European Social Fund (ESF) 2007-2013 ex-post evaluation: investment in human capital

Volume I – Key findings and lessons
European Social Fund (ESF) 2007-2013 ex-post evaluation: investment in human capital

Volume I – Key findings and lessons
Glossary of key evaluation concepts

**Action** The second level in the OP architecture, as usually the Priority Axis (see below) consists of several actions

**Adaptability** A key policy area in the ESF, consisting of activities to increase the adaptation of workers and enterprises to the changing economic circumstances and labour market demands

**Allocated expenditure** Expenditure allocated to the ESF activities during the programming stage of the Operational Programmes

**Annex XXIII categories** The socio-economic characteristics of ESF participants reported in the ESF monitoring systems, relating to the participant gender, labour market status (employed (of which self-employed), unemployed (of which long-term unemployed), inactive of which in education and training), age (young people aged 15-24 and older people aged 55-64), disadvantaged status (migrants, minorities, disabled, other disadvantaged) and educational attainment status (by ISCED levels)

**Category of expenditure** Common way of categorisation of the ESF expenditure into common categories reflecting EU priorities

**Certified expenditure** Expenditure incurred in the implementation of the ESF activities which has been approved by the Managing Authority of the Operational Programme and the European Commission

**Cluster** A group of actions or interventions with common objectives and activities (the evaluation identified 11 clusters of ESF human capital development activities across the stages of education cycle and different target groups, see Figure 1)

**Convergence objective** NUTS level 2 regions in the EU Member States whose gross domestic product (GDP) per capita was less than 75 % of the average GDP of the EU-25 for the same reference period

**Community added value** The extent to which the ESF activities provided effects additional to the national or regional activities

**Effectiveness** The extent to which the set aims and objectives have been reached

**Efficiency** The comparison between the achieved outputs and results and the costs incurred

**Gender sensitivity** The extent to which the planning, design, implementation and monitoring reflects the gender issues

**Intermediary Body** The organisation charged by the Managing Authority to implement the ESF funds in the OP

**Intervention** The third level in the OP architecture, usually the Actions in the OP consist of several interventions

**Human capital** A key policy area in the ESF, consisting of activities to develop the skills and knowledge of human resources across the different stages of the education and training system cycle (relating to the priorities of enhancing human capital and expanding and improving investment in human capital of the ESF Regulation)

**Managing Authority** The institution in each Member State OP responsible for the strategic direction and financial management of the OP

**Output** The immediate achievement after the conclusion of ESF activity (e.g. number of participants reached, number of schools or enterprises supported)

**Operational Programme (OP)** The means through which the ESF support was implemented in the Member States, as agreed between the European Commission and the Member States. Each OP consists of several Priority Axes, which in turn consist of several actions, which in turn consist of several interventions.

**Participant** The person who participated in the ESF funded activity

**Priority Axis** The first level in the OP architecture, usually the OP consists of several Priority Axes (concepts of priorities, investment areas and others are also used in the OPs), which in turn consist of several actions and each action of several interventions (it does not always corresponds to the priorities of the ESF regulation).

**Project promoter** The organisation in charge of implementing specific ESF sponsored projects.

**Regional competitiveness and employment objective** NUTS level 2 regions in the EU Member States whose gross domestic product (GDP) per capita was above 90% of the average GDP of the EU-25 for the same reference period².

**Result** The medium to long term achievements of ESF activities (e.g. number of qualifications acquired by participants, number of enterprises providing training upon leaving the intervention or later).

**Sustainability** The extent to which the achieved outputs and results last.

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1 Introduction

In the 2007-2013 period, the European Social Fund (ESF) has been the main financial tool through which the European Union translated its strategic labour market, human resource development and social inclusion policy aims into action, thus supporting Member States’ policies in line with the directions under the Lisbon and EU2020 strategies and the relevant Community objectives in relation to education and training.

This report presents key findings and lessons from the ESF 2007-2013 Ex-post Evaluation: Investment in Human Capital (VT/2013/092). The report provides an overview of ESF investment in human capital (one of the Fund’s key priorities), as well as the key evaluation findings and lessons learnt. The evaluation was conducted between 2014 and 2015 and is complemented by two further ex-post evaluations focussing on the other key ESF priorities of ‘Access and Sustainable Integration into Employment’ and ‘Supporting the Integration of Disadvantaged Groups into Labour Market and Society’\(^3\). The Priority Axes of all the ESF OPs have been allocated to one of the thematic ex-post evaluations (except for promoting partnerships and strengthening institutional capacity).

This evaluation covered both the Human Capital and Adaptability areas of ESF support. The ESF Regulation\(^4\) defined the human capital policy field covering the following activities and provided for a wider scope of defining human capital priorities in the Convergence objective regions. The Adaptability was defined in the evaluation as relating to the ability of individuals and enterprises to adapt to the changing economic circumstances.

Table 1. The definition of human capital field in the ESF Regulation (per article 3.1.d and 3.1.a of ESF Regulation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Human capital priorities</th>
<th>Adaptability priorities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convergence, Regional Competitiveness and Employment objectives</td>
<td>• 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;</td>
<td>2. Lifelong learning and increased investment in human resources (especially SMEs, and workers, through the development and implementation of systems and strategies, including apprenticeships, which ensure improved access to training, in particular, by low-skilled and older workers; the development of qualifications and competences, the dissemination of information and communication technologies, e-learning, eco-friendly technologies and management skills; he promotion of entrepreneurship and innovation and business start-ups</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Networking activities between higher education institutions, research and technological centres and enterprises;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Convergence objective</td>
<td>• The implementation of reforms in education and training systems, especially with a view to raising people’s responsiveness to the needs of a knowledge-based society and lifelong learning;</td>
<td>• No specific separate priorities in the Convergence OPs</td>
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<td>• Increased participation in education and training throughout the life-cycle,</td>
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\(^3\) A synthesis report is also in preparation synthesising the findings of all three ex-post evaluations.

Objective | Human capital priorities | Adaptability priorities
--- | --- | ---
 | 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; | • the development of human potential in research and innovation, notably through post-graduate studies and the training of researchers.

The purpose of the ex-post evaluation was to assess the achievements of ESF programmes by objective in the field of human capital investment namely:

- The extent of ESF resources used,
- The effectiveness and efficiency of the ESF,
- The socio-economic impact of the ESF,
- Implications for further economic and social cohesion policy
- The identification of factors conducive to success (or the lack of) from the ESF,
- The identification of good practices,
- The European added value.

The evaluation built on the significant preparatory work carried out, including the meta evaluations carried out by the ESF Expert Evaluation Network and the preparatory study. This evaluation was carried out using a range of sources and methods, including the use of existing ESF evaluations at EU and MS level. For 27 Member States, data from the Structural Funds Database and Annual Implementation Reports (up to the end 2013) was analysed. Furthermore, in nine in-depth countries, the overall ESF HC strategy was reviewed, the relevant actions and interventions mapped and a detailed assessment of 87 interventions was undertaken in the nine countries to assess their effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, gender sensitivity and Community added value. The key methods used were the analysis of Operational Programme (OP) monitoring data, interviews with the managing authorities and intermediary bodies (a total of 74 interviews), delivery partners (33 interviews), 10 surveys of project promoters and participants, analysis of key programming and implementation documents and interviews with nine independent labour market, education and training experts. Key to the analysis was the use of the available national evaluation results which were used to assess the achievements of the specific human capital interventions.

The 87 selected in-depth interventions represented 66% of the allocated expenditure of all human capital interventions in the nine in-depth countries (see Volume III, Section 3). Across the 17 OPs covering the nine in-depth countries, a high number of HC relevant actions and interventions were identified. Based on commonalities in terms of their objectives, activities, and target groups, the actions and interventions were classified into 11 clusters (see Figure 1 and Volume III, Section 2.3). These

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5 For key reports, see [http://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=3&langId=en&keywords=&langSel=&pubType=512](http://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=3&langId=en&keywords=&langSel=&pubType=512)
7 Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Portugal. The selection of in-depth countries was defined for the evaluation on the basis of the recommendations of the preparatory study reflecting the availability of data which could be useful for the evaluation and considerations of the financial importance of the ESF priorities associated with the human capital investment in the selected Member States.
8 See Glossary for the definition of OP.
9 See Annex I for a full list of national evaluations.
10 See Glossary for the definition of the terms ‘action’ and ‘intervention’.
clusters reflected the different stages of the education cycle, distinguishing between the objectives of improving quality or increasing participation. It is important to note that there is a degree of overlap between the clusters (e.g. Cluster 6, Reduction of early school leaving and inclusive education overlaps with Cluster 4, Quality of school education and Cluster 5, Quality of Vocational education and training).

