

The European Social Fund: changing approaches to VET

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The European Social Fund (ESF) in Perspective

The European Social Fund (ESF), as one of the European Union's Structural Funds, is embedded in the Treaty of Rome. When it first became operational in 1960, it functioned as a mechanism to refund the costs of measures that were taken by the Member States to foster the re-employment of workers in the regions that had been hit hardest by unemployment. This involved re-training and resettlement allowances to support geographical and occupational mobility within the Community. This approach was based on the striking disparities in the levels of unemployment and employment between the (then six) Member States. With an unemployment rate of 8.3% (EEC average 3.5%) Italy accounted for 65% of all unemployed EC citizens. In France and The Netherlands it was much lower, in Germany and Belgium it was insignificant and in Luxembourg it was virtually non-existent. During its initial phase (1960–1971), ESF grants totalling some 420 million EUA¹ helped to re-employ more than 1.1 million people and assisted some 800,000 unemployed workers who had had to move to find a job. Italy and Germany were the largest recipients of ESF aid in this period (BMAS, 2007).

Projecting this brief historical flashback on to the much more complex situation today may help to appraise the radical changes and massive extension that the ESF has undergone in the past five decades. They relate to its objectives, scope and financial means, its mode of planning and operation and its role in the implementation of EU social and employment policies (European Communities, 2007). Between 1971 and 2006, it evolved from being a device for retroactive redistribution of resources to being a major proactive instrument to allocate resources to comprehensive policies that prevented unemployment and thereby strengthened economic and social cohesion between Member States and regions (Brine, 2004).

Actions in the 2007–2013 period (http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/esf/index_en.htm) aim to contribute to two overarching objectives. The first is to promote growth and employment in the least developed Member States and regions (the Convergence objective) and the second is to strengthen competitiveness and employment in the other regions by anticipating economic and social changes (the Regional competitiveness and employment objective). Each embraces priorities for action by Member States which are match-funded by the ESF (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2006/1, *see article 3 of EC 1081/2006*) whose budget for the period amounts to 76 billion Euros. The ESF strategy and budget are negotiated between and decided on by the Member States, the European Parliament and the Commission. All Member States have drawn up seven-year Operational Programmes (OPs) with the European Commission that set out the operations, financial allocations and expected outcomes of the actions to be taken in relation to their different priorities.

Progressive Adaptation to Evolving Needs

In the course of these reforms, the scope of ESF assistance widened considerably to include:

- A new emphasis on the prevention of unemployment and on increasing the adaptability of workers, enterprises and entrepreneurs to economic and technological change;
- The improvement of employment guidance and counselling;
- Action to combat all forms of discrimination in the labour market and reinforce the social inclusion of disadvantaged people;
- Enhancement of equal opportunities for men and women;
- Promotion of lifelong vocational training; and
- Assistance to develop education and training systems that improve the labour market relevance of initial and vocational education and training.

Actions launched under the last two priorities can be strong levers for innovation in VET. They are fully compatible with several EU objectives for cooperation in education and training (Council, 2009; European Commission, 2010/1) and can also make a significant contribution to their achievement.

Since 1971, the ESF has embraced a much wider range of target groups and adopted a more diversified view of the needs of disadvantaged groups in the labour market. Its emphasis has shifted from addressing adult workers to targeting poorly qualified workers, women and men, the disabled, migrant workers, older workers, the self-employed, and people at risk of losing their jobs or being excluded from the labour market. From the late 1970s, the fight against rising youth unemployment concentrated up to 75% of its resources on measures targeted at young people under 25 who were unemployed, job seekers or in transition from school to work. Whilst focusing on improving their employment opportunities and related training issues, they complemented, and in some respects paralleled, newer and much more modestly-funded Community programmes in the field of initial VET. These included:

- The Action Programme on the Transition of Young People from Education to Adult and Working Life (Council and the Ministers of Education meeting within the Council, 1976 and 1982)²;
- PETRA (Council of the European Communities, 1987 and 1991)³; and,
- As from 1995, Leonardo da Vinci (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2006/2).⁴

