as their overall wellbeing.

Adult education opportunities in Bornholm are concentrated in its administrative capital, Rønne, on the west coast. Although only 35km away, for the inhabitants of Nexø, on the east coast, the distance is a major disincentive to enrol in training.

"Thirty five kilometres may as well be 350 kilometres in the minds of people here," says Birgit Aaberg, project coordinator in the regional municipality of Bornholm. "Rønne is about an hour away by public transport and few people are willing to make the journey on a regular basis."

But in an area where unemployment is currently 14% compared to the national average of 8%, training in professional and personal skills is an essential tool for increasing chances of getting a job.

Bringing training closer to home

The regional municipality of Bornholm therefore teamed up with the adult education centre in Rønne and several trade unions to offer local training to unemployed people in the southeastern part of the island.

"The beneficiaries are referred to us by the unemployment office or social services," says Ms. Aaberg. "We have people coming to us with almost no education at all, while others may have a university degree. Most of them are unemployed, although some are on sick leave or have seasonal work either in the tourist sector or fishing industry."

By far the most popular courses have been those in computer training. Everybody is given individual attention according to his or her specific needs. Many people come with no computer experience at all, while others are looking for training in specific software packages. Participants are often attracted by the possibility of working towards the recognised European Computer Driving Licence.

Getting ready to work

By the end of April 2004, some 380 people had registered for the training courses, although a number of these were individuals returning after a period of work. Results from 2003 suggest that around 35% of beneficiaries go on to find work after completing the training.

"But getting people back into the job market is only half the story," says Ms. Aaberg. "What I've witnessed is that through the training, participants gain self-confidence and social contacts they didn't have before. It enables people to be ready and open to find work."

Upgrading skills and qualifications in the audiovisual sector



Training in the TV studio

Project name

AV-alanTu Va-koulutus

Project duration

August 2001-December 2004

ESF Priority Area

Lifelong Learning

Country

Finland

ESF Funding

€347,391

Total Funding

€394,020

ESF Funding Type

Objective 3

Target Group

Employed

Name of coordinating organisation

Adult Radio and Television Institute (aRTO)

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Working with the main film, TV and radio production and broadcasting companies in Finland, ARTO offers a range of specialist training and further education opportunities to help employees update their knowledge and skills in audiovisual communications. Over 100 students are now studying for a vocational qualification or academic degree.

Prior to the expansion of the audiovisual industry in the 1990s, many people entered the sector without any formal qualifications or without finishing their degree. This project offers these employees, generally over the age of 40, the opportunity to complete their studies or formalise their skills through vocational qualifications or higher education degrees.

Enhancing employability

According to the project coordinator, Markku Uitto of the Adulta Radio and Television Institute (ARTO), "this project is the result of years of cooperation with audiovisual companies, such as the Finnish Broadcasting Company, MTV3. We try to tailor the courses and qualifications to the professional needs of the sector, but also to ensure that individuals have the confidence and necessary qualifications to remain active in the employment market."

There are currently 104 students, of which 24 are studying for a higher academic degree in cooperation with one or other of the Helsinki Universities. These students have a personal tutor from the Palmenia Centre for Research and Continuing Education. The remaining students are aiming for a specialist qualification in audiovisual communication and are tutored by the project coordinator. Students have access to advice, study facilities, lectures, study programmes as well as the opportunity to sit various exams. Tutoring is offered via an online learning platform.

"One of the biggest challenges faced by our students has been the shift to the online learning environment," explains Mr. Uitto. "It has required some upgrading of IT skills, and it also requires that students take on more responsibility for their own learning."

A comprehensive online learning environment

The project is now in its final year (2004) and is focused mainly on ensuring that the students attain the relevant qualifications. It is also developing an assessment system that will be part of the online learning environment.



Berlin develops lifelong learning network



Project name

Appolonius! – Marzahn-Hellersdorf Learning Region

Project duration

June 2002 – May 2006

ESF priority area

Lifelong Learning

Country

Germany

ESF funding

€877,856

Total funding

€2,046,559

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

Adults

Name of coordinating organisation

Helliwood Medienzentrum

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In the East Berlin district of Marzahn-Hellersdorf, a group of project partners are building a complex, sustainable network to promote lifelong learning in the region. Involving citizens, local institutions and businesses, the project is overseeing the development of several innovative processes, including learning platforms and tailor-made e-courses for the community.

A deprived area of the German capital, Marzahn-Hellersdorf, has long been in need of social assistance. Appolonius! is endeavouring to contribute to its regeneration by providing local, employed and unemployed workers and young people with access to learning courses to improve their skills.

Spreading the word

Managed by a central bureau, the project comprises five sub-networks. Each of these focuses on individual learning components, from needs analyses to establishing "virtual classrooms". At the beginning of the project, a needs analysis was carried out which established that over 65% of households in the region have an Internet connection. "Knowing this, we developed the website www.hellersdorf.de, one of our most successful services to the community," says project coordinator Thomas Schmidt. "This site allows us to approach a large number of citizens directly with news and events on our learning courses."

The curricula devised by the project for its e-learning courses are being constantly refined to meet the needs of the respective user groups. In cooperation with the Berlin Administrative Academy and the Citizens' Services Office, a new module is being launched by Appolonius! in 2004 for workers in public administration.

Harnessing technology for educational purposes

"Technology has played a key role in boosting and integrating the learning process within the community," says Mr Schmidt. "Partners BDL Computer and Systemhaus GmbH set up a platform for software use at various locations in the district which, in addition to standard software, offers residents the possibility of a virtual classroom."

The Appolonius! courses are not only benefiting participating individuals but local enterprise too. Its "Business development through learning" module offers empirical learning for workers of small and medium-sized enterprises. "This project is operating at many levels and requires immense coordination," says Mr Schmidt. "But it is now supporting workers and firms in dealing with dynamically changing markets. We are also transferring our experiences to other learning regions of Germany."

Transparent and comparable qualifications in Ireland



Project name

National Framework of Qualifications

Project duration

February 2001- 2006

ESF priority area

Lifelong Learning

Country

Ireland

ESF funding to end 2003

€3,176,000

Total funding to end 2003

€4,940,000

ESF funding type

Community Support Framework

Target group

Learners, teachers and employers

Name of coordinating organisation

National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

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Education and training in Ireland is undergoing a radical overhaul through the introduction of a National Framework of Qualifications. The National Qualifications Authority, launched in February 2001 with co-financing from the ESF, is spearheading its design and implementation.

The traditional linear model of primary, secondary and tertiary education is no longer suited to the needs of a modern society and labour market. Learning takes place at all ages and in many different contexts. Finding means of qualifying the skills and knowledge gained, that are both transparent and comparable, is a challenge faced by governments across Europe.

In Ireland, the launch of the National Qualifications Authority (NQA) in February 2001 and the recent publication of the National Framework of Qualifications in October 2003, reflects the country's drive towards a "lifelong learning society".

Learning as a lifelong process

"The Framework embodies a vision for the recognition of learning, based on an understanding of learning as a lifelong process. It involves the recognition of all learning activity throughout life within a personal, civic, social or employment context," says Seán Ó Foghlú, Chief Executive of the NQA.

For the first two and a half years after its launch, the NQA carried out an exhaustive consultation with stakeholders, encouraging their inputs and greater ownership of the National Framework and the cultural change it embodies. Now that the Framework has been published, the NQA has moved into the implementation phase. Over the next two years, the emphasis lies on the inclusion of existing awards into the new framework and developing new award-types, for example to cater for specific learning outcomes.

Ten assessment levels

The Framework establishes a single, coherent award system for all levels of education and training, which is easily understandable by learners, parents, teachers, employers and community workers. Ten levels have been set that can assess the learning and experience that takes place within school, the workplace, the community, training centres, colleges and universities.

"Meeting the needs of learners was the key driver for the establishment of the NQA of Ireland. Learners are the group who will benefit most from the development of a national framework of qualifications and from the implementation of procedures for access, transfer and progression," says Mr Ó Foghlú.

Quality childcare in the community



St. Oliver's Playgroup, Co. Tipperary: One of the participating groups

Project name

Community Playgroup Initiative

Project duration

2001-2004

ESF priority area

Women's participation

Country

Ireland

ESF funding

€44,441

Total funding

€88,882

ESF funding type

Objective 1

Target group

Community Playgroups

Name of coordinating organisation

Katharine Howard Foundation

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Five community-based playgroups in the south east of Ireland have been the beneficiaries of a programme to enhance childcare provision through staff training and support networks. Under the project, each group has worked out an individual plan to develop and improve their services.

Community playgroups are a very important part of the Irish childcare infrastructure. They are based in local communities and run by parents and volunteers on a non-profit basis, providing learning through play for pre-school children. The groups are often based in disadvantaged areas and are open to all young children, regardless of means. However, these groups have recently suffered from a lack of strategic support and a focus on developing day care facilities.

Targeted funding to improve quality

The Katharine Howard Foundation, an independent grant-making organisation working in the field of community projects, worked together with the South Eastern Health Board to tackle this problem. They jointly set up a Community Playgroup Initiative, aimed at providing support and extra funding to five selected childcare groups. A project coordinator works with each group individually to help them improve the quality of their services.

"The key aims are to contribute to community life through interaction of children and adults; strengthen parental involvement; develop links and networks; and enhance the physical environment," explains Noelle Spring of the Katharine Howard Foundation. "We also emphasise training, planning, monitoring and reflection on what works and what doesn't work."