The cluster framework was an important analytical tool in the evaluation, as it was used to map, report on and analyse key data on interventions (Evaluation Question 2), as well as to report the findings on the effectiveness, sustainability, added value and gender sensitivity of selected interventions (Evaluation Questions 3-8).

Figure 1. Cluster framework

Notes: VET – vocational education and training; HE – higher education.

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 provides key contextual information on the human capital challenges facing the European Union,
- Section 3 provides an overview of the ESF HC 2007-2013 investment in 27 EU Member States,
- Section 4 summarises the findings linked to the key evaluation questions,
- Section 5 contains the key lessons learnt in terms of policy choices, target groups, programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

The report is accompanied by the following Annexes:

- Annex 1 lists all national and EU evaluations used in the ex-post evaluation,
- Annex 2 provides the summary assessment of the effectiveness by cluster,
- Annex 3 provides a list of selected OPs and interventions in the in-depth analysis,
- Annex 4 contains an overview of the community added value aspects per cluster.

This Volume should be read in conjunction with the other four volumes containing the full results of the ex-post evaluation:

- Volume II – The overview of ESF HC investment in 27 Member States,
- Volume III – Analysis of in-depth countries,
- Volume IV – Good practice,
- Volume V – ESF human capital investment for young people.
2 Key human capital development challenges and policy directions in the EU in the 2007-2013 period

2.1 Key trends and challenges in the human capital development in the 2007-2013 period

The ESF human capital investment planning and programming in 2007 and 2008 took place in a context of sustained economic growth and overall improvements in the employment performance. However, soon after the start of the implementation phase, the financial and subsequent economic crisis hit. The deteriorating economic situation hit certain groups in society and in the labour market particularly hard (especially men and young people were hard hit by the rising unemployment, see Figure 4). Older workers and women were less affected by the crisis – for women this was true only in the first phase of the economic downturn. This situation changed somewhat as a result of austerity policies affecting public services characterised by higher share of female employment.

The ESF human capital investment took place in very different national contexts, responding to particular trends and influencing different policy directions in human capital development in individual Member States.

On a positive side, across the EU-27 in the 2007-2013 period, early school leaving rates decreased on average at the EU-27 level by 3 percentage points, higher education attainment rates increased by 4.4 percentage points and gender gaps narrowed (see Volume II, section 2). In addition, expenditure on education and training and research and development increased, albeit minimally (by 0.2 percentage points).

The decrease in the early school leaving rates was particularly significant in Portugal, which had a 17 p.p. decrease (see Figure 2). Relevant decreases were also registered in Malta, Spain, Luxembourg and Latvia, all of them decreasing over 5 p.p. over the 2007-2013 period. However, in Poland, Hungary, Finland and the Czech Republic, the early school leaving increased, albeit minimally and under 1 p.p.

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12 Early school leavers are usually defined as those young people who leave education and training with only lower secondary education or less, and who are no longer in education and training. See Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving (2011/C 191/01).
**Figure 2. Early School Leaving period change 2007-2013, by country (tsdsc410)**

Source: ICF analysis of Eurostat data. The line signals the EU2020 target of reducing the early school leaving below 10% by 2020.

For higher education attainment rates (see Figure 3), the most remarkable increase took place in Luxembourg (an increase of 13.5 p.p. over the 2007-2013 period, from its already relatively high rates of attainment). From a lower base, both Latvia and Poland increased their rates over 5 p.p. (8.5 p.p. and 6.1 p.p. respectively), starting from significantly lower levels. The smallest increase for the period took place in the Netherlands, where higher education attainment is already high among the population over 25 years old (a 1.9 p.p. increase). A contrary situation was seen in Italy and Romania, which consistently recorded the lower levels of higher education attainment for the group in the three periods and also registered very marginal increases over this time.

**Figure 3. Higher education (%) trends in the EU-27 2007-2013, by country (edat_lfse_07)**

Source: ICF analysis of Eurostat data.
The expenditure on human capital development increased for the EU-27, albeit minimally: seeing a 0.32 p.p. increase in expenditure on education and training and 0.24 p.p. increase in expenditure on research and development¹³ (see Figures 4 and 5). Differences between countries were slightly more marked in terms of expenditure on education and training (with differences ranging from Romania with a decrease of 1.18 p.p. and Malta an increase of 1.78 p.p.) compared to differences in research and development (ranging from Luxembourg and Slovenia, registering a 0.49 p.p. decrease and a 1.17 p.p. increase respectively). A national level analysis of these expenditure indicators reveals a pattern, particularly for education and training expenditure. Almost all countries (except Romania, Hungary and Malta) increased their expenditure before 2009. However, they then registered their maximum expenditure rates in 2009, and subsequently decreased expenditures (exceptions include Czech Republic, UK, Malta and Denmark).

There are consistent patterns over this time on which Member States are at the extremes of education and training investment. Bulgaria, Italy, Slovakia and Spain were consistently among the lowest investors, whereas Sweden, Belgium, Finland, Cyprus and Denmark remained in the top 10, for every year of the period.

A more consistent evolution was reflected in the R&D expenditure, where in general Member States had their lowest levels in the beginning of the period and increased by 2013. These include Romania and Luxembourg (who actually experienced a reverse trend and decreased their expenditure from 2007), Sweden and Finland (who are the biggest investors in R&D and only cut it by less than 0.05 p.p. over this time), and Spain and the UK (who performed as outliers, peaking in mid-period in 2009).

Positions at the top and bottom of expenditure were also more constant for R&D investment. Sweden, Finland, France, Austria, Belgium, Germany and Denmark were seven of the 10 Member States with high expenditures for every year recorded. Conversely, Romania, Latvia, Cyprus, Lithuania, Greece, Bulgaria, Malta, Poland and Slovakia were nine of the 10 Member States with smaller R&D budgets.

Figure 4. Expenditure on education and training (% GDP) trends in the EU-27 2007-2011, total change over time (educ_fiabs)


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¹³ This represents an important source of investment into skills in the research and innovation sectors and post-tertiary education.
On a more negative side, youth unemployment significantly increased (by 2 percentage points), the employment of the low-skilled (people with less than primary, or primary and lower secondary education) steadily decreased (by 4.4 percentage points) and the participation in lifelong learning fluctuated considerably (although increasing by 1.1 percentage points overall in the period).

The 2007-2013 period saw an overall increase for youth unemployment in the EU-27, almost parallel to the unemployment affecting the overall working-age population (see Figure 6). A peak increase was registered in 2009, when unemployment rates for the under 25s (particularly men) suffered a more drastic rise than for all adults, due to the effects of the 2008 economic crisis. Overall, the gap between unemployment rates in the adult and young population has remained constant during these years.

For youth unemployment, over the 2007-2013 period, youth unemployment decreased only in two countries, more markedly in Germany, and less so in Malta (see Volume II, section 2). Others such as Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, UK increased their rates but remained below the EU-27’s average increase of 7.8 p.p. Finally, Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain saw dramatic rises in the youth unemployment, including especially high rises in Greece and Spain, where the crisis had a particularly negative impact on the youth unemployment rates.
The participation in lifelong learning fluctuated considerably over the period for the EU-27 and conclusions are mixed, which is also reflected at country level. The participation in lifelong learning in the EU-27 did not increase between 2007 and 2012, and rose sharply between 2012 and 2013 for the 2007-2013 period (see Figure 7). Throughout this time, women's participation rates were constantly higher than men's, and that relationship remained constant over the time studied. The total increase for the period was 1 p.p. for both groups.

Figure 7. Participation in lifelong learning (%) trends in the EU-27 2007-2013, by gender (trng_lfs_01)

A very even distribution is also found, meaning that the EU-27 change over the period was a 1 p.p. increase (see Volume II, section 2). A third of the countries recorded losses over this time, a third increases of over 1 p.p., and the remaining third below 1 p.p. Portugal, Luxembourg, Sweden and France achieved increases of over 5 p.p. over this time. For the countries recording losses over this period, Poland, UK, and Slovenia consistently remained above the EU-27 average.

