

# Trainers' Digest



**ETUI-REHS EDUCATION 's  
information bulletin about EU  
training programmes**

## **New European Union Structural Funds (2007-2013)**

The Structural Funds are the principal tool used by the European Union, in partnership with the Member States, to support the less-favoured areas in order to reduce the socio-economic gap between the various member states and between the EU's different territorial areas. They aim to boost economic and social cohesion, competitiveness and employment, as part of a sustainable development model, which are the Union's most important political priorities.

The funds involved are:

- The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), related to funding productive investments, infrastructures and initiatives designed to reduce economic and social disparities among the Union's different territorial areas.
- The European Social Fund (ESF), focused on employment, on human resources' development and the promotion of social integration.
- The Cohesion Fund, focused on environmental policies and on trans-European transport infrastructure, is the only Fund that applies to the entire territory of Member States whose per capita gross national income (GNI) is less than 90% of the Community average.

## **Objectives**

These funds together contribute to the pursuit of three priority objectives defined in a Community plan for the period 2007-2013:

The **"Convergence" Objective** aims to speed up the convergence of the least-developed Member States and regions, by improving conditions for growth and employment through increasing and improving the quality of investment in human and physical capital, development of innovation and of the knowledge society, adaptability to economic and social changes, protection and improvement of the environment and administrative efficiency. The regions targeted by this Objective are

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those where the per capita gross domestic product (GDP) is less than 75% of the Community average.

The **"Regional competitiveness and employment" Objective** aims to strengthen competitiveness and employment, by anticipating economic and social changes through increasing and improvement of the quality of investment in human capital, innovation and the promotion of the knowledge society, entrepreneurship, protection and improvement of the environment, improvement of accessibility and of the adaptability of workers and businesses, and development of inclusive job markets. The regions targeted by this Objective are those not covered by the "Convergence" Objective.

The **"European territorial cooperation" Objective** aims to strengthen cross-border cooperation through joint local and regional initiatives in the border regions; strengthening trans-national cooperation, based on a list of eligible regions adopted by the European Commission, by means of actions conducive to integrated territorial development linked to the Community priorities; strengthening interregional cooperation and exchange of experience throughout the whole territory of the Community.

Transitional support exists for regions that have lost eligibility for the Convergence Objective because their nominal GDP per capita level has recently exceeded 75% of the average GDP of the Community, or for States that have lost eligibility for the Cohesion Fund because their GNI has recently exceeded 90% of the average GNI of the Community.

The "Convergence" Objective is subsidised by all the Funds, the "Regional Competitiveness and Employment" Objective is funded by the ERDF and the ESF, whilst the "European Territorial Cooperation" Objective is funded exclusively by the ERDF.

***It is important to point out that from 2007 onwards the Structural Funds will apply to all EU Member States (including Romania and Bulgaria).***

## **The European Social Fund**

Given the ESF's emphasis on employment and training it is worth looking in more detail at the tasks that the Community Regulations for 2007-2013 have assigned to this fund:

1. increasing adaptability of workers, enterprises and entrepreneurs, in order to anticipate and better manage economic change, in particular promoting:
  - lifelong learning and increased investment in human resources (in particular low-skilled and older workers) by enterprises, particularly SMEs, thereby developing qualifications and competences, including through new technologies;
  - the design and dissemination of innovative and more productive forms of work organisation, including better health and safety at work, and the development of employment, training and support services for workers in the context of company and sector restructuring;

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2. enhancing access to employment, preventing unemployment, in particular long-term and youth unemployment, and encouraging active ageing, by promoting:
  - the strengthening of employment services;
  - the implementation of active and preventive measures ensuring the early identification of workers' needs and facilitation of job seeking;
  - specific action to increase the sustainable participation and progress of women in employment and to reduce gender-based segregation in the labour market, including by addressing the root causes of gender pay gaps;
  - specific action to increase the participation of migrants in employment, thereby strengthening their social integration, including through guidance, language training and validation of competences and acquired skills;
3. reinforcing the social inclusion of disadvantaged people, by promoting:
  - pathways to integration and re-entry into employment for people experiencing social exclusion, early school leavers and people with disabilities;
  - acceptance of diversity in the workplace, combating discrimination in accessing the labour market;
4. enhancing human capital, by promoting:
  - reforms in education and training systems, in order to develop employability and ensure the continual updating of the skills of trainees;
  - networking activities between higher education institutions, research centers and enterprises;
  - partnerships between social partners and non-governmental organisations aimed at pressing for reforms in the field of employment and labour market inclusiveness.