Greater emphasis was put on disadvantaged young people after Jacques Delors issued the White Paper on 'Growth, Competitiveness and Employment' (European Commission, 1993) which launched the 'Youthstart' strategy to alleviate the problem of entrenched youth unemployment through more effective pathways that would guarantee all young people under the age of 18 a place in the education and training system or in a linked work and training placement, leading to a recognised qualification. This idea of a 'youth training guarantee' was taken up in the Employment Guidelines that were adopted by the Council in 1997 and which have since been further developed in the framework of the European Employment Strategy (EES) (Council, 2008). They have a strong bearing on the programming and implementation of actions funded by

the ESF. They set out agreed targets and benchmarks, some of which have significant implications for inclusive education and training policies and the adaptation of education and training systems to improve their labour market relevance.⁵

Capitalising on Lessons Learnt from ESF Community Initiatives

In 1990, the first Community Initiatives (CIs) (EUROFORM, HORIZON and NOW)⁶ were introduced as special programmes that were separate from the ESF mainstream operation. They had a specific budget to pilot innovation and foster transnational cooperation in the development and implementation of new approaches. They were followed by ADAPT and EMPLOYMENT (1995–2000) (http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/about/a&e_en.cfm) and EQUAL (2000 to 2008) (http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/index_en.cfm). Common to all three was emphasis on thematic work and the dissemination of results and the mainstreaming of successful approaches.

In the second generation of CIs,⁷ one strand of the EMPLOYMENT Initiative took up the ‘Youthstart’ challenge and provided impetus for innovation and the transnational exchange of good practice between some 1300 projects that focused on the training, guidance and employment needs of the least qualified young people. Transnational cooperation between the projects included possibilities to take part in training exchanges with another Member State. However, there was a concern to avoid overlap with Leonardo and the number of exchanges was limited and mostly centred on work experience placements. Modes of operation and European-level outcomes of ADAPT and the four strands of EMPLOYMENT are accessible on the A&E website.

In EQUAL, the combined experience of its predecessors in terms of comprehensive approaches to the needs of their target groups led to the introduction of Development Partnerships (DPs). These were the projects or delivery mechanisms for the CI and involved key actors at local or sectoral level, working together in one of the thematic priority fields of the initiative and in joint transnational activities.⁸ At EU level, the ESF Managing Authorities and many advanced DPs cooperated in *European Thematic Groups* (ETGs) to identify good practices and successful approaches in these fields and disseminate and ‘mainstream’ the outcomes. In the EQUAL Employability Pillar, several hundred large local or regional DPs were involved in the labour market integration of the most vulnerable young people. They piloted new offers and/or methods of training and learning and approaches to guidance and many engaged in special motivational and empowerment activities to boost the self confidence of their beneficiaries. The size and composition of these partnerships provided a framework for new and effective networking and multi-agency cooperation. Each partnership was also very engaged in structured transnational cooperation, mostly with EQUAL DPs in other Member States (see the EQUAL website). Thus, the Community Initiatives laid extremely solid foundations for joint work focusing on thematic priorities and piloted methods of transnational cooperation for future ESF operations. Many activities that were initiated by the EQUAL ETGs are being developed in the transnational *Learning Networks* which were launched at the beginning of the current ESF programming period. Perhaps even more significant is the fact that some of the principles and strategic lessons that have emerged from EQUAL (and from earlier CIs)

have been integrated into the general framework for ESF assistance. They include the partnership principle, the proactive involvement of target groups and a new emphasis on innovation, dissemination and transnational cooperation.