2.2 The EU and national education and training policy directions and the ESF role

This complexity of the human capital challenges at the national level was also reflected at the EU level with wide-ranging policy directions provided in the framework of the Lisbon strategy and EU2020 strategy and the Education and Training 2020 Strategic Framework. The Lisbon strategy’s Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs for the period 2005-2008 applicable at the time of ESF design for the 2007-2013 period identified the following relevant priorities, which reflected the key human capital challenges facing the EU:

- Guideline 21 – Improve the adaptability of workers (the promotion and dissemination of innovative and adaptable forms of work organisation, with a view to improving quality and productivity at work, including health and safety; support for transitions in occupational status, including training, self-employment, business creation and geographic mobility).
- Guidelines 23 - Expand and improve investment in human capital, through: inclusive education and training policies and action to significantly facilitate access to initial vocational, secondary and higher education, including apprenticeships and entrepreneurship training; significantly reducing the number of early school leavers; efficient lifelong learning strategies open to all in schools, businesses, public authorities and households according to European agreements, including appropriate incentives and cost-sharing mechanisms, with a view to enhancing participation in continuous and workplace training throughout the life cycle, especially for the low-skilled and older workers.
- Guideline 24 - Adapt education and training systems in response to new competence requirements, by: raising and ensuring the attractiveness,
openness and quality standards of education and training, broadening the
supply of education and training opportunities and ensuring flexible learning
pathways, and enlarging possibilities for mobility for students and trainees;
easing and diversifying access for all to education and training and to
knowledge by means of working time organisation, family support services,
vocational guidance and, if appropriate, new forms of cost-sharing; responding
to new occupational needs, key competences and future skill requirements by
improving the definition and transparency of qualifications, their effective
recognition and the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The EU2020 strategy, adopted on 3 March 2010, set two targets to be reached by
2020 in the field of human capital:

- to reduce the rate of early school leaving below 10 %; and
- to increase the share of population aged 30-34 that has completed third level
education to at least 40 %.

In addition to the EU2020 targets, the EU has also defined a number of benchmarks in
the Education and Training 2020 Strategic Framework. These include:

- participation in early childhood education
- achievement of pupils and students in basic skills as measured by PISA
  (reading, mathematics and science)
- participation in lifelong learning, international mobility
- employability
- foreign languages.

The specificity of national contexts was reflected in a number of country specific
recommendations relevant to the human capital issued by the European Commission
to the Member States in the 2007-2013 period. Amongst the most frequent country
specific recommendations was the call for the Member States to develop the quality
and labour market relevance of the education and training systems, to increase adult
participation in training, to improve competence levels and to upgrade the skills of the
labour force. These reflect the key human capital challenges discussed in section 2.1
above and analysed in further detail in section 3.2.

There were also a number of relevant policy developments and reforms in the 2007-
2013 period across the Member States, indicating a period of significant policy activity
in reforming the education and training systems across the EU in recognition of the
scale and urgency of the human capital challenges. This included reforms to increase
the participation in education and training, improve the quality of education and
training systems and change some of education delivery mechanisms, to address the
particular human capital needs of certain target groups and react adequately to the
challenges posed by the economic crisis.

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15 See http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/country-specific-recommendations/index_en.htm
3 Overview of the key ESF HC investment features in the 27 Member States

Key findings

There was a significant variation between the ESF HC investment choices made in the OPs, ranging from a broad lifelong learning perspective to a more limited focus on certain education sectors (see Volume III, section 1.2). The ESF human capital investment priorities reflected the EU level policy directions, the national / regional strategic HC and workforce development needs. The robustness of the theory of change and the use of evidence base to drive the ESF human capital investment priorities varied between the OPs. Overall, across the OPs, the theory of change (either explicitly articulated in the OP document or implied through the choices made) is considered to be identifiable and fairly robust, with exceptions noted in four OPs with a lack of systematic consideration of evidence of results in the ESF investment choices (see Volume III, section 1.5.5).

When taking into account HC Priority Axes and sub-priorities in Operational Programmes, € 51,859,496,732 (ESF and national co-financing) were allocated to the ESF human capital investment during the programming period (for breakdown by Member State, see Volume II, Section 4). By the end of 2013, € 33,110,800,273 or 63.8% of the allocated expenditure had been spent (covering both EU and national funds). It has to be noted that two more years of expenditure are still to be included after the end of 2013. These figures refer only to the Priority Axes of the Operational Programmes which were assigned to the Human Capital field (and some human capital activities have been mainstreamed in other ESF priority themes).

Such figures show high level of additional resources across the range of ESF human capital investment. The highest allocated expenditure to the human capital policy field was observed in the Convergence OPs (€19,367,143,569), followed by Multi-objective OPs (€17,695,630,761) and lastly, the Regional Competitiveness OPs (€14,796,722,402). Out of eight Member States with a high number of Convergence OPs, six Member States had medium and high levels of ESF human capital investment significance in the national education and training expenditure. This signals a more important role played by the ESF human capital investment in the Convergence OPs also due to the wider scope of the ESF human capital investment envisaged for the Convergence OPs in the ESF Regulation. This is linked to the wider scope of the ESF activities in the human capital field allowed in the Convergence regions.

ESF investment in human capital relative to the national expenditure on education and training state investment varied significantly (1% on average). The financial importance of different themes associated with the ESF investment into human capital also differed (based on the analysis of nine in-depth countries). The three clusters associated with the support for young people were significantly more financially important compared to the clusters focussed on higher education and research and development. The investment was used to respond to pressing national and European policy challenges and priorities and to scale up the delivery of skills development activities. The investment was also used to support the implementation of key national reforms in the area of education and training, such as improvements in the quality of lifelong learning; measures to improve teacher training; new curriculum developments; the introduction of new management systems; and funding for improving the quality of work-life balance.

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16 Source: analysis of the OP programming documentation.
17 1 Human Resources OP in Bulgaria, 1 OP in the Czech Republic (Education for Competitiveness), national OP in France, and 1 OP in Latvia.
18 Source: SFC database.
19 BG, FR.
20 BG, CZ.
21 BG, CZ, PT.
and evaluation methods in initial education\textsuperscript{22}; changes to the management, quality assurance and definition of study programmes in higher education\textsuperscript{23}; reforms of the initial education school network\textsuperscript{24}; and the introduction of measures to improve the quality and organisational structures of vocational education and training\textsuperscript{25}.

The ESF investment was also responding to the key EU policy priorities (in particular the ESF support to promoting lifelong learning and improving the employability of workers).

3.1 Links to the national and EU policy priorities, main activities and target groups in the ESF human capital investment (all 27 Member States)

3.1.1 Links to the national and EU policy directions

Member States have used ESF HC investment to contribute to the themes associated with EU policies and targets in the area of education and training (see Table 2). Overall, the vast majority of Member States used ESF human capital investment to support the participation in lifelong learning and improve the employability of workers. Conversely, ESF human capital investment was not frequently used to support early childhood education and foreign language learning.

Table 2. Contribution of the country’s ESF HC investment to the themes associated with the Education and Training 2020 benchmarks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HS</th>
<th>Reducing early school leaving</th>
<th>Completion of higher education</th>
<th>Participation in early childhood education</th>
<th>Reading, mathematics, and sciences (15 years olds)</th>
<th>Participation in lifelong learning</th>
<th>International mobility</th>
<th>Employability</th>
<th>Foreign languages</th>
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\textsuperscript{22} BG, IT.
\textsuperscript{23} BG, CZ, IT, MT.
\textsuperscript{24} LV, MT, PT.
\textsuperscript{25} CZ, IT, MT, PT.
An analysis by the Regional Competitiveness/Convergence/Multiobjective OPs showed that Convergence objective OPs were on average more aligned with the Education and Training 2020 benchmarks than Regional Competitiveness ones (see Volume II, Table 11). Amongst both objectives OPs, the most frequent priorities were similar, including reducing early school leaving, the completion of higher education, participation in LLL and Employability.

The importance allocated to certain EU policy priorities in the ESF human capital reflected the key human capital challenges facing the Member States. In 24 Member States, ESF support to tackling early school leaving was provided. This reflected the fact that the extent of early school leaving remained high and significantly above the EU-27 average in a number of countries. Secondly, in 20 Member States, ESF supported activities to increase the participation and quality of higher tertiary education. On average, higher education attainment rates increased, and the gender gap narrowed, but the improvements were unequal across Member States (see Volume I, section 2.1). 27 Member States implemented ESF activities to support lifelong learning.

Member States used ESF HC investments to address a number of the Country specific recommendations (CSRs) in the areas of adaptability and human capital. The analysis shows that ESF financed activities are evenly distributed to address CSRs in both policy fields, with predominance in the adaptability policy field (see Table 3).²⁶

Table 3. Contribution of the country’s ESF HC investment to CSRs in the Adaptability and Human Capital policy fields

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MS</th>
<th>Contribution to the CSRs in the Adaptability field</th>
<th>Contribution to the CSRs in the Human Capital field</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
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</table>

²⁶ For the analysis of CSRs a split by Regional Convergence or Competitiveness objectives was not possible.