Each group receives financial assistance of € 45,000 over three years, spent on a wide range of improvements, including updating and upgrading premises, the purchase of toys and equipment, employing new staff, increasing opening hours, staff training and actions for parents. From time to time the groups visit each other's premises and come together for networking and training in a central location.

A model for community playgroups

An extensive, ongoing evaluation of the project is being carried out to measure the impact of increased, targeted funding and support on the quality of service provided by the participating playgroups. Examining the potential of applying a similar model to other small community-based childcare services is also part of the evaluation. A final evaluation report will be published in early 2005 and will be made widely available.

Empowerment by improving computer literacy



Students receive a certificate in recognition of their attendance

Project name

GEMMA I

Project duration

December 2001 - June 2002

ESF priority area

Lifelong Learning

Country

Italy

ESF funding

€162,684

Total funding

€361,520

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

Adults

Name of promoting organisation

Comune di Perugia

Name of coordinating organisation

Associazione FORMA.Azione

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In central Italy, the municipality of Perugia has teamed up with vocational training centres to offer training courses in IT and languages and other specialised fields. Now in its third phase, the organisers have received over 10,000 requests to participate and 2,000 people have attended courses.

Public administrations are increasingly moving towards the use of IT to provide information and services to their citizens. But this trend risks marginalising those citizens who do not have access to new technologies or the skills to use them.

The municipality of Perugia has taken steps to help its citizens learn to use new technologies by offering free courses in cooperation with local vocational training centres. In parallel they have set up two IT centres in the north and south of Perugia city where people can take courses or simply drop in to use the computers and practice their new skills.

Accessible courses for all

The first round of training courses was launched in 2001 within the framework of ESF funded project GEMMA I. Some 58 different courses were offered throughout the province, attracting some 1,139 participants. In addition to IT, people could choose from courses in a foreign language – English, French or Spanish – and courses in entrepreneurship, health and safety in the home, social and communication skills. The training was open to all adults over the age of 25.

“We run courses at various times of the day to meet the needs of different target groups,” says Anna Schippa, project coordinator within the association FORMA.Azione. “Older people in particular come not only to learn new skills, but also to meet new people and to give a structure to their day.” Approximately 40% of participants are over the age of 50.

Filling a gap in training provision

Owing to the success of GEMMA I, second and third phases have also been launched. GEMMA II attracted requests to participate from some 9,000 people and GEMMA III, which started in May 2004, has already generated 3,000 requests.

“The courses are helping to meet a real need for training outside the formal education system,” says Ms. Schippa. “We’ve also seen a massive improvement in the image of the public administration. Participants have been positively surprised by the quality of the courses on offer.”



A company culture of lifelong learning



Shop floor worker at NedCar

Project name

NedCar - Road to the Future

Project duration

January 2001 – December 2001

January 2002 – December 2002

ESF priority area

Lifelong Learning

Country

The Netherlands

ESF funding

€ 526,035 (2001)

Approx. € 600,000 (2002)

Total funding

Approx. € 2M (2001 - 2002)

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

Employees

Name of coordinating organisation

NedCar

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Shop floor workers and office staff have benefited from training courses subsidised through the European Social Fund. NedCar's investment in staff development is proving the claim that "flexible employees are an asset to employers as well as to themselves".

NedCar – situated in Born in the Limburg province – is the only large-scale manufacturer of passenger cars in the Netherlands. With a workforce of more than 4,000 people, it is also one of the largest employers in Limburg.

According to Peter van der Heijden, organisation and personnel development manager at NedCar, many employees are trained to junior technical school level and realise the benefits of additional training only later in life. "We want to support the attitude among our employees that 'learning is forever'. We consider training to be an essential task of the employer," he says.

Improving professional skills

The 2001 ESF grant supported training for 2,300 shop floor workers and office staff. For example, team leaders were offered a training course to help them deal professionally with day-to-day situations. "The course showed them how to compile and adhere to priority lists, how to motivate people, and what skills should be assessed," says Mr. Van der Heijden. "They could immediately put theory into practice as it involved two days of training every month." Training team leaders this way has had an immediate and visible impact on their department.

For skilled manual workers, tailored courses were offered in subjects related to safety, preventative maintenance, forklift truck operation and use of the latest software.

Employee and employer benefits

"As a result of the ESF grant, we have been able to lower the threshold for participation in training," says Mr. Van der Heijden. "Now we can involve more employees, even those with short-term employment contracts."

Staff training is an essential part of the company's strategy to remain competitive, and to encourage employees to take responsibility for improving their own job prospects, both internally and externally. In 2003 NedCar launched new production lines and brought in new equipment. The company hopes to receive a new round of ESF funding in 2004 to expand their existing training programme.

National scheme helps under-qualified adults fulfil their potential



Participants and members of the RVCC national and local teams meet during a monitoring activity

Project name

National System for Recognising, Validating and Certifying Competences (RVCC)

Project duration

2000-2006

ESF priority area

Lifelong Learning

Country

Portugal

ESF funding (provisional data)

€14,233,885
(2000-2003)

Total funding (provisional data)

€18,978,513
(2000-2003)

ESF funding type

PRODEP III

Target group

Under-qualified people

Name of coordinating organisation

Direcção-Geral de Formação Vocacional

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A new system to recognise, validate and certify previous non-formal learning represents a landmark in adult education and training policy in Portugal. Almost 13,000 adults who had not completed lower secondary education now have a recognised certificate. It has motivated participants to improve their job situation and/or to return to formal education.

According to data from 2000, over three million adults in mainland Portugal - around 64% of the active population - had not completed compulsory lower secondary education¹. It was this situation that led the Portuguese Government to launch a national system for recognising, validating and certifying competences, implemented through a network of centres known as RVCC Centres.

Today, there are 70 RVCC Centres operating throughout Portugal, and over 60,000 adults have enrolled since the system was launched in 2000.

The centres are open to everybody over 18, but target low qualified working adults – employed or unemployed – in particular. According to a survey carried out in late 2003 on the impact of the recognition and validation process, some 79% of those entering the system are employed, albeit often on very low salaries – sometimes earning less than €350 per month.

Giving visibility to hidden skills

The objective of the system is two-fold: firstly, to recognise the knowledge and skills acquired inside and outside the professional sphere and, secondly, to validate them by registering and certifying so-called key competences.

The system identifies four key competences: language and communication, mathematics for everyday life, information and communication technologies, and citizenship and employability. An individual first prepares a portfolio documenting their competences in these areas, with counselling if needed. This is then assessed by a validation jury and the skills are registered on a personal key competences card. Official recognition is given through the award of a certificate equivalent to one of the three levels of lower secondary education.

Any public or private body, with a track record in adult education and training and skills assessment, can apply to become an accredited RVCC Centre. New centres are being set up at a rate of 14 per year: by 2005, there will be 84 all over the country.

Personal and professional benefits

According to the survey mentioned above, most of the 1,290 certified adults in 2001-2002 said the RVCC system had helped them to improve their self-knowledge and self-esteem. Some two-thirds of respondents were considering further study, and 13% had returned to formal education. There was also a notable improvement to participants' employment conditions, with 15% of those employees on fixed-term contracts achieving permanent contracts six months after receiving their certificates.

¹ Source: INE - National Institute for Statistics, 2001

Navarran businesses take steps in training



A training organised by FUNDANEL

Project name

Training plan for businesses in the 'social economy'

Project duration

January – December 2002

ESF Priority Area

Lifelong Learning

Country

Spain

ESF Funding

€68,002

Total Funding

€113,153

ESF Funding Type

Objective 3

Target Group

Workers in the social economy

Name of coordinating organisation

Asociación Navarra de Empresas Laborales (ANEL)

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Some generic skills are necessary across all business sectors such as communication, quality management and IT literacy. But it's often these key areas that are left out of a company's training plan. An association for businesses in the 'social economy' from the Spanish region of Navarra, has developed training modules tailored towards updating and adapting these crucial professional skills.

The pace of technological and market change demands increasing flexibility and adaptability within organisations and among the workforce. Help is at hand for businesses in Navarra with a socially-oriented legal basis (including cooperatives and labour societies where the bulk of the share capital is owned by the workers), who make up the membership of ANEL (Asociación Navarra de las empresas de Economía Social).

Mapping training needs

Since 2001, FUNDANEL, the training arm of ANEL, has implemented a training plan designed to meet the specific needs of ANEL's members (currently 169 businesses from the Navarra region). "Our members work across all sectors of the economy from manufacturing to services. The difference is that these businesses prioritise social capital over profit," explains Maria José Vivar, training manager and consultant.

FUNDANEL has carried out detailed assessments of training needs and, responding to calls from business managers and staff, designed a set of training modules that apply across all sectors. "We're not dealing with training needs specific to one company or management model. Rather we focus on needs that are often overlooked by companies, but are essential for staff to remain effective in their work," says Ms. Vivar.

Improving job satisfaction

The training modules cover four key areas: quality, environment and risk prevention at work; culture and organisation; adapting skills; and information and communication technologies. In 2002, there were 27 courses involving 332 people, one third of them women and more than two-thirds over the age of 45.

An evaluation is carried out during and after each training course. As Ms. Vivar explains, "employees generally appreciate learning new skills. It increases their company loyalty, professional satisfaction and their work environment. It can also facilitate organisational change and increase productivity."