Convergences between the ESF Operations and EU Action Programmes in VET

Before 1993, the ESF did not support vocational education in the framework of secondary education and apprenticeship systems, except in cases relating to the needs of regions with the most serious problems of lack of economic potential, employment, infrastructure, and skills levels in the workforce (Objective 1 regions)⁹. Since the 1990s, ESF regulations (1993, 1999 and 2006) have included references to vocational training equivalent to compulsory schooling, apprenticeships and education and training systems. This raised the issue of defining the borderline between ESF activities and those of the other Community programmes that assisted the European education and training policy. Thus, the 2006 Regulation stipulates that *'Member States shall, with the assistance of the Commission where appropriate, ensure that the ESF does not support specific operations being concurrently supported through other Community transnational programmes, in particular in the field of education and training'*. The borderline is sometimes difficult to define in operational terms, particularly as the Regulation specifies that *'the ESF shall take into account the relevant priorities and objectives of the Community in the fields of education and training, increasing the participation of economically inactive people in the labour market, combating social exclusion — especially that of disadvantaged groups such as people with disabilities — and promoting equality between women and men and non-discrimination'*. Thus, concerning certain issues and target groups, similar types of operations seem to be eligible for funding from either source, but not from both.

Conversely, several EU policy statements on education and training issues, including VET, encourage Member States to call upon the ESF for new measures in this field (Council, 2007, 2009, 2010/1; Commission, 2010/2). In June 2010, the European Council agreed to the Commission's proposal to launch a strategy for jobs and growth, *Europe 2020*, and confirmed five targets (Council, 2010/2; Commission, 2010/1) which include raising employment rates by greater participation of young people and improving education levels by reducing school drop-out. It also endorsed new Integrated Guidelines to implement the Europe 2020 strategy, to be adopted following the opinion of the European Parliament. These incorporate guidelines for Member States' employment policies that highlight the need for reforms to improve the quality of education and ensure access for all (Commission, 2010/3). These developments call for a more proactive approach to cooperation and constructive coordination between the ESF and the other EU initiatives in the field of education and training, rather than for more effective administrative demarcation.

Access to VET and Modernising Education and Training Systems

In the last ten years, the ESF has placed greater emphasis on supporting Member States' actions, such as measures to improve access to training and re-training and related guidance and counselling services, to involve those with low skills and those who are marginalised in the labour market in a process of lifelong learning. They remain a priority for the 2007–2013 period. However, whilst the bulk of ESF

funding in the past was in the form of assistance to individual people, it now also provides substantial support to adapt education and training systems to labour market needs. In its priorities related to the development of human capital, the ESF promotes, for the first time and throughout the Union, the design and introduction of *'reforms in education and training systems in order to develop employability, the improvement of the labour market relevance of initial and vocational education and training and the continual updating of the skills of training personnel with a view to innovation and a knowledge-based economy'*.

In regions falling under the Convergence objective,¹⁰ support is granted both for the design and introduction of reforms in education and training systems and their implementation *'especially with a view to raising people's responsiveness to the needs of a knowledge-based society and lifelong learning'*. A further priority focuses on *'increased participation in education and training throughout the life-cycle, including through actions aiming to achieve a reduction in early school leaving and in gender-based segregation of subjects and increased access to and quality of initial, vocational and tertiary education and training'*.

All Member States have agreed regional and/or national Operational Programmes with the European Commission, many of which involve actions related to reforms in education and training systems. ESF support to these activities amounts to 8.3 billion Euros over the programming period (European Commission ESF website). It is not possible to give a detailed analysis here of the measures that Member States have launched or are planning with ESF support in this field. However, some examples may illustrate the nature of these reforms and their relevance to the objectives and priorities of the EU's strategy in the area of education and training.

Preventing Early School Leaving and Improving Young People's Transition from Education and Training to Employment

One out of six young Europeans leaves the education system without completing or proceeding to the upper secondary stage. This is particularly true for those from socially disadvantaged or ethnic minority backgrounds. Early drop-out is recognised as one of the main causes of youth unemployment and as a major barrier for young people to embark on and stay in lifelong learning. In countries where companies provide a substantial element of vocational training, such as the apprenticeship systems in Austria and Germany, employers are concerned about the growing number of school leavers who have not attained the levels of basic skills and qualifications to enrol or stay in training. This waste of talents can also exacerbate the shortage of qualified workers in economies with a shrinking workforce. Thus, both the current Employment Guidelines (2008–2010) and those proposed for the Europe 2020 Strategy set targets to reduce the rate of early school leavers. In their ESF OPs, several Member States have incorporated priority actions to combat school failure and drop out from secondary education. Examples are given below.