### 3.1.1.2 Links to the national policies

At the national level, Member States have linked ESF HC investment to support a wide range of activities. The detailed analysis of links and added value to the national policies is provided in section 4.7.

### 3.1.1.3 Strategic objectives and levels of education targeted in the ESF human capital investment

ESF human capital investment across the 27 Member States was used flexibly and in very diverse ways, which reflected the specific human capital challenges faced in the national / regional contexts. Although the number of OPs varied widely by country (from 1 OP to 24 OPs), the investment in both the Human Capital and the Adaptability themes was found in all Member States. Generally, all Member States addressed both the strategic objectives of improving the quality of education and training systems and increasing the participation in education and training. The most frequently targeted levels of education were lifelong learning (all countries, with the exception of France and Sweden), higher education (all 27 with the exception of Sweden) and general education (all but Denmark and Sweden).

A closer analysis of other strategic objectives, along with recurrent specific objectives across Member States and OPs again showed a significant response to the key human capital challenges faced in the Member States and supported in the EU policy directions. These include:

- Increasing the adaptability and competitiveness of employees and businesses;
- Improving labour market (policies, partnerships);
- Encouraging the implementation of health and safety measures at work;
- Promoting entrepreneurship and self-employment;
- Reducing Early School Leaving (ESL);
- Increasing Lifelong Learning (LLL);
- Fostering the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs);
- Enhancing Innovation and Research and Development (R&D);
- Increasing the qualifications; and
- Improving the equality in the labour market.

As for the levels of education covered (see Figure 8), pre-primary education level was the most rarely targeted education level (only 10 Operational Programmes in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Spain, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Poland, Romania and Slovakia did so). This is partly due to the fact that such support was only possible in the Convergence regions. On the other hand, the most frequently targeted levels of education were lifelong learning (25 Member States apart from France and Sweden), higher education (26 Member States with the exception of Sweden) and general education (including initial vocational education) (25 Member States apart from Denmark and Sweden).
3.1.2 Activities and target groups

The EU-27 Member States used a variety of activities to implement ESF human capital investment. The most common activities across the EU-27 were:

- Individual training activities (which took place in all EU-27 Member States);
- Development of new or improved curricula (24 Member States apart from Austria, Denmark and Sweden);
- Capacity-building of teachers and training staff (25 Member States except Denmark and Sweden) and
- Career guidance and training (25 Member States apart from Malta and Sweden).

For both Regional Competitiveness and Convergence OPs, the most frequently occurring activity was training targeted to individuals, followed by the career guidance (see Volume II, Table 4). Similarly, in both types of OPs, the least commonly implemented activities were outplacements and support to restructuring.

Reflecting the different levels of education targeted and the policy aims of the ESF human capital investment, 11 relevant clusters of activity were distinguished in the nine in-depth countries.\(^{27}\) Table 4 presents these clusters and the types of activities supported and the main target groups for each cluster. The presence of the clusters also shows the complex nature of the ESF human capital investment.

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\(^{27}\) The clusters were defined in relation to the stages of education cycles (initial general education, initial vocational education, higher education and research, and adult education) and the general objectives of the ESF HC support (increasing the participation in the human capital development activities and improving the quality of education and training systems).
## Table 4. The ESF HC clusters – activities, target groups and countries covered

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of activity</th>
<th>Name of cluster</th>
<th>Activities supported and core target groups</th>
<th>Countries and objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Individual level  | Cluster 3 Early school education | Activities include: teacher training  
Core target groups: staff in early school education | Bulgaria (convergence)  
Czech Republic (multi-objective) |
|                   | Cluster 5 Quality of VET | Activities include: VET teacher training, promotion campaigns to participate in VET courses, financial incentives to participate in VET courses  
Core target groups: Students and staff in vocational education | Bulgaria (convergence)  
Czech Republic (multi-objective and competitiveness)  
Denmark (competitiveness)  
France (competitiveness)  
Italy (convergence and competitiveness)  
Latvia (convergence)  
Malta (convergence)  
Portugal (convergence and multi-objective) |
|                   | Cluster 6 Early school leaving | Activities include: provision of education and vocational courses, advice, guidance, mentoring  
Core target groups: pupils and students at risk of early school leaving, young people who have left school system early, parents, teachers | Bulgaria (convergence)  
Bulgaria (convergence)  
Czech Republic (multi-objective)  
France (competitiveness and convergence)  
Ireland (competitiveness)  
Italy (convergence and competitiveness)  
Latvia (convergence)  
Malta (convergence)  
Portugal (convergence and multi-objective) |
|                   | Cluster 7 R&D | Activities include: provision of financial support to study in the tertiary education, staff training and competence development, support to internationalisation and links with enterprises  
Core target groups: students and staff in the tertiary education institutions | Bulgaria (convergence)  
Czech Republic (multi-objective)  
Denmark (competitiveness)  
France (competitiveness and convergence)  
Italy (convergence and competitiveness)  
Latvia (convergence)  
Malta (convergence)  
Portugal (convergence and multi-objective) |
|                   | Cluster 8 Young people | Activities include: support to the apprenticeships, internships and other forms of vocational education, access to other training and skills development activities, advice and guidance systems development  
Core target groups: young people, education system staff, employers | Bulgaria (convergence)  
Czech Republic (multi-objective)  
Denmark (competitiveness)  
France (competitiveness and convergence)  
Italy (convergence and competitiveness)  
Malta (convergence)  
Portugal (convergence and multi-objective) |
|                   | Cluster 9 Employed | Activities: delivery and financial support to access the training courses, qualifications, advice and career guidance, development of organisational HR strategies and management models  
Core target groups: people in employment, employers | Bulgaria (convergence)  
Czech Republic (multi-objective)  
Denmark (competitiveness)  
France (competitiveness and convergence)  
Italy (convergence and competitiveness) |

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28 See Volume III, Table 25.
### Cluster 10 Adults

**Activities include:** delivery and financial support to access the training courses, qualifications, advice and career guidance, public works

**Core target groups:** adults outside employment, adults with low level of qualifications

- **Bulgaria (convergence)**
- **Czech Republic (multi-objective and convergence)**
- **Italy (convergence and competitiveness)**
- **Malta (convergence)**
- **Portugal (convergence and multi-objective)**

### Cluster 11 HE participation

**Activities include:** scholarships for HE participation, funding of HE places, support services for specific target groups (disabled)

**Core target groups:** students and staff in the tertiary education institutions

- **Bulgaria (convergence)**
- **Czech Republic (multi-objective)**
- **France (competitiveness and convergence)**
- **Italy (convergence and competitiveness)**
- **Latvia (convergence)**
- **Malta (convergence)**
- **Portugal (multi-objective)**

### Systemic level

#### Cluster 1 LLL systems

**Activities include:** development of new courses, quality assurance systems and mechanisms for educational institutions, qualification systems, recognition and validation of prior learning

**Core target groups:** education system staff and institutions

- **Bulgaria (convergence)**
- **Czech Republic (multi-objective)**
- **France (convergence)**
- **Italy (convergence and competitiveness)**
- **Latvia (convergence)**
- **Malta (convergence)**
- **Portugal (multi-objective)**

#### Cluster 2 Quality of HE

**Activities include:** development of e-learning systems in HE, HE staff skills development, improvement of HE study programmes, preparation of new HE management models

**Core target groups:** HE system staff

- **Bulgaria (convergence)**
- **Czech Republic (multi-objective and competitiveness)**
- **Latvia (convergence)**
- **Malta (convergence)**

#### Cluster 4 Quality of school education

**Activities include:** school staff training, development / update of school study programmes, pedagogical tools and procedures, development of student competences

**Core target groups:** school staff and students

- **Bulgaria (convergence)**
- **Czech Republic (multi-objective and competitiveness)**
- **France (competitiveness and convergence)**
- **Italy (convergence and competitiveness)**
- **Latvia (convergence)**
- **Malta (convergence)**
- **Portugal (multi-objective)**

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**Source:** ICF analysis of OP documentation.
The financial importance given to different human capital themes differs between the interventions by objective OP (see Volume III, Section 6.3). The convergence and regional competitiveness OPs focussed their funds on a limited number of clusters, while the multi objectives OPs more equally spread funds across different clusters (see Figure 9).