Adaptability

Promoting a skilled, trained and adaptable workforce, innovation and adaptability in work organisation, developing entrepreneurship and conditions facilitating job creation, and enhancing skills and boosting human potential in research, science and technology

Helping parents with childcare obligations



The children's room offers flexible support for students and staff

Project name

Children's Office of the Vienna University

Project duration

December 2002 - December 2005

ESF priority area

Creating an adaptable work force

Country

Austria

ESF funding

€142,065

Total funding

€308,838.76

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

University staff and students

Name of coordinating organisation

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At the University of Vienna the project 'Children's Office' is helping staff and students reconcile their studies or working life with their childcare obligations, making the university more child-friendly.

Parenthood is often a reason for changing, delaying or simply dropping out of a career. Various studies and statistics show that, especially at universities, combining family life with work or studies proves to be difficult.

Help balancing obligations

"Through the Children's Office we aim to support parents at universities in Vienna," says Karoline Iber, project coordinator from the Children's Office project.

Some 11% of all the students at universities in Vienna have childcare obligations, which is about 11,500 people. "Around 5% of this group is thinking of breaking their studies, because of difficulties in combining them with childcare," says Ms. Iber. The number of university staff with childcare obligations is as high as 50%.

Since the start of the project 2,500 kids have benefited from the Children's Office. And it's not just working mothers who benefit. "Although mainly mothers come here for advice, increasingly young fathers are showing up in our office or the children's room," states Iber.

Childcare services

The children's room is one of several services offered by the Children's Office to help balance parenthood and work or study obligations. "It is a flexibly organised type of crèche where kids up to 12 years of age are looked after whenever there is a need," says Iber.

The Children's Office also coordinates childcare services for events held at the universities, the so-called 'flying nanny service'. It mediates offers provided by childcare institutions, and provides details of a pool of potential babysitters. More than 90 children are registered in the Children's Office, which means that they regularly use the facilities.

"It is difficult to say exactly how many individual careers our services could already help to push, whether through babysitting services or simple advice, but the overall feedback of those mothers and fathers who profited from our support was very positive", says Iber. The Children's Office is already networking with other institutions active in childcare and children's culture. As the coordinator elaborates, "our aim is to continue our service after the completion of the project. Being part of a network of the Universities in Vienna already, we hope to also extend this to a wider, international network and to stimulate exchange of ideas and further initiatives similar to the Children's Office."

Reaching out to the farming community in Belgium



Preventagri is promoted nationwide via agricultural fairs and other events

Project name

Preventagri

Project duration

2001-2003

ESF priority area

Creating an adaptable workforce

Country

Belgium

ESF funding

€592,127

Total funding

€1,266,043.24

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

Employed at risk

Name of coordinating organisation

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A nationwide initiative is putting the spotlight on stress management and health and safety within the agricultural sector in Belgium. Some 3,200 people have participated in awareness-raising and training activities, giving vital support to farmers whose livelihoods are under ever-increasing strain.

It is estimated that around 25% of farmers throughout the EU face financial insecurity. Technological change, economic pressure and successive food crises mean that farming is one of the professions most vulnerable to occupational stress. Agricultural workers also have one of the highest rates of accidents at work, exceeded only by workers in commercial fishing, construction and health and social care.

Research backs up targeted action

The Belgian federal government has responded by supporting Preventagri, a nationwide project that aims to prevent stress-related illness and accidents in the workplace through a combination of research, training, direct intervention and awareness raising. Launched in June 2001, the project builds on the experience of over 10 years of research into the causes and the prevention of occupational stress.

"With Preventagri we have strengthened the links between research and action. It means our activities are more effective and our research is based on better data," says Muriel Bossut, project coordinator within the University of Liège psychology department.

Prevention better than cure

Almost 1,000 people responded to a survey to assess stress levels in the agricultural sector and its main causes. A series of training events has also been organised, particularly targeting young farmers and students in agriculture.

"It's important to intervene early, so that farmers are better equipped to anticipate and handle stress," says Ms Bossut. "In this way we can avoid people leaving the profession or ending up in crisis situations."

In addition to research and training, the project also supports direct intervention. A free helpline Agricall is permanently available in French and Dutch, which up to now has received some 500 calls. Trained psychologists are on hand for home visits – a service so far taken up by 350 farmers.

The project has received a positive reaction from the farming community, unions and local grassroots organisations. "A few years ago, few people talked of stress and certainly not in the agricultural community," says Ms Bossut. "We've helped to put it on the agenda, and farmers feel more supported as a result."

A second phase of the project was launched in 2003 and will last until 2006. It has become an important reference point for work on health and safety and stress risks, and several related sectors have requested similar initiatives, for example food producers and farm vets.

From cleaner to school steward: building a new generation of service staff



Service personnel take on more varied tasks

Project name

Multiservice

Project duration

May 2002 - December 2004

ESF priority area

Creating an adaptable work force

Country

Denmark

ESF funding

€857,315

Total funding

€2,830,469

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

Employed at-risk, unemployed

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Herlev municipality in Denmark has had a long and fruitful partnership with the facility services company, ISS. Together they have created new jobs for the unemployed, improved the skills and flexibility of their staff, and helped to meet employers' demands for qualified personnel.

The collaboration between the municipality of Herlev, a town 8km north west of Copenhagen City, and the facility services supplier, ISS, began about 10 years ago. It has had the dual aim of helping people back into work and meeting the shortage in qualified and flexible service staff. Denmark's active population (those in work plus the unemployed) makes up just 56% of its total, placing increasing pressure on public resources and service needs.

Two target groups

In 2002, the partnership launched a new project to develop a training programme that incorporates several innovations. "We've worked out a programme that offers individualised training to unemployed people who face problems entering the labour market for health or fitness reasons. At the same time, existing staff can develop their skills by taking on the role of 'auxiliary instructor'. They supervise, train and support the trainees on a one-to-one basis," says Mads Cronquist, project manager at ISS facility services.

Having successfully proven the concept during a first nine-month pilot programme, the partners have now launched the second and third training rounds. Some 20 unemployed people have participated in each one, together with an equal number of employees.

Over the programme period, each trainee carries out a personalised set of activities including work shadowing, on-the-job training, theory and team building. Towards the end of the programme, they take over the tasks of their 'auxiliary instructor' for five weeks, while he/she is participating in another training course.

Of the 24 unemployed people that took part in the pilot programme, only one person is still out of work. Current employees also have a lot to gain from taking part.

More variety – more job satisfaction

"As an auxiliary instructor, staff get basic training in teaching techniques and supervision. They can also do courses in other service tasks to make their job more varied. A school janitor could take on basic cooking or maintenance tasks, for example," says Mr. Cronquist. "Job satisfaction has increased dramatically as a result, and this is helping to improve the service industry's image."

After ESF co-funding comes to an end in December 2004, it is expected that the programme will be integrated into the general activities of ISS and the municipality.



Holistic' business support for SMEs



A consortium of Finnish organisations is offering local SMEs a range of training and support services to help them cope with structural change. Some 100 SMEs have benefited so far, involving over 800 employees.

Small companies rely on few people to do many tasks. Keeping pace with technological change, new organisational approaches and future market trends, while also promoting a healthy working environment and staff training, can be extremely difficult. With support through EQUAL, three main partners - the Institute for Extension Studies, Finn-Medi Research Ltd. and Tampere Technology Center Ltd. - have teamed up with other partners to develop training and support services that can help companies anticipate and adjust to change.

"Our target group are mainly employees whose skills or knowledge are out of date, or who are facing problems with their well-being and health at work and ability to carry out their job," says Mikko Nieminen, project manager within the Institute for Extension Studies (IES) at the University of Tampere. "With a constant eye on the future, we aim to analyse a company's needs in relation to skills, technology and occupational health."

4-T: Four key themes

The project involves seven sub-projects focusing on four different themes. Coping with future change is the main theme. Here the 'Future Clinic' provides models to help companies anticipate change and develop appropriate action plans. In due course, companies will be able to search on-line via the 'Virtual Future Clinic' to find tools to help them understand and respond to change.

Building knowledge - another key project theme - is tackled through a sub-project helping companies to integrate knowledge management into their business activities. Training is offered in communication, data processing, new technology and changing work patterns.

Two sub-projects focus on the theme of new technology. SMEs in the foundry, automation and machining sectors are receiving advice and training in the selection, adoption and use of new technologies.

Finally, three sub-projects focus on employee health and well-being in the workplace for SMEs in the metal industry. Through a combination of evaluation, training and development plans, companies are able to reduce the health risks and improve the workplace environment.

Encouraging feedback

"The project has been welcomed positively by SMEs," says Mr. Nieminen. "Our emphasis is now on developing company-oriented models, and ensuring widespread dissemination and mainstreaming of our results."

Project name

The four way model '4T'

Project duration

January 2002 - April 2005

ESF priority area

Creating an adaptable work force

Country

Finland

ESF funding

€1,638,991

Total funding

€4,252,392

ESF funding type

EQUAL

Target group

SMEs and their employees

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"Holistic" management leads to improved workforce performance



Employees at Métroplast

Project name

Development of Skills – A New Strategy

Project duration

2003-2005

ESF priority area

Creating an adaptable work force

Country

France

ESF funding

€ 98,492

Total funding

€ 247,182

ESF funding type

Objective 2

Target group

Employees

Name of coordinating organisation

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A French company specialised in the collection of sorted waste, Métroplast, has launched a training programme for its workers that is resulting in the company's improved competitiveness and a more motivated workforce.