Within the framework of these objectives, the ESF will support each Operational Programme prepared by Member States at a national or regional level. ESF resources are, in fact, one of the main tools for promoting the European Employment Strategy, launched by the Luxembourg European Council in 1997 and updated by the Brussels European Council on 12 July 2005.

The ESF will also finance transnational and interregional actions aimed at promoting the dissemination of good practices and the development of appropriate strategies. The ESF will also support actions that integrate lessons learnt from the former Community Initiative "Equal", which ran from 2000 to 2006 and will not be re-launched in 2007-2013. These actions will pay particular attention to the integration of migrants, including those seeking asylum, and of marginalized groups within the labour market, through the development of a methodology which strengthens trans-national cooperation.

## **What scale of funding is available?**

The overall amount of EU funding for the period 2007-2013 is 308,041 million euros. The "Convergence" Objective will be allocated 81.54% of the total resources, whilst the "Regional Competitiveness and Employment" Objective will be allocated 15.95% and the "European Territorial Cooperation" Objective will be allocated 2.52%. In addition to this there are also sums earmarked for national co-funding. Each country must contribute matching funds amounting to at least 25% (except for particular cases and areas that receive the transitional support) for areas included under the "Convergence" Objective, and 50% for areas included under the "Regional Competitiveness and Employment" Objective.

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## Procedure

By the end of 2006, each Member State, working in conjunction with the European Commission, is required to prepare a framework document (known as the "National Strategic Reference Framework"). This document provides both general and specific guidelines for intervention under each objective.

In addition to the National Strategic Reference Framework, each country, again in consultation with the European Commission, is required to submit for each Region or area of intervention an Operational Programme, which contains the planned implementation measures, funding plans and handling and monitoring methods.

In the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of operational programmes, Member States should involve the regional and local authorities and the economic and social partners, including trade unions, in accordance with national rules and practices.

## Trade Unions and Structural Funds

Community Regulations provide for the full involvement of National Trade Unions and business organisations in the various stages of implementing the Structural Funds, and especially on preparation, implementation and monitoring. In particular, Monitoring Committees, in which trade unions and employers' associations participate, will be set up for each Operational Programme established by the Structural Funds. In these Committees, trade unions should provide guidance on the initiatives and on coherence between the financial actions and the main objectives for workers.

Decisions concerning individual projects will remain largely under the responsibility of institutional bodies such as ministries, regional authorities, etc., which in the past have not always paid due attention to projects involving trade unions. However, throughout the general objectives in the European Social Fund, there is continual reference to workers and to the importance of training as a crucial factor in improving employability. Trade unions should make good use of these references, bearing in mind the percentage of ESF resources that the ESF Regulation will, for the first time, be allocating to the "Convergence" Objective, with a view to strengthening the social partners' ability to achieve the ESF objectives through:

- training,
- networking measures,
- strengthening social dialogue,
- joint activities undertaken by the social partners, with particular regard to the adaptability of workers and enterprises, as indicated in Objective 1 of the ESF.

The best opportunities will arise in projects aimed at training or re-training workers, or aiming to provide support on careers guidance for young people and the unemployed. Most of these are likely to be vocational training projects, a field in which not all European trade union organisations are currently involved.

Vocational training needs are to be interpreted in the broadest possible sense, thus including a number of areas of expertise of those trade union structures involved in trade union training. Trade union education should focus on ESF programmes, job market policies, initiatives to boost employment at the local level, immigration issues,

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equal opportunities and combating the various forms of inequality at local level, and need to include crucial areas of training expertise:

- in prior analysis of training needs
- in drafting of curricula and the implementation of training pathways
- in drafting of guidelines, innovative material and IT aids.

In terms of opportunities for realising transnational actions, through the ESF and also through the new "European Territorial Cooperation" Objective, we need to make the best possible use of the network of organisations within the ETUC and ETUI-REHS Education to identify the key elements present in each country and proceed to define successful transnational activity. This will include using the results and the networks provided by projects carried out over the last few years by ETUI-REHS, with support from its affiliates and other partners, and funded by Article 6 of the ESF (please see the "DIALOG-ON" project, on using Information Society tools in the context of Social Dialogue:

[http://education.etui-rehs.org/en/projects/Dialog\\_on/default.cfm](http://education.etui-rehs.org/en/projects/Dialog_on/default.cfm)

and the "TRACE" project, which focused on building capacity within European trade unions to anticipate and manage changes:

<http://www.traceproject.org/>).

## Information

[http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/esf2000/2007-2013\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/esf2000/2007-2013_en.html)