



## The European Social Fund celebrates its 60th anniversary: 6 decades of investment in people

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**The year 2017 marks the 60th anniversary of the European Social Fund (ESF), Europe's oldest and main instrument to invest in people.**

Today it is an important driver of job creation, promoting better education, more modern public administrations and social inclusion, and therefore a key tool to ensure fairer opportunities for all citizens.

Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility Marianne **Thyssen** said: "*The 60th anniversary of the European Social Fund is a true reason to celebrate. Throughout six decades, the European Social Fund has helped millions of job seekers and employees and has supported hundreds of thousands of companies and start-ups. By investing directly in people, we help to make sure that nobody is left behind, while boosting Europe's competitiveness and keeping pace with the changing world of work. 60 years of success stories showing that the European Union is making a real difference in the lives of Europeans: today, in the past and in the future.*"

In the past 60 years, the European Social Fund has helped millions of Europeans find a job, gain a qualification or certificate and increase their skills levels. These outcomes are achieved through many thousands of projects carried out everywhere in Europe.

Examples include projects that aim at:

- Getting people into work: In Spain, the [Caritas](#) organisation has been working with the ESF to help more than one million individuals improve their chances of finding a job. This includes coaching for job-seeking, work placements, or job creation through social enterprises. Many of these initiatives focus on groups with special difficulties, including immigrants, disadvantaged women, less qualified young people and the over-45-aged unemployed.
- Improving educational outcomes: The [Diritti a Scuola](#) project in Italy reached over 200 000 children and is making a positive contribution to their schooling. In a joint effort with schools, teachers, parents and pupils, curricula and teaching methods were improved and individual counselling to youngsters and their families provided. As a result, the school drop-out rate in Puglia decreased from 30.3 % in 2004 to 19.5 % in 2011.
- Fostering social inclusion: The [Academy of Social Economy Development](#) project in Poland's Małopolskie region has created a flourishing social economy to the benefit of many of its most disadvantaged citizens. The project provides legal and business counselling and also financially supports the start of social enterprises. More than 1700 people have so far benefitted from the project's activities, along with 245 social economy organisations and 126 local partners.

Our work doesn't stop there. Also in the period 2014-2020 millions of people have benefitted and will benefit from the Fund, thanks to investments from the EU budget of €86.4 billion. During this programming period, the ESF focusses on a limited number of priorities to ensure maximum impact, with an emphasis on youth employment and social inclusion. The online [Open Data Platform](#) which gives access to data on achievements under the European Structural and Investment Funds for 2014-2020, shows that ESF projects are making very good progress: over 30% of projects have already been selected for funding. The projects under the Youth Employment Initiative even show a 60% implementation rate.

Celebrations of the Fund's achievements and debates on the future of human capital funding in Europe will kick off tomorrow with the [conference "European Social Fund: past, present and future"](#), hosted by the Maltese Presidency of the EU, ahead of the celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome and the meeting with the EU Social Partners in Rome which will be attended by President **Juncker**, Vice-President **Dombrovskis** and Commissioner **Thyssen**. Throughout the year, Member States are organising similar events and debates to look back at what the ESF has achieved, to take stock of the performance of the Fund and to make the case for strong investment in human capital in the future. During the month of May, thousands of EU-funded projects will open their doors to the public in the frame of the [Europe in my Region](#) campaign.

## Background

The European Social Fund is the European Union's oldest fund, and was established together with the Treaty of Rome in 1957, with the aim to improve job opportunities for workers and to raise their standard of living. At first, it was a relatively simple instrument for reimbursing to Member States half of the costs of vocational training and resettlement allowances for workers affected by economic restructuring. Today the ESF has become ever more targeted and strategic, focusing increasingly on systemic reforms, which can benefit as many people as possible.

The ESF is based on co-financing, with financial contributions from both the Member States and the European Commission, and sometimes also the private sector. In the current financing period 2014 – 2020, the ESF is operational in all 28 Member States with an overall budget of €124.9 billion (of which €86.4 billion from the EU budget).

The ESF is operating on the ground through Operational Programmes (OP). These translate the overall objectives at European level– getting people into employment, improving education, fostering social inclusion and better public services – into the specific needs of a region or Member States and their citizens. OPs are negotiated between national authorities and the Commission, while their implementation is managed by the relevant authorities in each country. This demonstrates how the ESF is based on the principle of shared management, which means responsibility at the appropriate level.

## For more information

[European Social Fund website](#)

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