"We had become aware that there was increasing competitiveness and competition in our corner of the market," says the scheme's project coordinator Emmanuel Denan. "So the company's management took the lead and decided to develop a new plan of action to improve our performance." The result was a three-year training programme for its 83 employees based on the Japanese concept of TPM or Total Productive Management.

A training programme for new qualifications

The training programme's objective is to make the company stand out from competition and to improve its use of resources. This management concept is based on the active participation of all staff, and greater initiative on the part of individuals in the workplace.

Says Mr Denan: "With TPM, the idea is for everyone to work together on the programme's methodology and the solutions to be implemented within the company." Themes to be focused on are then agreed upon and teams are formed. "Each team is made up of four to five people, who develop a specialised field of action, for example, skills, linguistic or technical training." The themes and objectives are chosen according to the types of problems that staff have encountered in the workplace or with machinery.

All-inclusive approach

"By including all the staff in this process, a change of attitude is brought about: each employee becomes more focused on maintaining company standards and their own personal development. In addition, more tasks are delegated to employees since responsibilities are shared out across all levels of the company," says Mr Denan.

Following a pilot phase in 2003, the project is now expanding and so far feedback from staff has been positive. "They are happy to take part in the improvements and to get involved in other activities other than production," says Mr Denan. "They are more motivated and the training programme has now become the factory's driving force."

In 2005, the project will enter a phase of consolidation. The project is fully expected to win a TPM prize in 2004 from Japan.

Training helps to modernise Greece's tourism industry



Trainees take lessons in cooking

Project name

Programmes of further training to modernise and upgrade provided services

Project duration

October 2001 - December 2003
(Phase A)

ESF priority area

Creating an adaptable work force

Country

Greece

ESF funding

€387,280 (Phase A)

Total funding

€516,373 (Phase A)

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

Seasonally unemployed, low skilled, employed

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Organisation of Tourism Education & Training

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Raising standards and increasing employment opportunities in the tourist industry are the dual objectives of a training course offered by the Organisation of Tourism Education and Training (OTEK) in Greece. Re-launched in 2002, the course has an annual intake of over 1,000 students and is run all across the country.

Tourism contributes to approximately 19% of national GDP in Greece, and is estimated to employ around 10% of the total employed population. Its importance to the economy is therefore hard to understate. Nonetheless until recently there was no nationwide training programme or qualification in tourism, limiting the opportunities for professional development in the sector.

A step towards a career in tourism

In response to this, the Organisation of Tourism Education and Training, as part of the Ministry of Tourism launched a nationwide course in 2002 that encompasses practical and theoretical training to improve skills and knowledge in different areas of the tourism and hospitality industries.

"We have placed particular emphasis on giving students the opportunity to undertake practical experience in the speciality of their choice," says Konstaninos Kravaritis, General Director of OTEK. "Students spend almost a quarter of the training course in practical placements."

Students can choose between courses focusing on the hotel business, restaurants, confectionary or cookery. All are required to undertake language training in English or French, and courses in communication and interpersonal relations.

Between 2002-2003, the course attracted some 881 students from all over Greece. In its second year, the number of students increased by 16% to 1,449, reflecting the increase in demand. A third year has just started, involving 1,157 students.

The course is targeted at people with low qualifications, who are either seasonally employed within the tourist sector or unemployed. Almost 50% of the students are women. Those who complete the course are awarded a professional certificate now widely recognised within the sector and by the Greek authorities.

Modernising tourist services

"The course has definitely proved its worth in the job market," says Mr. Kravaritis. "Graduates find it easier to find work and it has also helped to modernise and raise standards in the industry to reflect tourist demands."

Networking students and teachers in Greece



Students get to grips with new technologies

Project name

Greek School Network

Project duration

2000-2004

ESF priority area

Creating an adaptable work force

Country

Greece

ESF funding

€9,923,980

Total funding

€17,809,088

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

Students, teachers, schools, administration staff

Name of coordinating organisation

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The creation of a nationwide information network in the education sector and the provision of digital resources for schools have been the principal objectives of the Greek School Network, a project led by the Education Ministry. The project has succeeded in creating a national intranet service linking all secondary schools and 92% of primary schools in Greece.

To promote innovative teaching methods and improve the communication and networking capacity of geographically dispersed schools, the Greek government designed a project to develop a national educational intranet, linking primary and secondary schools around the country.

The system introduced provides access to standard communication tools like e-mail and internet, as well as discussion forums and more advanced informatics services like webcasting, teleconferencing and Video on Demand. It also allows users to benefit from e-learning systems and education services for those with special needs.

Supporting learning and promoting cooperation

"We wanted to create a national infrastructure for primary and secondary schools via an educational intranet, with the aim of supporting learning while promoting information exchange and cooperation among schools," says Dr. Michael Paraskevas, Technical Director of the Greek School Network.

"The Network is targeted at the educational sector as a whole, including students, teachers and administrative staff in both primary and secondary schools, and also provides links to educational and administrative content managed by the Education Ministry."

To date, 100% of Greek secondary schools have been connected to the network, while 92% of primary schools currently enjoy access. A total of 45,000 email accounts had been set up by September 2004.

Developing the skills of staff and students

"The Network represents a major form of support for staff by promoting the use of new technologies for education, communication and cooperation," according to Dr. Paraskevas. "It also serves to develop the skills of students by introducing them to new information technologies at an early age."

The project has helped develop one of the largest intranets in Greece, with potential for future use in advanced scientific and research applications. The network is currently being upgraded with new broadband installations, and the project has now been extended to 2006. Funding has been shared between the ESF and the Greek government's Framework Programme for the Information Society.



Training and qualifications in the Irish meat industry



* The Department of Agriculture's launch of the Food Development Plan at Dublin Castle on 30th May 2001

Project name

In-company training for the meat sector

Project duration

2000-2006

ESF priority Area

Creating an adaptable work force

Country

Ireland

ESF funding

€ 299,068 (2000-2003)

Total funding

€ 524,680 (2000-2003)

ESF funding type

Objective 1 + in transition

Target group

New and existing workers in the meat sector

Name of coordinating organisation

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Investment in training and upgrading of workers' skills in the meat industry is improving the sector's image, productivity and employee morale. The project is part of a national strategy of in-company training in Ireland, promoting national standards in training and qualifications.

The Irish meat industry has faced a number of challenges over recent years: consumer food safety concerns; difficulties in attracting high calibre workers; new national regulations for the industry, and stiff competition within the EU and world markets. In response, the Food and Drinks Sector of FAS – the Irish National Training and Employment Agency – is leading a project of training and accreditation for Irish meat workers.

Industry endorsement

"Securing industry involvement in the project's development and implementation has been critical to its success," says Pat Moynihan, manager within the food and drinks sector of FAS. This has been one of the key roles of the National Meat Standards Steering Group, set up to oversee the project and comprising representatives of the meat industry, employer and employee organisations, the relevant food development agencies, colleges and government bodies.

Work has so far focused on new national training and assessment programmes for industrial abattoir workers and deboners/trimmers in the beef and pigmeat sectors. Similar programmes are planned for the sheep/lamb and poultry sectors in the near future. Nationally recognised standards, which carry accreditation, have been set and are suitable both for new entrants to the sector and existing workers who can acquire certification under the system of Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL). Over 700 certificates have been issued to date.

In-company training and assessment is offered through companies registered as 'FAS Approved Assessment Centres'. So far, 18 companies have achieved this status, with 30 staff awarded a trainer accreditation and 18 an assessor accreditation.

"There's now a more clearly defined career structure in the industry," says Mr. Moynihan. "And it's much easier to recruit and to retain staff as a result. Furthermore employees are more aware of the importance of food safety and quality management in the workplace."

Wider lessons to be learnt

The national programme for the meat industry is a useful model for other sectors of the Irish economy. In-company training, lifelong learning and accreditation of work-based skills are part of a national strategy to improve the skills and competitiveness of the Irish workforce.

* From left to right: David Byrne, EU Commissioner for Health & Consumer Protection; Franz Fischler, EU Commissioner for Agriculture; Joe Walsh, T.D., Irish Minister for Agriculture; John O'Gorman, Assistant Director General, Industry Division, FAS, and Pat Moynihan, Manager, Food & Drinks Sector, FAS.

Written in April 2004 – project reference: D7-IE3

Bridging the gap between industry and research



© Gettyimages Don Beshop
Industrial research: vital for future innovation

Project name

Master in Ricerca Industriale

Project duration

June 2002-December 2003

ESF Priority Area

Adaptability in the workforce

Country

Italy

ESF Funding

€948,989

Total Funding

€1,355,699

ESF Funding Type

Objective 3

Target Group

Young people

Name of coordinating organisation

ITIA-CNR

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A unique and much-valued Masters in Industrial Research has been launched in Italy. Taking 18 months to complete, it offers students the chance to consolidate their research skills in a real working environment.

For European industry to survive in an ever more competitive global economy, it is vital that the gap between innovation through research and business development is bridged.

"This important link in the research-innovation chain is all too often overlooked by industry," says Professor Francesco Jovane of the founding institute for the new Master's course, ITIA-CNR. "Industry, generally, tends to pour back its profits into all other areas, except research."

Combining theory with practice

Recognising this as a flaw in the development of European industry, the ITIA-CNR set about organising the Masters course as a way of sustaining growth in the sector.

"Most of our students come from an engineering background," says Professor Jovane. During their studies, they are assigned an industrial research project, which lasts a year and must be carried out between the Institute and the industry concerned. "This way they gain insight into both domains, and will have a genuine grasp of how to contribute to innovation in industry and are not limited to theory only."