**Figure 9.** The relative mean financial importance of clusters by the respective objectives, million €

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Convergence incl. selected</th>
<th>Multi objectives incl. selected</th>
<th>Regional Competitiveness incl. selected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lifelong learning systems and frameworks</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of higher education</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early childhood education and care</td>
<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of school education</td>
<td></td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>69%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality and labour market relevance of VET</td>
<td></td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>86%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reduction of early school leaving and inclusive education</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research and innovation</td>
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<td>6%</td>
<td>81%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transition to the labour market for young people</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional up-skilling of employed people</td>
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<td>6%</td>
<td>75%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Up-skilling and requalification of adults</td>
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<td>19%</td>
<td>68%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation and mobility of HE students</td>
<td></td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>74%</td>
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<td>Total (%)</td>
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<td>Total (€)</td>
<td>4 200 MEUR</td>
<td>2 972 MEUR</td>
<td>8 663 MEUR</td>
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The ESF human capital investment reached a variety of target groups. The groups most frequently targeted included (see Table 5):

- Employees (all EU-27);
- Unemployed (23 Member States except Austria, Bulgaria, and Lithuania and the Netherlands).
- General education students (24 Member States apart from Cyprus, Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and UK);
- Teachers (24 Member States apart from Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands and UK and); and
- Early school leavers (20 Member States except Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark and Malta).
In both Regional Competitiveness and Convergence OPs, the most frequently addressed target groups were employees, enterprises and the unemployed (see Volume II, Table 7). Teachers, VET trainers, schools and older people were also, in both instances, the least frequently targeted groups.

### 3.2 The overall strategy for ESF human capital investment (nine in-depth Member States)

The variety of the ESF human capital investment priorities across the 27 Member States described in the previous section is echoed in the in-depth analysis of the ESF human capital investment strategies in the nine in-depth countries. The OPs clearly

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**Table 5. Overview of the ESF HC target groups across the EU-27 in 2007-2013**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MS</th>
<th>General Education Students</th>
<th>Early School Leavers</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Education System Staff</th>
<th>VET Students</th>
<th>VET Trainers</th>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Institutions / Organizations</th>
<th>HE Students</th>
<th>HE Staff</th>
<th>Researchers</th>
<th>Entrepreneurs</th>
<th>Unemployed</th>
<th>Young Unemployed</th>
<th>Vulnerable Groups</th>
<th>Low Skilled</th>
<th>Disabled</th>
<th>Minorities</th>
<th>Older People</th>
<th>Inactive</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: ICF analysis of AIRs 2013.
differed in their focus with some OPs covering a wide range of priorities whereas other OPs had a more limited focus on certain priorities:

- **OPs covered a wide range of priorities in four countries (Czech Republic, Italy, Malta and Portugal).** In the Czech Republic, all the priorities identified above were covered across the three OPs in a complementary manner. While the regional OPs in Italy focussed more strongly on adaptability, matching labour market needs, access for disadvantaged groups and, to a certain extent, participation in higher education, the national OP focuses on the quality of initial education (a priority not tackled at regional level). Malta covered all of the priorities identified with a strong emphasis on education, rather than adaptability (though this was also covered). Portugal emphasised the issues of matching labour market needs, adaptability and lifelong learning. It also addressed the priority of access for disadvantaged groups (in particular early school leavers).

- **OPs had a more limited focus on certain priorities in five countries (Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Ireland and Latvia).** In Bulgaria while a variety of priorities were covered, there was a marked emphasis on matching labour market needs. In Denmark the OP focussed on the general workforce including young people in the educational system and covered the priorities of adaptability, lifelong learning participation and to a certain extent the issue of matching labour market needs. In France the national OP and the Guadeloupe OP covered a range of priorities but emphasised the issues of labour market matching and employability. In Ireland there was a strong focus on access for participation of disadvantaged groups and those with low or no skills, including also at the higher education level. Compared to other OPs, the Latvian OP paid strong attention to the issue of higher education and research and development (though the funding to the R&D strands was cut following the crisis).

The coverage of the EU level priorities in the OPs was varied. All the guidelines from the 2005-2008 (and 2008-2010) Guidelines for Growth and Jobs were covered by the programmes (see Table 6). A tendency amongst the Convergence OPs was to cover more Guidelines for Growth and Jobs compared to the Regional Competitiveness OPs.

### Table 6. Match between 2005-2008 Guidelines for Growth and jobs and the countries’ use of ESF HC investment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>BG</th>
<th>CZ</th>
<th>DK</th>
<th>FR</th>
<th>IE</th>
<th>IT</th>
<th>LV</th>
<th>MT</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G21 - Adaptableness of workers through training</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>G23 - Inclusiveness and access to E&amp;T</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>G23 - Reduce ESL</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>G23 - Lifelong learning strategies</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>G24 - Raising standards of E&amp;T</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>G24 - Flexible learning pathways</td>
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<tr>
<td>G24 - Mobility of students and trainees</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>G24 - Access to guidance etc</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>G24 - Respond to new occupational needs</td>
<td>✓</td>
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</table>

Source: ICF analysis of OP documentation.

With regard to the EU2020 targets, the target on early school leaving (to reduce the rate of early school leaving below 10 %) is frequently addressed in the OPs (particularly in countries that face this challenge, see Table 7). The target on tertiary education attainment (to increase the share of population aged 30-34 that has

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29 For France, the match was assessed as existing if it was present in at least one of the covered OPs.
30 For Italy, the match was assessed as existing if it was present in at least one of the covered OPs.
31 For Portugal, the match was assessed as existing if it was present in at least one of the covered OPs.
completed third level education to at least 40%) is also reflected in the Operational Programmes, but to a lesser extent. Concerning the participation in lifelong learning, this ET2020 benchmark is covered by all 17 Operational Programmes. There is less coverage of the benchmarks concerning competences in reading, maths and science. Nine out of 17 analysed OPs in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Italy, Latvia and Malta (and Ireland focusing on specific groups) covered activities aimed at improving the achievement in these competences.

Table 7. Coverage of the themes associated with the Europe 2020 targets in the area of human capital and the ET2020 benchmarks in the OPs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>OP</th>
<th>EU2020</th>
<th>ET2020 Benchmarks</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BG</td>
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<td>CZ</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apulia</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Piedmont</td>
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<tr>
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<td>OPHRE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Azores</td>
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</table>

Source: ICF analysis of OP documentation.

Most countries set targets based on what is easily measurable, rather than measuring progress and the ESF contribution relative to the main issues identified (see Volume III, section 1.3.3, including few examples of focus on improving educational attainment, skills and competence levels). A clear exception is the target on lifelong learning participation which was present in all 17 analysed OPs. The extent to which the targets were based on a sound analysis differed. Several countries report having changed output and results targets that are linked to participation because of the reallocation of funding between priorities, and in addition, some targets were not set appropriately (evidenced by overachievement of targets by over 100%).

While the identification of challenges and the choice of priorities appeared to be based on evidence, the extent to which the choice of interventions and measures were also evidence based varied. In six countries (Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy and Portugal) previous programme experience or other sources of evidence such as reflections on the existing national or regional initiatives were used to inform the OP design and the choice of measures. In two countries, there is no evidence that the more specific aspects of the OP design (such as what types of interventions should be financed) were based on evidence of past experiences or ex-ante assessment of potential effectiveness (the Czech Republic, Latvia).

In two countries (out of 9), the ex-ante evaluations of the programmes did examine the potential effectiveness of types of measures envisaged (complementing the
analysis of the choice of priorities) (Bulgaria, Malta). This led to the changes in the OP planned measures and activities insofar that some ex-ante evaluation recommendations were adopted (see Volume III, section 1.2.2).

In the 2007-2013 period, ESF human capital investment was implemented in parallel with the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Indeed, the intended policy aim at the programming stage was that, where appropriate, the activities supported by the ESF and ERDF would be interlinked to achieve better synergies and benefits for the territories. This intended synergy with the ERDF was achieved partially (see also Box 1).

**Box 1: Examples of links with the ERDF**

In the Czech Republic, the ESF OP HRE and the ERDF OP Entrepreneurship and Innovation interacted formally at the level of the monitoring committee and similar calls were always approved by both MAs.

In Italy, a significant amount of European financial resources was allocated to the priority of increasing competence levels, through two dedicated National Operational Programmes (NOP ESF "Competences for development" and NOP ERDF "Environments for learning"). The synergy between ESF and ERDF was central to boost the use of new technologies and integrate them into the educational system.

In Latvia, in the activity 1.2.1.1.4 initial vocational education, there was strong complementarity between this intervention and the provision of infrastructure and equipment at vocational education institutions (ERDF Intervention). Also, in the support measures for decreasing the social exclusion of young people (activity 1.2.2.4.2), the achievement of the results was very positive due to the fact that more general schools have acquired facilities to accommodate children with special needs, mainly as a result of ERDF funding.