OPs' priority actions to combat school failure and drop out from secondary education include:

- Assistance to disadvantaged learners through individual counselling, tutoring and coaching, remedial education and intensive cooperation between schools and external social services,
Examples: OPs from Austria (AT), Germany (D), Spain (ES), France (F), Greece (GR);
- Initiatives to reform vocational routes that raise awareness of the world of work among young people, including opportunities for work-based training and work experience placements, as in *Estonia (EE), The Netherlands (NL)* and *England (UK-en)*; introducing basic vocational training and offering courses that provide an initial vocational qualification and access to continuing secondary studies, as in *Portugal (P)*;
- Cooperation with parents and families and involvement of school mediators and influential persons from the surrounding community, as in *Bulgaria (BU) Cyprus (CY) and Romania (RO)*;
- Promotion of intercultural education (*BU, D, GR*);
- Provision of special curricula in the mother tongue of foreign-speaking students, based on adapted teaching material and methods (*CY*);
- Preventive action including the monitoring of enrolment and participation in pre-school and primary education (*GR, RO*).

Facilitating Access to Training and Qualifications and Strengthening Vocational Guidance

Young people who leave full-time compulsory education with only minimal or without certified qualifications face problems in fulfilling the prerequisites to enrol in apprenticeships or training courses offered by post-compulsory vocational institutes. Many of those who initially overcome this hurdle rapidly drop out. Conversely, many training providers are not equipped for or experienced in catering for this group. Programmes of vocational and pre-vocational training that are offered to those who are not yet 'fit' for formal VET are frequently criticised by training providers and potential employers for not including relevant content and not reflecting the realities of work.

Measures to improve access to training are not confined to enlarging the scope of opportunities. Delivery of effective vocational guidance is a continuing concern. Young people need diversified and well-coordinated support if they are to become aware of their abilities and inclinations and link their vocational aspirations to the rapidly evolving needs and structures of the labour market. Action in this field not only focuses on providing relevant and updated information, sometimes through ICT, but also on ensuring continuity of the guidance process from compulsory education to the first stages of stable employment. Young people who have dropped-out of mainstream education and training have particular guidance needs which are often not met by the existing services. Continuous action is also required to encourage girls and young women to make their vocational choices from a wider range of options than those that are traditionally perceived as being 'appropriate' for them. Several OPs support actions to implement new approaches to vocational preparation and pre-vocational

training that will increase the number of training places that are suited to vulnerable young people and provide them with more effective guidance.

OPs' priority actions to improve access to training and qualifications and strengthen vocational guidance include:

- Promoting new approaches to vocational preparation involving a step by step process of qualification through short modules, which lead to the acquisition of vocational competences that can be certified and credited against subsequent initial training in a recognised training occupation (*Francophone Belgium (BEfr), D, ES, Hungary (HU) and Lithuania (LT)*);
- Enlarging the offer of training places by stimulating cooperation and networking between training providers, including SMEs, so as to encourage the pooling of their resources and expertise and increase their capacity to train young people with lower educational achievements (*D*);
- Modernising the apprenticeship system by introducing new courses, methods and training material adapted to employers' needs and by facilitating the transfer of students between the public education provision and the apprenticeship system (*CY*);
- Setting standards for vocational guidance and career advice and improving the training of professionals working in this field, including through the development of materials and tools for them (*BU, GR and LT*);
- Developing and implementing integrated approaches to educational and vocational guidance that draw on different types of specialist expertise, involve networking and coordination between different service providers and span general education as well as initial VET (*BU, GR and EE*);
- Increased efforts to diversify the vocational choices of girls and young women and to stimulate their interest in the fields of technology and science (*D and ES*);
- Intensifying vocational guidance and counselling in secondary education, including through closer cooperation between general education and vocational schools and between schools and industry (*BU, CY and D*);
- Focusing special attention on rural areas and on enhancing the provision of guidance services for disadvantaged groups including, in particular, young Roma people and their families (*RO*).