So far the scheme is progressing well. Some 85 per cent of graduates of the first intake found employment within weeks of receiving their diploma from the National Research Council of Italy. The second intake of students began their course in October 2003.

Ambitions for the European Research Area

"We are pleased with our results," says Professor Jovane. "But of course, to make an even greater impact on the industrial research sector, we need to train more people." That is why a third Masters is planned for October 2004 and an even more ambitious plan is in the pipeline to create a European Masters in Industrial Research. "It would be good to broaden our scope beyond Italy to include the rest of the EU countries to help the European Research Area become a leader in the global research field," adds Professor Jovane.

Active labour market

Social inclusion

Lifelong learning

Adaptability

Women's participation

Training experts in intellectual property for innovation



Promoting the Insprint Master programme

Project name

INSPRINT Master – Innovation and Development of Intellectual Property

Project duration

June 2002-June 2003

ESF priority area

Creating an adaptable workforce

Country

Italy

ESF funding

€527,842

Total funding

€754,060

ESF funding type

Objective 1

Target group

Young graduates

Name of coordinating organisation

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An Italian partnership has supported innovation by providing specialised training for young professionals in the key field of intellectual property. The Masters programme has so far trained 20 students in specialist legal and economic skills related to managing trademarks and patents.

Intellectual property is a key area of expertise supporting innovation in the business world, but the Italian labour market currently has a serious shortage of professionals trained in the field. This is particularly the case in southern Italy.

A partnership led by the national Patents and Trademarks Office and the Tagliacarne Institute responded to this shortage by setting up the Insprint Masters qualification, a study programme designed to train experts in intellectual property. The project was especially targeted at students from disadvantaged regions in Italy.

Three phase learning

"The Masters programme consists of three phases: classroom teaching, project work, and a traineeship with a firm or organisation working in the field," explains Marilina Labia of the Tagliacarne Institute.

"Our students were all young graduates, who were either unemployed or looking for their first job. Many had a background in law, but others came from a variety of disciplines. The Masters qualification was designed to supplement this training with more specialised legal and economic skills in the field of intellectual property."

Putting new skills into practice

Although the intellectual property sector is male-dominated, 13 of the 20 students who completed the course were women. Seventeen of the project's graduates are now employed in related fields.

Marilina Labia puts the project's success down to the unique partnership that supported it and is hopeful that the course can be continued in the future. "We have a very high level of interest from young people, and there is still a strong demand for experts in intellectual property."

Active labour market

Social inclusion

Lifelong learning

Adaptability

Women's participation



Image used for the campaign of daily routine arrangements.

Flexible work arrangements to complement private life



The results of 140 experiments in flexible work arrangements are feeding into the life-work policies of companies, organisations and government. Two new rounds of experiments have now been launched in the Netherlands. A third round is under construction.

More and more women are combining work with family commitments, and fathers are taking a greater share of childcare responsibilities. Furthermore, the number of one-parent families and non-traditional family entities continue to grow.

Despite these trends, the social infrastructure and working conditions have been slow to adjust. The flexibility of employers, delivery of services, opening times, and organisation of space are still inadequate for the needs of parents and carers.

Innovative solutions

The 'Daily Routine Incentive Scheme' was set up in 1999 to challenge welfare organisations, businesses and local authorities to work in partnerships and come up with solutions to reconcile work and family life. During the next four years, 140 local experiments were financed, producing concepts, models and instruments that can be applied to organisations or in local, regional or national government policy.

Experiments ranged from providing leisure activities for children out of school hours to introducing flexi-time or part-time work in industry. The results have been very promising. For example, a hospital recruited more women for their operating teams by introducing an innovative contract that allows them to fit their work around their parenting responsibilities. By doing so, the number of operations carried out increased by 341 over five months, reducing the patient waiting list.

The Incentive Scheme ended in May 2003, and a follow-up scheme began in December 2001 funded through ESF. Some 27 experiments have been completed, a further 66 have recently been approved and around 60 are expected to start in October 2004.

Multiplying effect

"We take our role in implementation and mainstreaming of project results very seriously," says Jannie Roemeling, leader of the project team in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. "We analyse the results, translate them into policy information, and disseminate this to ministries, social partners at national and local level, companies, schools, municipalities and so on."

The team is also leading a European project 'Daily Routine arrangements, from local practice to national policy' involving partners from France, Finland, Italy, and the Netherlands.

Project name

Daily Routine Project

Project duration

December 2001 – December 2006

ESF priority area

Creating an adaptable work force

Country

The Netherlands

ESF funding

€ 17,5 million (2001-2006)

Total funding

€ 17,5 million (2001-2006)

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

People combining work and care responsibilities

Name of coordinating organisation

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Creative jobs for young people in Madeira



One of the 'characters' in a pedagogical stereoscopic film designed by the students for children

Project name

3D stereographic producers

Project duration

September 2001

December 2002

ESF Priority Area

Adaptability in the workforce

Country

Portugal

ESF Funding

€145,551

Total Funding

€172,423

ESF Funding Type

Objective 1

Target Group

Young people

Name of coordinating organisation

Arquimedes – Produções Estereográficas

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A company in Madeira is giving young people the opportunity to work with cutting-edge technology in the design and creation of virtual 3-D images for film animation or multimedia applications. Still a very specialised field, this training course offers its graduates a bright future.

Computer modelling and animation of 3-D images has many applications including film, architecture, web design, computer games and company marketing material. But there is only a handful of companies worldwide working in this specialised field of stereographic design. One of them, Arquimedes – Produções Estereográficas, is based in Madeira, and alongside stereographic production, they also offer advanced IT training courses throughout the island.

An innovative training

"We wanted to expand our capacity to produce 3D stereographic film, but there was no one around with the know-how or technical competences to work with us," says Alfredo Reis Deus, General Director of Arquimedes. "As a certified training organisation, we designed our own specialised programme that qualifies people to work as stereographic producers."

The course is now in its second year. It comprises 12 months of full-time training, and a three month work placement. Of the 12 students who completed the full 15-months in 2001-2002, seven are now working in Arquimedes, while others found work in the computer game industry, web design, have started to work freelance or set up their own company.

"We designed the course to give our students the best job prospects," explains Mr. Reis Deus. "Before entering the course, the students were tested in English, stress management and creativity, as well as for their technical skills in drawing, maths, geometry and 3D visualisation. The course itself included web design, multimedia conception, human and animal anatomy and movement, botany, dynamics, ergonomics and studies of the four elements: fire, water, air and earth."

Virtual and real dancers

The training course has also produced some interesting partnerships. Teaming up with a non-governmental organisation "Inclusive Dance", the students of the Arquimedes course produced an animated film used as the backdrop to a dance performed by disabled and non-disabled dancers. The 3-D images that appear to move freely on the screen complement the dancers movement. The show was premiered in the official opening ceremony of the World Basketball Championship for mentally handicapped players, and it has been performed several times in Portugal and Brazil.

Job rotation gives career boost to local authority employees



Two of the trainers participating in the job rotation scheme

Project name

Job Rotation in Halland

Project duration

October 2002 - March 2003

ESF Priority Area

Creating an adaptable work force

Country

Sweden

ESF Funding

84,000 SEK (€9347)

Total Funding

267,528 SEK (€29,770)

ESF Funding Type

Objective 3

Target Group

Local authority employees

Name of coordinating organisation

Municipality of Halmstad, Social Welfare Authority

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An innovative approach to job rotation, implemented by a local authority in Halland, Sweden, is providing career development opportunities for existing staff while offering temporary work placements for the unemployed.

When Sweden's ESF Objective 3 programme started in 2000, job rotation was seen as its centrepiece. Unemployed people were to obtain work to replace staff engaged in training activities. However, the idea never took off to the scale anticipated.

"Perhaps it was a lack of information, or fears about the amount of administration or low skills level of replacement workers," says Camilla Eklund-Hagel, coordinator of a new job rotation scheme at the Social Welfare Authority of Halmstad in Halland, Sweden. "We have worked closely with the employment office to clarify how it can best work in practice."

Meeting staff training needs

The job rotation scheme is an integral part of the social welfare authority's programme to upgrade staff skills and provide career development opportunities. Two projects have been run so far, giving four existing staff members the chance to take six months out of their existing job to train other staff. Some 350 staff benefited from the training, and seven unemployed people were given temporary positions in the authority.

"The staff selected as trainers all had specialised knowledge or experience to share with other staff members. For example, they gave training in sign language, special lifting techniques or approaches to working with the disabled," says Ms Eklund-Hagel. "The scheme has helped them to grow professionally, and has given other staff the opportunity to upgrade their skills."

Creating new jobs

Six of the seven people taken on to replace the selected trainers were subsequently awarded permanent employment contracts within the authority. The seventh went back into full-time training. A third project is now starting, involving the internal recruitment of two trainers to train 50 staff members.

"The results have exceeded all our expectations," Ms. Eklund-Hagel. "At first staff were nervous about training their own colleagues, but the scheme received such a positive reaction that we hope it will continue in the future."

The scheme was presented in October 2003 at a national conference of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities involving over 500 participants, and it has attracted a lot of interest from other local governments. A similar project is planned within the education authority of Halland.