A number of key factors underpinning a closer integration between the ESF and the ERDF have been identified across the in-depth countries:

- The term ‘synergies’ needs to be understood at the level of OPs by MAs (staff in charge should be clear about what is the concrete meaning of the synergies);
- The joint management of both ESF and ERDF by the same organisations helps to develop closer synergies;
- Practical methodological guidance is needed to implement, monitor and evaluate such synergies;
- The issue of synergies should be considered as a priority by MAs.

Across the countries analysed in-depth, ESF links with the ERDF have been implemented in very different ways (see Volume III, section 1.2.7). Denmark stands out as the country where a genuinely common programming and implementation approach has been achieved between the ESF and ERDF. Both OPs have defined common priorities supporting regional growth and innovation, and had integrated management, implementation, monitoring and evaluation structures and mechanisms. The integrated approach has allowed a high level of coherence in projects across funds, focusing funding on the same territorial challenges as well as the integration of funding, where selected large scale projects have benefitted from both OPs. In four countries (Czech Republic, Italy, Portugal, Latvia), the links with the ERDF were also present but on a less systematic basis. The ESF provided ‘soft investment’ in education and training, whilst the regional ERDF OPs provided ‘hard investment’ in the education system infrastructure. Finally, in three of in-depth countries, no significant linkages occurred between the two funds as this has not been part of the implementation choices made (France, Ireland, Malta).
3.3 The impact of the economic crisis on ESF human capital priorities, actions and funding (all 27 Member States)

As the crisis unfolded, both the EU and Member States developed recovery packages, which saw increases in labour market policy spending (although to a significant extent this was devoted to passive – income support – measures). However, in the southern EU Member States in particular, the crisis led to significant financial problems and public sector debt crises triggered austerity measures in many Member States.

In the early years of the crisis, ESF funding was increasingly used to support short-term working and training measures to allow for the upgrading of human capital during a period when demand for labour declined.32 Partly depending on the level of flexibility in the existing ESF programming, Member States chose either to formally adapt their OPs or to shift emphasis between the priorities and activities, and indeed the target groups, to reflect the new requirements. This demonstrates an important flexibility of the ESF human capital investment to respond to unexpected economic shocks.

The finding that ESF had the flexibility to respond appropriately to the challenges of the crisis is supported by the in-depth analysis of 17 OPs in the nine in-depth countries which have all undergone changes in the period 2007-2013 (see Volume III, section 2). The majority of these changes can be explained by the economic crisis, with growing unemployment and increasing constraints on public budgets, especially mid-way in the 2007-2013 programming period:

- Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy (Piedmont, Tuscany) saw an increase in the funding allocation to active labour market policies. In these countries the emphasis of ESF funding on human capital decreased somewhat (in terms of expenditure levels) in favour of the employment priority.
- In the Czech Republic, Latvia and Portugal ESF funding was redistributed amongst human capital priorities and actions. In Latvia several system-level measures33 were closed down to re-focus the funding on measures directly benefitting individuals and teachers, in particular (though the focus was on those who were made redundant).
- In Bulgaria, Malta and Apulia in Italy, the allocation to human capital actually increased due to changes in priorities. In Bulgaria and also in Apulia (Italy) higher education measures were strengthened.

Several countries used ESF funding to implement the equivalent of the short-time working arrangements (e.g. Czech Republic, Italy) in reaction to the economic crisis. These measures combine funding training with a wage subsidy for the time spent in training.

It should be noted that in three countries initially planned measures were closed down after the 2008 economic crisis. This was identified in Latvia, Ireland and Portugal. In all three countries where such radical changes occurred this was partly explained by public budget cuts (all three countries faced significant deficits). Countries in this situation saw their national funding decrease to a level where the national co-funding requirements could not be met by them. In Latvia several types of measures focusing on human resources in research as well as the development of orientation and career guidance centres in initial education were cancelled. In Ireland, the cuts concerned gender equality training, training for people with disabilities and in-company training. In addition to changes in the allocation of funds, some countries created new sub-priorities and types of actions (see Box 2).

3.4 The ESF expenditure in the area of human capital (all 27 Member States)

3.4.1.1 Overall funding levels

Given the wide range of possible activities and target groups and considerable support to the national policies in the area of education and training, ESF expenditure in the area of human capital was considerable. The total financial envelope assigned to the Human capital policy field (covering both the Human capital and Adaptability themes) was €51,859,496,732, comprising the total EU and national funding (out of the total ESF funding of €117 billion; see Volume II, Annex III for information on the different allocations at the national level).

The total amount of certified eligible expenditure paid by beneficiaries by the end 2013 (or actual expenditure) was €33,110,800,273. This reflected the financial progress achieved by end of 2013. The majority of the certified eligible expenditure paid by beneficiaries was composed of the public contribution (€30,761,898,944 of EU and national co-funding by the end of 2013). This indicates that the ESF human capital was not very successful in attracting private co-funding sources to the human capital development activities (e.g. from enterprises, although a good example of this was noted in France for example due to focus on ESF providing enterprise training where the company oriented training was co-financed privately by companies, see Volume III, section 4.10).

The highest allocated expenditure to human capital was observed in the Convergence OPs (see Table 8), in line with the wider scope of the ESF in these regions, followed by Multi-objective OPs and lastly the Competitiveness OPs. This pattern is repeated for the actual expenditure and corresponding public contribution.

Table 8. ESF human capital investment expenditure by OP objective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective of the OP</th>
<th>Total funding of the OP (Union and national)</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total amount of certified eligible expenditure paid by beneficiaries</th>
<th>Corresponding public contribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convergence</td>
<td>19,367,143,569</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>11,727,151,087</td>
<td>11,284,675,082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitiveness</td>
<td>14,796,722,402</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>9,746,862,417</td>
<td>8,212,561,736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-objective</td>
<td>17,695,630,761</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>11,636,786,770</td>
<td>11,264,662,126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU-27 total</td>
<td>51,859,496,732</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>33,110,800,273</td>
<td>30,761,898,944</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SFC database.

3.4.1.2 The importance of ESF funding in the national context

The importance of the ESF HC investment was also assessed in the national context in contrast to the national expenditure on education and training. On average (annualised data), across the 26 Member States for which data were available (except Greece), the ESF HC investment per year in the 2007-2013 period (using the actual expenditure certified by end 2013) represented 1% of the national education and training expenditure (excluding primary education) (see Table 9). This however varied substantially from 0.2% in the Netherlands and Sweden to 10.4% in Portugal. Hence, three groups of countries were identified:

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34 This was undertaken on the basis of assigning the most appropriate Priority Axes (and in some countries sub-priorities) in the Operational Programmes to the Human Capital field, as well as a cross-check with the other ex-post evaluations to ensure consistency and avoid overlaps with the access to employment and social inclusion themes. Source: SFC database.

35 Data for the national education and training expenditure for Greece was not available from the Eurostat data.
• 19 countries with low significance of ESF HC investment (below 2 %): Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Germany, Denmark, Spain, Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, UK,
• 6 countries with medium significance of ESF HC investment (2-5 %): Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Slovenia.
• 1 country with high significance of ESF HC investment (above 5 %): Portugal.

Using a similar calculation with the total allocated ESF HC investment in the 2007-2013 period, this represented a slightly higher 1.5% of the national education and training expenditure (excluding primary education) (see Table 9). The extent also varied between 0.3% in Sweden to 12.5% in Portugal. The groups of countries, classified on the basis of allocated expenditure, varied as below, with more countries in the medium and high category:

• 14 countries with low significance of ESF HC investment (below 2 %): Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Germany, Denmark, Spain, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Sweden, UK,
• 10 countries with medium significance of ESF HC investment (2-5 %): Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia.
• 2 countries with high significance of ESF HC investment (above 5 %): Czech Republic, Portugal.