Adapting Education and Training Systems to Labour Market Needs

Several OPs emphasise the need to enhance the relevance of VET and ensure that initial education and training systems respond better to the demands of the labour market. Action involves reviewing the standards that have to be met in VET and developing the national systems of qualifications and skills. In many cases, efforts aim at bringing skills recognition systems in line with the European Qualification Framework (EQF). Special attention is also being given to intensifying dialogue with VET stakeholders and adapting curricula to new needs.

OPs' priority actions to adapt education and training systems to labour market requirements include:

- Introducing, or updating national qualification and related skills recognition systems, based on common standards and covering all cycles of VET, and adapting them to the EQF (*BEfr, CY, EE, ES, HU, LT and PL*);
- Creating qualifications that anticipate emerging qualifications (*ES and LT*);
- Enhancing the involvement of employers, trade unions and other relevant actors of the labour market in order to ensure the relevance of qualifications, and strengthening capacities and expertise in the management and application of qualification systems (*LT and RO*);
- Developing teaching/training materials for new curricula and updating the knowledge of teachers/trainers (*CY, ES and LT*).

Vocational Pathways that Address the Needs of Disadvantaged Learners and Validate Acquired Skills

Learning in mainstream education and training systems is not always conducive to developing and maintaining young people's motivation, especially those who are resistant to classroom and other formal environments. More flexible and individualised ways of learning, including learning based on experience, can often be a better response. Work-based learning and modular routes to vocational qualifications referred to in the preceding sections on *preventing early school leaving* and *access to training* are relevant in this context.

Offering comprehensive pathways is another way of addressing effectively those who have dropped out of the formal systems. These generally combine assessments of individual competences, guidance, training and practical work opportunities with continuing personal tuition and support. They require close cooperation between a wide range of agencies and services. New approaches to validating and accrediting the outcomes of learning, including non-formal learning and learning in informal environments, are essential. It is also crucial that training and employment intermediaries and relevant multipliers are well informed on how to navigate through the complex web of administrative provisions that regulate, or sometimes hinder, the recognition of qualifications. Tackling this issue of validation and accreditation of individual competences acquired through learning and experience outside the formal systems is a concern in many OPs.

Improving the Skills of Teachers and Training Personnel

Several OPs stress the pivotal role of teachers and trainers and managers of education and training institutions in the modernisation and adaptation of VET. They incorporate specific measures for in-service training which address identified

OPs' priority actions to offer vocational pathways and validate acquired skills include:

- Developing "new chance" programmes or a system of comprehensive and individualised pathways to vocational qualification and employment for young people (*F and HU*);
- Promoting more flexible and individual ways of learning, including distance learning, in mainstream institutions of education and training, and improving the interface between such new provision and opportunities for learning outside the formal system (*EE, F, HU and LT*);
- Introducing new methods for the assessment and accreditation of competences and skills acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning processes and experience, and information and training of staff related to this (*BEfr, EE, ES, F, HU and LT*).

gaps. These may include the need to familiarise teachers and trainers with new teaching methods, including the use of ITC, and with new developments and requirements in the world of work, in particular through work experience placements in enterprises. Some Member States also seek to introduce a transnational dimension into their in-service training programmes.

Another issue is the development of skills that help teachers, trainers and other professionals, such as mediators and counsellors, to work in a multi-cultural environment and improve their capacities to detect and cope with discriminatory practices that ethnic minority groups, including Roma people, often face in education and training.