Using and developing skills among care workers



Ulrika at "Äppelgården" – a workplace for people with mental disabilities

Project name

Light, rally, function

Project duration

January 2002 - September 2005

ESF priority area

Creating an adaptable work force

Country

Sweden

ESF funding

18,578,500 SEK (€2,016,991)

Total funding

53,623,500 SEK (€5,821,681)

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

Employed at-risk

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City of Stockholm, Social Welfare Authority

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Staff motivation and job satisfaction have improved significantly since the Stockholm social welfare authority decided to implement a comprehensive programme of skills analyses and individual training plans for over 2,000 of their employees.

In recent years, local authorities in Stockholm have experienced difficulties in recruiting new staff and training existing staff in delivering care services for the disabled. They therefore decided to launch a common project with ESF support, bringing together 19 local authorities and 139 different workplaces.

Networking between local authorities

"We wanted to help the various authorities support one another and exchange their experiences," says Carina Schmidt, overall project coordinator in the City of Stockholm social welfare authority. "And also to build a sustainable structure that would continue to operate after the project ends."

Each workplace nominated an 'engine' – the person responsible for leading the skills analysis among their colleagues. Around 200 such 'engines' were selected from across Stockholm. They met regularly to share their experience and attended a two-day training course. Eight 'process leaders' took on a stronger leadership and coordination role.

By August 2003, individual skills development plans had been drawn up for 2,375 individual employees, based on guidance material designed by the project leaders. The second phase of the project focuses on implementing the development plans, and will last until September 2005. A foundation course on working with people with disabilities began in autumn 2003, and 180 employees have already completed or are currently undertaking the course.

Making best use of existing skills

Several workplaces have also started to run sessions in team and trust building. "Our first objective is to ensure that existing skills among the staff are used to the full. An initial survey revealed that staff who feel a high level of trust in the workplace are much more likely to feel their skills are fully used," says Ms. Schmidt.

Since the project began, several other units that could not originally participate are now coming on board. "Some of the workplace 'engines' have moved to another unit in the authority and brought the idea with them. It proves that the model is sustainable," says Ms. Schmidt.

Women's Participation

Specific measures to improve women's access to and participation in the labour market, including their career development, their access to new job opportunities and to starting-up of businesses, and to reduce vertical and horizontal segregation on the basis of sex in the labour market

Young women break the gender employment mould in Austria



Young girls get to grips with new technologies on a Mafalda-run project

Project name

Mafalda

Project duration

1989 - ongoing

ESF priority area

Women's participation

Country

Austria

ESF funding

2003: €240,000

Total funding

2003: €825,000

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

Young women

Name of coordinating organisation

Mafalda – Verein zur Förderung und Unterstützung von Mädchen und jungen Frauen

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In a bid to break gender stereotyping and reduce unemployment among young women, an innovative project in Austria is offering access to training courses and apprenticeships in traditionally male professions. The scheme has been running for 15 years, and some 2,500 girls take part in the project's activities each year.

Through a possible lack of awareness and/or social prejudice, European women continue to avoid careers in professions that are commonly dominated by men. About 15 years ago, the Austrian organisation Mafalda, some of whose projects are part-funded by ESF, was set up to try to improve this situation by establishing a set of practical courses to enable young women to gain experience in "male métiers" like metalwork, electronics, IT and woodwork.

Advice on career options

Specifically, the project's target group is girls and young women between the ages of 13 and 22. For the older age bracket, 15 to 22, the organisation works in cooperation with the national office of employment advising the women on career options and practical Mafalda-run courses that might benefit them. "Many of the women who join us through this avenue are unemployed, and need to raise their level of skills," says Elke Unger, a Mafalda project coordinator.

With the increasing growth of IT and technology, the organisation has broadened its activities to run new projects, such as Girls crack IT and MuT! (Mädchen und Technik/Girls and Technology), which include introductory courses in technology. In addition, they are now assisting participants in finding traineeships in enterprises. "Women here have always had more difficulty than boys in finding apprenticeships," says Ms Unger. "Through our networks, Mafalda can give them a helping hand."

Breaking gender stereotyping

For the 13 to 15 age group, some of the projects visit schools and inform girls about possible career paths, as well as encouraging them to consider jobs that they might not have thought of before. Mafalda takes a holistic approach to training, providing counselling, information and assistance on psycho-social issues that the young women might encounter during their future careers. "Many of the women who take part in our courses come from difficult social backgrounds. But out of a possible training course for 16, four to ten of them will go on to some sort of related employment," says Ms Unger.

Coaching to support sustainable jobs



Flora: women working together to develop their capacities

Project name

Jobcoaching

Project duration

April 2001 – December 2003

ESF Priority Area

Women's participation

Country

Belgium

ESF Funding

€304,561

Total Funding

€619,682

ESF Funding Type

Objective 3

Target Group

Women

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In Belgium, a network of organisations has been testing a new approach to employment support: 'jobcoaching'. Working primarily with women with little or no formal schooling, the organisations support training and recruitment and provide jobcoaching to help overcome problems in the first months of work.

Many people facing marginalisation or discrimination in the job market find it difficult not only to obtain a job, but also to retain it in the longer term. Traditional employment services accompany an individual to the point at which they are recruited, and then leave them and their employer on their own.

Coping in a new environment

"Often the culture of a company is so difficult to cope with that a new recruit gives up after a few days," says Anne Snick director of Flora, the Belgian non-governmental organisation (NGO) responsible for the project. "A jobcoach is there to help the employee and employer address the problems that come up during those critical first months after recruitment."

Since the project was established in April 2001, jobcoaches in the Flemish, Walloon and Brussels regions of Belgium have worked with almost 200 people, most of them women with low levels of formal schooling or immigrants whose qualifications are not transferable to the Belgian labour market. Approximately half have found full-time employment, and one-third have been working for three months or more.

"By default, it's the women that have the hardest time in combining family commitments with work. As soon as a child is ill, it tends to be the woman that takes charge and who is more likely to take time off work," says Ms. Snick. "Very often a new employee turns to their jobcoach in such a situation. He or she can help to find a solution or can encourage an employer to offer more flexible employment conditions."

The results have shown that more women have persisted with a job due to the encouragement of a jobcoach, and absenteeism has been reduced. Furthermore, more employers have been willing to take risks in recruitment, knowing there is a jobcoach supporting new employees.

Promoting a culture shift

The long-term objective of the Flora project is not to create a dependency on jobcoaches, but rather to create a culture shift in companies. This pilot project has revealed a strong need to work more closely with employers to break down stereotypes and to encourage a more supportive approach to new employees facing particular challenges integrating into the labour market. The objective of a follow-on project is therefore to increase recognition of jobcoaching as a structural approach to labour market integration, and to help employers take on this role with new employees.

Equal-IT-y: Changing women's attitudes towards technology



High-street computer fitness centres allow women to learn more about IT

Project name

Equal-IT-y in the Information Society

Project duration

May 2002-June 2005

ESF priority area

Employability/Equal opportunities

Country

Germany

ESF funding

€2,243,685.41

Total funding

€5,093,938.45

ESF funding type

EQUAL

Target group

Women/Young people

Name of coordinating organisation

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Theatre role-play and high-street computer "fitness centres" are just some of the ways women and girls are being encouraged to look at careers in information technology in a positive light by an EQUAL project in south-western Germany. Several hundred women have already taken part.

A recent unpublished survey by the expert group Frauen in der Informationsgesellschaft (Women in the Information Society) puts the number of female computer specialists in Germany at 23% and the number of female IT students at 10%. Given that the number of employment opportunities in the service, IT and multimedia sectors is increasing, this lack of female interest and representation in the IT field is of growing concern to business and government alike.

Training centres in latest IT skills

To address the imbalance, Equal-IT-y has set up several initiatives in the Rhine-Main Region - where demand for IT skills is relatively high - that offer advice and training to women and schoolgirls on information technology.

Says Equal-IT-y project director Barbara Wagner: "One of the partnership's most successful initiatives has been its 'high-street' computer fitness centres where, like a sports club, we develop personal training schemes for participants to build up their skills in information technology."

Many of the women who come to the centres are unemployed and have been referred to the project by the Labour Office. "Everyone is given a personal profile and a tailor-made course lasting anything from four weeks to three months," says Ms Wagner. On average, some 40% to 60% of participants have gone on to use their new skills in the workplace. "In certain districts, this figure can be as high as 80% to 90%. But the current recession makes it more difficult as there are fewer jobs on offer," she adds.

Breaking stereotypical female behaviour

Another popular initiative has been the running of theatre workshops on IT. "The girls and women who attend are asked to act out certain roles, like 'buying a computer in a shop', and we then reflect and discuss on how they went about it," says Ms Wagner. "It reveals a lot about how women perceive themselves, and how they think they should behave when talking about technology with men. It all helps to change attitudes."

Not only do the women seem to be enjoying the courses, but the partnership is flourishing too. "More and more social partners in the region are coming on board - the University of Applied Sciences in Frankfurt, for example, has just become a partner of our regional network. And now the Labour Office has expressed an interest in taking over the running of the scheme once the EQUAL funding stops in 2005."

Promoting gender equality in Greek schools



Equality in the classroom: a school on Donousa island learns more about gender issues

Project name

Teachers' awareness raising and intervention strategies to promote gender equality in education

Project duration

July 2002 - December 2006

ESF priority area

Women's participation

Country

Greece

ESF funding

€18,750,000

Total funding

€25,000,000

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

Women

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Teachers from across Greece are being trained on how to encourage their students to challenge gender stereotypes, inequalities and discriminatory attitudes that still persist in the country's labour market and education system. The programme involves some 3,500 secondary schools and vocational colleges.