Analysis of the significance of the ESF human capital investment by Convergence / Regional Competitiveness objectives (see table 9) shows that out of eight Member States with a high number of Convergence OPs, six Member States had medium and high levels of ESF human capital investment significance in the national education and training expenditure. This signals a more important role played by the ESF human capital investment in the Convergence OPs also due to the wider scope of the ESF human capital investment envisaged for the Convergence OPs in the ESF Regulation.
### Table 9. The significance of the ESF HC investment (allocated and actual expenditure) in the national expenditure on education and training, € million

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member State</th>
<th>ESF HC investment, € million (total certified expenditure paid by beneficiaries as of end 2013)</th>
<th>National education and training expenditure average 2007-2013, € million, excluding primary education</th>
<th>% of the ESF in the national expenditure (A/B)</th>
<th>The degree of significance (actual expenditure)</th>
<th>% of the ESF in the national expenditure (C/B)</th>
<th>The degree of significance (allocated expenditure)</th>
<th>Competitiveness OPs (% of all ESF HC actual expenditure)</th>
<th>Convergence OPs (% of all ESF HC actual expenditure)</th>
<th>Multi-objective OPs (% of all ESF HC actual expenditure)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>12,131.60</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>15,427.80</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>101.8</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>2,723.80</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>81.1</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>1,055.00</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>202.2</td>
<td>7,451.10</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>380.9</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>10,820.20</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>903.6</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>117.6</td>
<td>7,891.50</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>117.6</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>488.1</td>
<td>78,111.00</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>488.1</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>682.1</td>
<td>99,188.50</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>958.3</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>98.8</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>239.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>121.3</td>
<td>6,608.10</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>301.3</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>5,595.10</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>646.3</td>
<td>50,928.80</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>1025.5</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>1,146.50</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>2,104.20</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>84.1</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Volume I – Key findings and lessons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>GDP (€)</th>
<th>GDP Growth (%)</th>
<th>Income Level</th>
<th>Inequality (Gini Coefficient)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>480.3</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>4.8 1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>433.4</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>10.3 2.4% medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>23,275.10</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>116.0 0.5% low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>546.3</td>
<td>19,558.20</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>871.3 4.5% medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>827.2</td>
<td>7,937.10</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>992.3 12.5% high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>107.4</td>
<td>7,442.40</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>290.2 3.9% medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>3,065.90</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>89.9 2.9% medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>1,475.20</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>71.7 4.9% medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>288.5</td>
<td>40,296.70</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>417.6 1.0% low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>14,685.80</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>45.5 0.3% low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>291.7</td>
<td>64,801.60</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>481.4 0.7% low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU-27</td>
<td>4,730.10</td>
<td>491,136.90</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>7408.5 1.5% low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ICF analysis of SFC and Eurostat data, latest data available from Eurostat dates from 2011, no data for Greece.
3.4.1.3 The ESF human capital financial volumes by categories of expenditure

The analysis of financial volumes was also undertaken using the categories of expenditure reported by all MA (see Figure 10).

Overall, 17% of all ESF expenditure could be attributed to the Adaptability policy theme (codes 62, 63 and 64), whereas 40% of all expenditure could be attributed to the Human capital theme across the EU-27 (codes 72, 73, 74) up to 2013 (see Figure 10).

Amongst the individual expenditure codes, the highest financial volume was for Code 73 (participation in education cycle) (€13 billion, ESF Community contribution), followed by the financial volumes for Code 62 (€7.1 billion) (see Volume II, Section 3). This is in contrast to the smallest financial volume allocated to Code 64 (restructuring and economic change) (€1.5 billion).

The country variations were pronounced for both policy themes.

In relation to Adaptability, across the expenditure codes associated with the Adaptability theme (62, 63 and 64) the proportion of financial volumes varied from a high above 50% in Denmark and the Netherlands, to below 10% in Estonia, Spain, Ireland, Luxembourg, and Latvia. Variations were more pronounced at individual code level. For Code 62 (development of lifelong systems), the financial volume varied from €1.2 billion in Germany to no allocations in Ireland, Luxembourg and Latvia. For Code 63 (innovative forms of work), the financial volumes varied from €2.5 billion in Greece to no allocations in 11 Member States. Also for Code 64 (restructuring and economic change), the financial volumes varied from over €300 million in Italy to no allocations in 12 Member States.

In relation to the Human capital expenditure codes associated with the Human capital theme (72, 73 and 74), the ESF allocations varied from 60% in Hungary, Ireland and Luxembourg to below 10% in Austria, Belgium and the UK. Country variations were pronounced for specific codes. For Code 72 (reforms of education systems), the financial volume varied from over €1 billion in the Czech Republic, Germany, Greece and Italy to no allocation in Ireland and Slovakia. For Code 73 (participation in education cycle), the volumes differed from €4 billion in Portugal and €2 billion in Poland to no allocations in Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden. Also for Code 74 (research and innovation skills), the volumes varied from over €1 billion in Germany to no allocations in Cyprus, Ireland, Sweden and Slovakia.

Direct comparisons between the financial volumes analysis using the PA approach and the codes of expenditure approach are problematic due to the different definitions used (the first method relied on the calculation of the financial volumes using an allocation of PAs to the human capital field whereas the second method relied on the allocation of certain expenditure codes which would apply across the PAs) and different understandings and approaches by MAs to allocating the expenditure to the common categories of expenditure.

36 Code 73: Measures to increase participation in education and training throughout the life-cycle, including through action to achieve reductions in early school leaving, gender-based segregation of subjects and increased access and quality of initial vocational and tertiary education and training.

37 Code 62: Development of lifelong learning systems and strategies in firms, training and services for employees to step up their adaptability to change, promoting entrepreneurship and innovation.

38 Code 64: Development of specific services for employment, training and support in connection with restructuring of sectors and firms, and development of systems for anticipating economic changes and future requirements in terms of jobs and skills.
Figure 10. Financial volumes of the ESF HC investment in the codes of expenditure assigned to Human capital, ESF Community contribution, (cumulative to end 2013)

Source: ICF analysis of SFC data.

Codes 62-64 relate to the Adaptability policy field and Codes 72-74 to the Human capital policy field.
4 The effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, gender sensitivity, Community Added Value (CAV) and the socio-economic impact of the ESF human capital investment

Key findings

Overall, ESF HC has supported a high number of participants and entities to address a number of strategic human capital development challenges across the Member States:

- Outputs: Under the theme of human capital development ESF has funded 49.7 million participations\(^{39}\) for individuals between 2007 and the end of 2013.\(^{40}\)
- ESF also supported more than 2.3 million entities (enterprises, educational institutions, NGOs, social partners) and created more than 16,000 networks involving education and training stakeholders.
- ESF support led to the creation of 420,000 courses, qualifications, training programmes, and quality standards.
- Results: By the end of 2013, the overall number of results for participants\(^{41}\) was 21 million gained or maintained a job, obtained a qualification or acquired new skills and competences, consisting of:
  - 3,760,643 results of achieving or maintaining employment
  - 5,937,357 results of obtaining a qualification
  - 11,306,272 other positive results (skills, new competences).
- The number of results, measured at the end of 2013, are likely to increase in subsequent years. Some participants who started ESF funded activities prior to 2013 (and are already counted in the participation figures) will complete their ESF activities and this will increase positive results.

The profile of participants shows a strong targeting of priority groups, with a strong focus on people with lower educational attainment levels (47% of participants), inactive people (46% of participants), employed people (42% of participants) and young people (15-24) in education and training (30% of participants). At least 13% of participants were from a group defined as disadvantaged, almost equally distributed between migrants, ethnic minorities, disabled and other disadvantaged groups. Analysed by objective, 41% of ESF human capital investment participants were from the multi-objective OPs, followed by 32% from the Convergence OPs and 24% from the Competitiveness objective OPs.

In addition, at least 2.3 million entities received the ESF support; more than 16,000 networks were created; and nearly 420,000 qualifications, courses, training programmes and standards were developed.

These figures are based on the specific results reported by the MAs that were similar and could be aggregated (1,193 or 92% result indicators out of total 1,300 result indicators, representing 91% of HC participants). It is likely that more results were achieved. Making the direct link between 21 million results recorded and 49.7 million participations is problematic due to the data quality issues. The aggregated results ratio was 46.3% (i.e. 21,004,272 aggregated results divided by 45,384,631 participations excluding the Priority Axes where no participant results were

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\(^{39}\) The data recording procedures did not allow for differentiating between unique participants and individuals who participated in ESF multiple times. The figures reported are likely to reflect the number of participations - some individuals participated several times. Henceforth, the term ‘participants’ is used, even though the data reflects multiple participations of the same participant.

\(^{40}\) Source: Annex XXIII, SFC database.

\(^{41}\) It is also possible that more than one result could be generated from a single intervention for a participant. In the absence of monitoring data on unique participants this aspect however cannot be captured.
aggregated).