Some OPs foster the integration of different types of initial and in-service staff training in a more broadly-based approach to systematic staff development in education and training institutions. This includes the development of support networks and the recognition and accreditation of training achievements to facilitate progression in career paths.

OP actions to improve the skills of teachers and training personnel include:

- Introducing special programmes, including e-learning, to enhance the capacities of teachers and trainers to make better use of ICT in assisting the learning process of their students (*BEfr, BU, CY, EE, ES, GR and LT*);
- Promoting the inclusion of practical work experience placements and the accreditation of such experience in the provision of in-service training (*BEfr, LT and PL*);
- Enhancing opportunities for teachers and trainers to benefit from teaching and work experience placements in other Member States (*EE and ES*);
- Developing intercultural and anti-discrimination skills as a professional competence of teaching and training staff (*BU, HU, and RO*);
- Supporting approaches to systematic staff development which relate training processes to individual career advancement (*EE, LT, PL and RO*).

Evaluating the Delivery of Quality Education and Training

Some OPs, such as those for Bulgaria, Estonia, Spain, Germany, Lithuania and Romania, foresee the setting up and/or development of mechanisms for the continuous monitoring of renewal and improvement in VET. These include assessment of the quality of education and training through standardised exams, the promotion of approaches to quality management in training institutions, internal and external evaluation of education and training establishments and the involvement of local communities in monitoring and control processes.

Some Conclusions

Obviously, most of these issues do not reflect new developments and it is too early to say how far ESF actions have advanced in their responses. However, the fact that many or all of these thematic priorities have been on the agenda for many years reflects persistent gaps in the delivery of VET policies and shows that there are still significant implementation deficits to be addressed. This is not only a concern for the operation of the ESF, it is also a challenge for the EU mainstream programmes in the field of education and training that tackle priorities that are very similar to those of the ESF. To reduce this 'implementation gap', efforts are needed to ensure that the experiences of prior initiatives, both within the ambit of the ESF and the domain of education and training, are fully incorporated in the implementation of current activities. They should also extend to the design of future action so that new activities reach beyond 'benchmarks' that have already been achieved.

Transnational Cooperation

Transnational cooperation can boost the quality of actions in support of the thematic priorities described above. Experience from the ESF Community Initiatives has shown how exchanges between Member States have stimulated policy innovation and provided benchmarks for good practice. Based on these positive results, the ESF 2007–2013 programme focuses on and offers special funding for transnational cooperation within its mainstream operation.¹¹ Several national and/or regional OPs such as Bulgaria, Germany, Spain, France and Italy promote activities that enable stakeholders in education and training to identify innovation in and transfer of good practice from other Member States and exchange ideas and know-how on how to best use the ESF in this field.

In Germany, France and Italy, special support is also provided to enhance the transnational mobility of young people and teachers and trainers through training or work experience placements abroad. This is relatively new for the ESF and difficult to implement, as transnational cooperation in vocational training must cope with systems which have blurred outlines and operate in complex ways involving states, regions, businesses and social partners. Therefore, it is probably harder to come to grips with vocational training systems in other countries than with their general education systems in which the institutional players are clearly identifiable and the systems are generally well structured. However, some short-cuts may be possible, as can be seen from the German experience where the ESF has opened up opportunities for many thousands of young people to benefit from transnational placements which complement those offered by Leonardo in the framework of the Lifelong Learning Programme.¹²

Conclusion

The ESF now constitutes the EU's major instrument to frame and allocate resources for the implementation of a comprehensive European employment strategy. It has also developed as a vehicle to promote innovation and the transfer and wider implementation of good practice across the Member States. It provides significant resources for action in the field of VET that can stimulate reforms in education and training systems.

While the ESF maintains its focus on employability, jobs and the labour market, its priorities in relation to VET are fully compatible with, and largely complementary to, those of other mainstream Community Programmes in this field and contribute to strengthening the social dimension of education and training. However, at European policy level, the scope for cooperation between the ESF and the other major EU initiatives in VET, in particular those focused on lifelong learning, has been underexploited. So far, more emphasis seems to have been placed on the delineation of action between these two areas than on structured collaboration between the relevant protagonists.