Giving men and women an equal chance to succeed in the job market and in education is an ongoing political objective of the Greek Government. The employment rate of women aged 15 to 64 is still far lower than that of men - 43% compared to 72% for men in 2001 – and, in education, strong patterns of gender segregation remain.

A four-year project, supported by the ESF and national government, aims to challenge gender stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes that perpetuate inequalities in Greek society. It targets the education system – notably secondary schools and vocational training colleges – as a means of sensitising wider society to gender issues.

Recognising and challenging inequality

"We want to raise students' consciousness of how gender identities are reinforced through the media, through school books, through traditional paternalistic social structures and so on, and to develop their capacity to think critically and challenge the stereotypes," says Konstantina Petridou, coordinator of the project in the Research Centre for Gender Equality (KETHI). "We expect this will also have a knock-on effect on the students' families and members of the local community."

So far, some 2,000 teachers from secondary schools and vocational training colleges have participated in a specific training designed to raise their awareness of gender inequalities in the education system, and to help them introduce the topic into the school programme. The project aims to train some 7,500 teachers by the end of 2006.

Practical intervention

Trained teachers from groups of five or more schools then come together to design and implement their own so called "intervention programme". This may involve innovative teaching topics and styles, or activities outside the official teaching programme. Over the course of the project, more than 700 such collaborations will be set up involving over 3,500 schools.

Educational materials that help teachers to approach the topic of gender equality are being produced, in addition to a distance learning and cooperation system that will support the project activities and encourage teachers to use ICTs.



A student tests the communication system in her training placement

Women electricians: the face of the future



The Tampere Adult Education Centre in south-west Finland is helping women break into the traditionally male domain of electrical maintenance and installation. In cooperation with electrician companies, the Centre ran a national study programme in electrical engineering and energy technology. Of the 12 recent graduates, 11 are now employed in the sector.

If recent trends continue, Finland is likely to face a shortage of electricians in a few years. The profession is often considered to offer poor working conditions and be physically tough. Furthermore, it has always been considered a male occupation – only 1% of electricians are women. To meet future needs, it is important that the profession improve its image and attract workers from both sexes.

The project “Electrical engineering for women” developed a new study programme in close cooperation with electrical installation companies. It was targeted at unemployed women who wanted to become electricians. Some 60 women applied to participate in the programme, of which 15 were selected.

Balancing theory and practice

The programme, which lasted 18 months, was split 50:50 between theory and practice. Every student was able to undertake a period of on-the-job training in one of the companies involved. Their work tasks were designated together with the project manager, the company representatives and the students themselves.

In April 2004, 12 women completed their studies and were qualified as electricians. Eleven are now employed. Three women dropped out over the course of the project.

Women are well suited to the profession

“We had very positive feedback from the companies involved,” says Lasse Lehtonen, project coordinator at Tampere Adult Education Centre. “They felt that women make good electricians because of their attention to detail, care and conscientiousness. For example, women often specialise in the installation of communication systems in buildings.”

The project has also served to show that women are suitable employees in typically male occupations. More electrician companies are now willing to employ women and women are finding it easier to access education in electrical engineering. “This is extremely important in Finland because we have to find ways of solving our employment deficit over the next five years,” says Mr Lehtonen.

Project name

Electrical engineering for women

Project duration

November 2002 – April 2004

ESF priority area

Women's participation

Country

Finland

ESF funding

€98,036

Total funding

€245,090

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

Unemployed women

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Creating more flexible and equal workplaces



Women express their difficulties in balancing work with private life

Project name

Equal Opportunities and Local Development in the Nord du Tarn region

Project duration

2001-2004

ESF priority area

Women's participation

Country

France

ESF funding

€404,200

Total funding

€808,405

ESF funding type

EQUAL

Target group

Unemployed women

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A social partnership in France is working on ways to help female employees and jobseekers with families reconcile their private lives with work commitments, and to encourage local companies to introduce more flexible working practices. So far, 300 people have benefited from the awareness-raising activities organised by the group.

Carmausin, in the south-west of France, is a former mining area with a rich history of trade union participation. In the past, workers have enjoyed relatively high salaries and employment stability. But in recent years the area has suffered a recession that has resulted in increasing job insecurity. The service industries created in recent years to boost the economy, such as call centres and home-help services, often have anti-social working hours, and are therefore finding it difficult to attract employees. Although all jobseekers in the region are finding it harder to find work, women have been the hardest hit.

Balancing work and home life

"61% of the region's 12% unemployed are women," says project coordinator Christian Bruhat. "When a person is trying to find work and look after a family at the same time, it can be stressful. That's why we've been running activities – video screenings and photo exhibitions, for example – to allow women to express their concerns and difficulties, and for us to show them ways in which professional and domestic life can be balanced better, often through a better division of domestic tasks at home."

The project has also set about mobilising partners involved in the economic development of the region to promote gender equality generally. "We've contacted companies and run seminars to make employers think about the problems of balancing a family with work, ways of developing appropriate payment schemes to encourage this, and how to develop new practices in the companies that facilitate gender equality. In the end, such changes will only make a workforce more productive," says Mr. Bruhat.

Improving conditions in the workplace

"The hardest part of the work is getting the employers on board," says Mr. Bruhat. At the moment, the project is compiling a study on work hours versus 'home-life hours' in regional business; once finished, it will be used as a basis for launching a new children's crèche system that should give greater flexibility to people seeking shift or seasonal work in the area.

A partnership, comprising several present project partners, will take over the running and funding of the project in the second half of 2004.

Professional training for unemployed women



A drop-in computer suite offers women the chance to practice their IT skills

Project name

NAXI - Centre for professional integration and training of women

Project duration

January 2000 - December 2004

ESF priority area

Women's participation

Country

Luxembourg

ESF funding

€1,053,256

Total funding

€2,340,569

ESF funding type

Objective 3

Target group

Unemployed women

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NAXI - Femmes en Détresse asbl

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NAXI, a national institution for women in Luxembourg, has developed a multi-annual programme of professional training. The courses offer a first point of entry to the labour market for women wanting to develop their professional career.

For many women in Luxembourg, financial independence and a professional career still seem out-of-reach. The traditional family model of men as the 'providers' and women as the 'homemakers' still holds strong in much of Luxembourg society. Nonetheless, there are signs of change. Driven by economic reality – the number of single women and single mothers is steadily increasing – or simply a desire for self-realisation, more and more women are looking to get back into professional life.

Upgrading professional skills

NAXI is helping women take their first steps to access the job market. They offer training courses in a number of specialised areas: care for the elderly or disabled, child-care, catering services and IT; as well as courses in generic professional skills. For women with little or no formal education, specialist workshops are offered in washing, ironing and sewing.

"Any woman who is registered unemployed can participate in our courses," says Gaby Heintz, project manager in NAXI. "It means we have to deal with very different education levels. For example, some immigrants are highly educated but their qualifications aren't recognised here in Luxembourg so they come to us. But we have other participants who can barely read or write."

The programme has been running since 2000. In 2003, some 89 women completed a training course, roughly half of them from Luxembourg and the remainder of immigrant origin. Some 25% of participants had left school at the minimum age.

"Our workshops in washing, ironing and sewing focus on practical experience rather than theory," says Ms. Heintz. "We've also integrated training in personal development and motivation in all our courses, because we've found that self-image is often the most important factor in finding and keeping a job."

Stepping-stone to the future

Of the 89 participants in 2003, 40% have gone on to find work, while 25% have entered another training course. The remainder are actively seeking work.

"The ESF project has proven the effectiveness of our training courses," says Ms. Heintz. "We hope they achieve national recognition so that they can continue beyond 2004 with government support."

Responsible employers: Informed employees



Combining work and family life

Project name

Balance

Project duration

February 2002-November 2004
(possible 6 month extension to April 2005)

ESF Priority Area

Women's participation

Country

The Netherlands

ESF Funding

€232,750

Total Funding

€465,500

ESF Funding Type

EQUAL

Target Group

Employers and Employees

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Finding the right balance between work and private life is one of the biggest challenges among today's working population. In the Netherlands, an EQUAL project is tackling the issue by working directly with employers and employees in the care and welfare sectors.

"Two issues led to our decision to start up this project," explains Simone Seelen, coordinator of this EQUAL project. "Firstly, we were experiencing a shortage of care workers in the Netherlands. But we also have a large proportion of women not participating in the labour market because of the difficulties in combining work and family life. Secondly, the incidence of work-related stress is escalating, and managers are increasingly asked to adopt preventative measures to protect the health of their employees."

The aim of this project is therefore to help employers and employees change their behaviour or working structures to encourage a better balance between work and private life. By doing so, more women are likely to take up jobs, absenteeism will be reduced and employers can reduce personnel turnover.

Employee reflections

So far the project has focused on pilot studies of three organisations in the social care, welfare and business sectors. The project partners used an employee survey in each case to identify the main problem areas. In both the social and welfare organisations, employees were positive about the supportive environment within the workplace. Nonetheless, the results revealed a real lack of awareness among staff about their employment rights - for example, how much time they could take off to care for family members.

"Several respondents reported difficulties in combining family and work life, such as: 'I can't find a solution for the school holidays', 'How do I manage when my child is sick?' 'I have no time to myself and I'm getting more and more stressed,'" says Ms Seelen. "It's clear that there is still a lot of work to do."

The surveys provide each organisation with a detailed analysis of good practice and bottlenecks. In 2004, the project will work with the employees and employers to identify and implement solutions to existing tensions in work-life balance among staff.