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NOTES

1. The European Unit of Account (EUA) and, from 1979, the ECU were used to manage the budget of the European Communities prior to the introduction of the Euro in 1999.
2. The Transition Programme (1976–1987) was designed to assist Member States to develop their education and training policies. It helped young people to become better prepared for their entry into work and adult life, identify common issues in this field and work out and test new approaches to tackle these issues (Conclusions on the European Community Action Programme, 1988). The programme involved pilot projects which aimed to: strengthen young people's motivation to study and work; improve vocational preparation through cooperation between schools and enterprises, guidance and teacher training; and respond better to the needs of young jobseekers. An important element was the transnational cooperation between these projects, which included study visits and exchanges of information and experience.
3. PETRA was the first European Programme aimed at improving the quality of training for young people and was a cornerstone on which much of the cooperation in initial VET was built. It supported the efforts of the Member States to ensure *'that all young people in the Community who so wish receive one year's, or if possible two or more years', vocational training, in addition to their full-time compulsory education'* and targeted young people in vocational training, young workers and young jobseekers. The programme created a European network of training partnerships that engaged in various types of transnational training programmes and provided opportunities for young people to complete part of their training, or acquire work experience in another Member State. PETRA was implemented from 1988 to 1994 and its actions were incorporated into the Leonardo programme as from 1995.

4. Established in 1995, the Leonardo da Vinci programme forms the main pillar of the EU's action programme in lifelong learning (2007–2013). It promotes actions that:
 - Assist participants in training and further training to acquire and use knowledge, skills and qualifications that facilitate personal development, employability and participation in the European labour market;
 - Support improvements in quality and innovation in vocational education and training systems, institutions and practices;
 - Enhance the attractiveness of vocational education and training and mobility for employers and individuals and facilitate the mobility of working trainees.

It has taken over most of the actions that were developed and piloted by PETRA, by Eurotecnet which was established in 1989 to promote innovation in vocational training in connection with technological change, and by Force which was set up in 1990 to encourage investment in continuing vocational training, particularly in SMEs.
5. These targets and benchmarks relating to education and training policies and systems stipulate that by 2010:
 - *every unemployed person is offered a job, apprenticeship, additional training or other employability measure; in the case of young persons who have left school within no more than 4 months . . . and in the case of adults within no more than 12 months;*
 - *an EU average rate of no more than 10 % early school leavers should be achieved; and*
 - *At least 85 % of 22-year-olds in the EU should have completed upper secondary education.*
6. The first generation of CIs (the Human Resources Initiatives 1990–1994) included three strands:
 - EUROFORM, which experimented with new measures for vocational training and employment;
 - HORIZON, which worked on training for the disabled; and
 - NOW (New Opportunities for Women), which looked at how women could more easily be brought into, or back into, the labour market.

The ESF contributed match-funding of some 760 million ECUs to implement these initiatives.
7. The second generation of CIs (1995–2000) included:
 - EMPLOYMENT, which explored effective methods to integrate people who are marginalised or excluded from the labour market. It was implemented through four strands: YOUTHSTART to help young people without qualifications find a first job; NOW to improve the situation of women in the labour market; INTEGRA to help groups such as single parents, the homeless, refugees, prisoners and ex-prisoners to find secure jobs, and fight racial or other discriminations in training or employment; and HORIZON for the disabled.
 - ADAPT, which piloted new approaches to help enterprises, especially SMEs, and their workers anticipate and cope with requirements imposed by industrial and economic change so as to secure employment.

Over 10,000 experimental projects were launched in these two CIs, with contributions from the ESF totalling 3.4 billion Euros.

8. EQUAL (2000–2008) was designed to operate as a laboratory to develop new ways of tackling discrimination and inequality in the labour market and promote a more inclusive working life by fighting discrimination and exclusion. EQUAL was built on four pillars:

- *Employability*: Facilitating access or return to the labour market for those who have difficulty in being integrated in a labour market which must be open to all; and combating racism and xenophobia in the labour market;
- *Entrepreneurship*: Opening up the business creation process to all by providing the tools required for setting up in business and for the exploitation of new possibilities for creating employment; and strengthening the social economy, in particular the services of interest to the community, with a focus on improving the quality of jobs;
- *Adaptability*: Promoting lifelong learning and inclusive work practices which encourage the recruitment and retention of those suffering discrimination and inequality in the labour market; and supporting the adaptability of firms and employees to structural economic change and the use of new technologies;
- *Equal opportunities for women and men*: Reconciling family and professional life, as well as the re-integration of men and women who have left the labour market, by developing more flexible and effective forms of work organisation and support services; and reducing gender gaps and supporting job desegregation.

A further strand aimed at the social and vocational integration of *Asylum Seekers*.

A key element in this initiative was the principle of partnership: through its comprehensive Development Partnerships (DPs), EQUAL brought together the main actors, including local and regional authorities, training bodies, public employment services, NGOs, enterprises and social partners, at a geographical or sectoral level. Each DP was also involved in one or more Transnational Partnership(s), based on formal multilateral cooperation agreements. The ESF contribution to the implementation of EQUAL amounted to 3.3 billion Euros.

9. The European Community did not have legal competence in the field of education until the Treaty of Maastricht which acknowledged, for the first time, that one role of the Community was to contribute 'to education and training of quality'. An analysis of the development of EU policies in education and training can be found in Corbett, A. (2005) *Universities and the Europe of Knowledge: ideas, institutions and policy entrepreneurship in European Community higher education policy, 1955–2005* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan) and in the European Commission's (2006) *The history of European cooperation in education and training* (Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities).
10. The convergence objective applies to EU regions with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per head that is below 75% of the Community average. They include Portugal and the Southern parts of Spain and Italy, the new Länder in East Germany, most regions of Greece and all Member States that have accessed the Union since 2004 except Cyprus and other Member States such as Austria, Belgium and the UK. Over 80% of the ESF budget is

reserved for the countries and regions that are eligible under the convergence objective.

11. Where Member States support actions involving transnational cooperation as a specific priority axis within an Operational Programme, the contribution from the ESF may be increased by 10%. It is estimated that at least €3 billion will be deployed for transnational cooperation in the 2007–2013 period, including actions related to reforms in education and training systems. In addition, a *Network of Transnational Contact Points* in the Member States has been created. These contact points are responsible for implementing transnational aspects in the national and regional OPs in their Member State or region. They ensure that effective mechanisms and procedures for transnational cooperation are in place, principally by putting ESF managers into contact with peers from other Member States and regions and sharing information and good practice. *Learning Networks* have also been set up at European level, each of which is structured around a specific thematic focus and involves ESF Managing Authorities and a range of other stakeholders. At the end of 2009, the ESF Committee established an *Ad-Hoc Group on Innovation and Transnational Cooperation* which focuses on the policy and strategy aspects of innovation and transnational cooperation in the ESF programmes (see ESF website).
12. Germany is particularly active in this field. In the framework of the national OP, significant resources have been ring-fenced for two new initiatives to foster transnational mobility:
 - The IDA Programme, (Integration through exchange), and
 - A network of Mobility Counsellors in 40 Chambers of Craft and Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

The first phase of IDA (2010 and 2011) offers transnational placements to 10,000 young people who have either been unsuccessful in accessing regular initial training or are unemployed after completing their vocational training. These placements are organised by local job centres. The Network of Mobility Counsellors provides support, mainly to SMEs, to encourage them to involve their apprentices in transnational programmes. Several regional OPs draw on this network to introduce new placement opportunities for young people so that they may gain transnational experience as part of their initial vocational training.

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