Ambassadors for the cause

Getting the message across about measures that can be taken to improve the work-life balance and the dangers of work-related stress is another key area of the project. Business conferences have been organised to promote best practice and a CD-Rom will be produced later in 2004. In addition, a number of 'ambassadors for the cause' have been selected among well-known people from government and businesses.

Combining work with family commitments



Children try out the pedagogical games in a local school

Project name

ConVidas – Promoting the reconciliation of work and family life

Project duration

November 2001 – December 2004

ESF priority area

Women's participation

Country

Portugal

ESF funding

€479,668

Total funding

€639,557

ESF funding type

EQUAL

Target group

Women

Name of coordinating organisation

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In the Covilhã municipality – an industrial region in central Portugal – women make up 41% of the labour market. But the division of labour in the home is less equally balanced, with women still more likely to care for family members and perform household tasks than men. The EQUAL project, ConVidas, is beginning to change these attitudes, while also providing much needed support to working parents and carers.

Covilhã still maintains its strong industrial tradition. Around 50% of the active population are employed in industry, including textiles, metal works and carpentry. Women make up almost half of the labour force. As a result, there is a strong demand for flexible family support structures to meet the needs of employees on different working schedules and earning relatively low wages.

Services fall short of demand

"Our needs analysis showed that there is a real lack of accessible childcare for the under threes, virtually no planned activities for children during the holidays, and long waiting lists for residential care for the elderly," says Graça Maria Rojão, coordinator of Beira Serra, the association coordinating the EQUAL project. "Companies also seem to be quite insensitive to the difficulties of reconciling family and working life."

The project, ConVidas, has carried out a wide range of activities aimed at offering practical support to families, improving the flexibility of existing services, raising awareness among employees, and changing attitudes within society about the roles of men and women in the home and community.

Mobilising local volunteers

One of its key initiatives is a voluntary network for family support which now has some 89 volunteers and has already provided support to over 500 people, 61% of them elderly, 21% children and 18% disabled. It is coordinated entirely by local actors to ensure its long-term sustainability.

The Enterprise Association has helped to target companies. After the project ends they will continue to award an annual prize for the best company in reconciliation, and to disseminate information about good practice and legislation in this arena.

Furthermore, local schools have been given two pedagogical games designed to help sensitise children to the more equitable sharing of home and family responsibilities.

"Our biggest impact has been on increasing the visibility and debate about this important social issue," says Ms Rojão. "But we've also delivered concrete benefits by mobilising the community to support each other in managing family and work commitments."

Getting women into work in the Basque country



An ICT training course for women in Guipuzkoa

Project name

Women's participation in the labour market

Project duration

November 2001 - July 2003

ESF Priority Area

Women's participation

Country

Spain

ESF Funding

€1,340,000

Total Funding

€3,350,000

ESF Funding Type

Objective 3

Target Group

Unemployed women

Name of coordinating organisation

Diputación Foral de Gipuzkoa

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The Basque regional government is tackling the persistent challenge of female unemployment, through a combination of personalised ICT training, information and job search support, and work placements. Some 3,200 women have participated in the initiative and 65 per cent have subsequently found employment.

Women have traditionally been less well represented in the job market than men. The increasing reliance on information and communication technologies (ICTs) threatens to further limit women's access to jobs, as it is difficult to keep skills updated while out of work.

An initiative supported through the ESF Operational Programme in the Basque region of Spain promises to have a far-reaching impact, not only on women's levels of employment, but also on future active labour market policies.

Individual learning accounts

"There are several innovative aspects to this initiative," says Joseba Amondarain, project coordinator in the Provincial Council of Guipuzkoa. "For example, we set up a system of 'learning accounts' – whereby each participant applies for credits to pay for their personal training programme. It gives them much greater ownership and responsibility in setting and achieving individual training goals."

The involvement of the private sector was also new. Local branches of the 'Caja Laboral de Euskadi' publicised the training programme and the bank also gave financial support to the initiative. Around 450 private companies assisted the scheme by offering work placements or jobs after the training.

Participatory approach

Unemployed women took part in the design and conception stage, represented through the women's associations and EMAKUNDE (the Basque Women's Institute). Particular attention was given to ensuring that the training matched employers' needs. On the other hand, employers were encouraged to offer more flexible working hours or teleworking options, so that women could combine their job with family obligations.

Around 65 per cent of the 3,200 women that took part went on to find a job. Furthermore, over 300 people were involved in delivering ICT training across 39 local education centres.

The lessons learnt from this initiative will feed into future policies and programmes in the fields of lifelong learning and employment support. This summer the Provincial Council of Guipuzkoa plans to launch a new scheme adapting the model of 'learning accounts' to active citizenship and participation in local communities.



Toolkits for gender equality



A book on stereotypes is part of a toolkit being prepared by the EQUAL transnational partnership

Project name

Partnership for Equality

Project duration

June 2002 - June 2005

ESF priority area

Women's participation

Country

Sweden

ESF funding

SEK 9,000,000
(€974,828)

Total funding

SEK 20,330,000
(€2,202,353)

ESF funding type

EQUAL

Target group

Decision makers

Name of coordinating organisation

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The county of Gävleborg in Sweden is challenging age-old beliefs about the roles of women and men in the labour market and in society. Involving partners from all the local municipalities, the county council, the private sector and academia, the project is developing training programmes and other tools to raise awareness and change behaviour.

Among the EU Member States, Sweden is perhaps known as having one of the most gender-neutral societies. But beneath the surface there are continuing inequalities and gender segregation in the labour market. This is particularly true for the county of Gävleborg.

"We rank 20th among Sweden's 21 counties in terms of gender equality," says Birgitta Keller, project coordinator in the Gävleborg county administration. "Historically the steel industry and forestry were the main employers in the region. Men far outnumber women in these industries and in the private sector in general. The public sector, by contrast, employs mainly women."

A catalyst for change

The project aims to persuade key actors that this situation needs to change and to help them take action. Key actors are those that have a wide sphere of influence such as politicians, teachers, employment advisers, executives and recruitment agencies. "We want to start a movement," says Ms Keller. "This project is just the beginning of long-term changes in behaviour and attitudes."

Several tools are being developed to reach this goal. Some 250 people have already participated in an introductory training programme. It starts by providing the facts – the history behind the statistics – and then takes participants through a process of internal reflection to help them understand how they adopt traditional stereotypes.

Special focus groups are also developing training targeted at different professions, such as doctors, teachers and healthcare professionals. Another working group is making a film on gender stereotypes.

The multiplier effect

"We have some 100 people involved in our project from all across the county," says Ms Keller. "They are all talking about the issue at work and at home, and many other initiatives have started as a result."

One such initiative was taken by Sandvik AB, a multinational engineering company and a project partner. They organised a large conference on gender equality, attended by the CEO and other top executives. "Industry is realising that if it doesn't target women it will miss out on a huge potential resource, and simply won't be able to recruit enough skilled employees," says Ms Keller.

A launch pad for employment in Scotland



Former trainee, Liz, enjoying her success

Project name

Edinburgh women's training course

Project duration

July 2000 – June 2003

ESF Priority Area

Women's participation

Country

United Kingdom

ESF Funding

£210,000
(€301,812)

Total Funding

£607,821
(€875,262)

ESF Funding Type

Objective 3

Target Group

Women

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Some 75 per cent of graduates from the Edinburgh women's training course find employment, become self-employed or go into higher education. For women with no, few, or unrecognised qualifications, it opens doors to a better future.

Returning to work after a break, or combining work with childcare, can seem to be an insurmountable challenge for many women. Often qualifications are outdated or, for immigrant women especially, are not recognised by the Scottish job market. The Edinburgh women's training course (EWTC) has developed a programme that gives women the technical and professional skills and self-confidence to fulfil their personal goals.

EWTC has been running since 1988. Its proven track record in getting women back to work and building self-confidence has ensured continued financial support for this project through the European Social Fund and the City of Edinburgh Council and Edinburgh's Telford College.

Beneficiaries are carefully targeted

The course is in high demand: around 100 women apply each year for just 30 places. Candidates must live in Edinburgh, have low, no or outdated qualifications, and be unemployed or in casual low paid work. Many students are single parents, or older women returning to work. The course is free of charge and assistance is provided for childcare and travel expenses to maximise its accessibility.

"The course has evolved considerably over the years," explains Fiona Keddie, coordinator of the women's course. "Initially we started with electronics and computing but we switched just to computing to reflect demand and employment trends. Recently we've also introduced qualifications in hardware and multimedia."

The course offers different training modules leading to up to 14 different qualifications recognised by the Scottish Qualification Authority and the European Computer Driving License – a Europe-wide qualification in IT literacy administered through the British Computer Society in the UK. Careers guidance is provided throughout the course, as well as training in communication skills and personal effectiveness. A 10-week work placement completes the course, providing a practical opportunity to implement the skills learnt.

High Achievers

Almost 500 women have participated in the course since it began 17 years ago, leading to many personal success stories. For example, Liz, a graduate of the 2002-2003 course, was awarded 'LearnDirect's Personal Achiever of the Year' in recognition of the number of qualifications she achieved while coping with significant health problems. Liz is now working towards an IT Training qualification and volunteering one day a week as an IT trainer on this year's Women's Course.

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The individual success stories can also be accessed online in English, French and German at following Web addresses:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/news/2004/jan/esf_in_action_en.html

http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/news/2004/jan/esf_in_action_fr.html

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