The effectiveness of the ESF human capital interventions varied in terms of financial progress (from 51% in Cluster 1, Lifelong Learning to 121% in Cluster 11, Participation and mobility of higher education students) and the achievement of outputs and results. However, there was a lack of consistent and systematic information about the extent and intensity of ESF support for the participants and entities to enable a more robust cross-OP and cross-country analysis and evaluation in this respect. Similarly, the extent of efficiency was challenging to measure given the absence of the information about the intensity of support. However, the available evidence shows some relationship between the costs per output achieved and the intensity of support (including that more intense interventions cost more resources). Some less cost effective interventions have also been identified.

The efficiency of ESF human capital activities (cost per output achieved by the end of 2013) varied significantly by cluster. The average cost per output ranged from €133 for Quality of higher education to €2,384 for Research and development across the 9 countries concerned. This largely reflected the different types of activities supported. The lower costs reflected the shorter nature of the support provided (and more informal learning compared to support for full qualifications). In contrast, activities with higher costs were of longer duration and provided more intensive support (such as scholarships for full qualifications or the development of lifelong learning systems).

There is some evidence on results being sustained in the in-depth interventions (such as continuing positive employment outcomes, lasting improvements in skills and competences and continued use of education and training materials developed) (based on stakeholder interviews and OP monitoring data). However, a systematic follow-up of ESF participants to measure the sustainability of their human capital development results (at least within 6-12 months) was rarely undertaken. For the in-depth interventions themselves, sustainability is relatively high, with just over 70% either continuing or intending to continue their activities.

Sustainability at the systems level was mixed on the extent to which the developed tools and processes continue to be used after the end of the ESF support.

In terms of the gender sensitivity of ESF HC investment, there was little evidence of deeply embedded gender sensitive approaches. Some examples targeting the human capital development needs of women or taking into account the needs of the different genders have been identified. Much more positive was the general availability of gender disaggregated monitoring data in the OPs and the generally positive results for women in terms of participation and effectiveness. On average, there was a slightly higher proportion of women participating than men (both across the selected interventions and the overall ESF participants in the PAs allocated to the human capital policy field). However, only in 20% of selected interventions, gender considerations were taken into account in the implementation and delivery of activities.

The Community added value of the ESF HC interventions was substantial, as demonstrated in high financial volumes in many MS, but also the numerous examples of scope, role and process effects identified. This included reaching new target groups and new economic sectors, as well as promoting innovative activities, new education delivery methods and new ways of working between the partners in the education and training system.

4.1 The effectiveness of ESF human capital investment

The effectiveness of the ESF human capital investment was assessed as follows:

- Analysis of financial implementation, comparing the actual spending reported with the allocated funds. However, as many projects in the interventions are
still ongoing, the current analysis at the end of 2013 is only indicative of the final financial implementation of interventions.

- Analysis of the different participant groups addressed in the selected interventions (based on Annex XXIII data).
- Analysis of the intervention outputs and results, comparing the targets for outputs and results with the achieved outputs and results. However, this analysis needs to be treated with caution as it was not possible to assess on a systematic basis whether the initial targets were set in a comparable and appropriate way across the OPs (e.g. were the set targets stretching, comfortable or realistic). In OPs, the targets have also been adjusted over time, further complicating such like-for-like comparisons.

It was not possible to conduct a systematic comparison with the results of similar non-ESF sponsored interventions in the national / regional contexts. Such systematic benchmarking was possible in too few interventions (10 out of 87) to provide a solid body of evidence (firstly due to the lack of sufficiently similar non-ESF sponsored interventions and secondly due to the lack of results data on available comparators).

**4.1.1 Progress in the financial implementation of ESF human capital investment (27 Member States)**

The average implementation rate of the ESF human capital investment reached 63.8% across the EU-27 by end 2013 (see Figure 11). Overall, this is a satisfactory rate and likely to increase further as the ESF human capital activities are completed in 2015. As Figure 11 illustrates, however, the financial implementation rates for the ESF human capital investment by end of 2013 varied across the 27 Member States. This means that, in the Member States with low implementation rates, there is a risk that not all of the allocated ESF expenditure will be spent, representing potentially substantial lost opportunities. Based on the financial implementation rate by end 2013, three groups of Member States can be identified:

- **Member States with high financial implementation rate (above 70%)** – including Ireland, Latvia, Finland, Portugal, Slovenia, Austria, Cyprus, Estonia and Germany. The group contains a mix of countries well used to the implementation of ESF procedures (such as Germany) and countries relatively new to the ESF implementation (such as Latvia). The group contains both OPs from the Convergence objective (Latvia, Cyprus, Slovenia, Estonia) as well as the Regional Competitiveness Objective (Ireland, Finland) (and countries with both types of Objectives such as Austria, Germany).

- **Member States with medium financial implementation rate (between 40 and 70%)** – including Spain, Sweden, Italy, Poland, Lithuania, Denmark, the UK, Luxembourg, Belgium, Greece, France, Malta, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Hungary. The group contains a mix of countries well used to the implementation of ESF procedures (such as the UK) and countries new to the ESF implementation (such as Bulgaria). The group contains both OPs from the Convergence objective (Poland, Lithuania, Malta, Bulgaria, Hungary) as well as the Regional Competitiveness Objective (Sweden, Denmark, Luxembourg) (and countries with both types of Objectives such as the Czech Republic, Spain, Italy, the UK, Belgium, Greece and France).

- **Member States with low financial implementation rate (below 40%)** – including the Netherlands, Slovakia and Romania. Slovakia and Romania are relatively new to the implementation of the ESF procedures, especially Romania. In the Netherlands the activities linked to HC started later following the reprogramming of the OP. This group contains OPs from Convergence (Romania), Regional Competitiveness (the Netherlands) and Multi-objective regions (Slovakia).
Figure 11. ESF human capital investment implementation rate, by end 2013, by country

Source: ICF analysis of the SFC database, the rate is calculated by dividing the total funding of the PAs allocated to human capital field by the total amount of certified eligible expenditure paid by beneficiaries in the allocated PAs.

When measured across the selected 87 in-depth interventions, the financial implementation rate (the relationship between the allocated and actual expenditure to date) varied also significantly, from 1% to over 100%, with the median rate of 82% (see Volume III, section 4).42

Across the clusters of ESF HC in-depth interventions in nine in-depth countries (see Figure 12), the financial implementation rate varied from 51% in Cluster 1, Lifelong Learning (LLL) to 12143% in Cluster 11, Participation and mobility of HE students. This indicates that certain types of ESF human capital activities were more advanced in their implementation than others at the time of the ex-post evaluation. In particular, more system level activities in Clusters 1 and 2 experienced lower than average financial implementation rates. In contrast, the financial implementation rates for activities oriented towards individuals with higher level skills in Clusters 11 and 7 were higher than average.

Figure 12. The average financial implementation rate across the clusters

42 The intervention with the 1% financial implementation rate was the IT Sicily OP relatively small-scale (€6 million) intervention 'Actions for tackling early school leaving'. The intervention was delayed, with the full-scale implementation starting in 2013 and 2014, hence, the low financial implementation figures as measured at the end of 2013.

43 Interventions had the financial implementation rate where the actual expenditure exceeded the initial allocation. This could occur when the national or regional authorities allocate more than initially planned own resources to the ESF interventions.
The financial implementation rate of in-depth interventions was compared across competitiveness, convergence and multi-objective OPs (see Volume III, section 6.3). Overall, the selected interventions were able to use 80% of allocated funds. Keeping in mind that the actual spending was provided in some cases as of the end of 2013, the overall implementation rate is satisfactory as the implementation of interventions was still ongoing at the end of 2013.

The competitiveness OP interventions performed best in this regard by utilising allocation and even overcommitting (109%). The financial performance of the convergence OP interventions was slightly below the average (79%). Also the multi objectives OP interventions fall short in this regard, by only using 56% of dedicated funds. These differences can at least partially be explained by the types of activities funded by different Objective OP interventions. The Convergence OP interventions funded relatively few system level interventions which on averaged tended to have lower financial implementation rates (for example in Clusters 1 and 2, see Figure 12 and Volume III, Section 6.3) and funded more individual oriented activities (for example in Clusters 7 and 11, see Figure 12 and Volume III, Section 6.3) which on average had higher financial implementation rates. The opposite trend is observed for Multi-objective OP interventions (see Volume III, Section 6.3).

However, the analysis of the financial implementation rate needs to be treated with caution. This information is only partly indicative of the effectiveness as interventions are still ‘live’ and the final expenditure of the closed interventions is not yet known. Also, the financial allocation of interventions was revised during the OP implementation, facilitating high levels of the financial planning and spending in countries (e.g. Ireland). Finally, several interventions analysed were part of the OP architecture, whereas others were groups of calls for projects. In the former case, where an intervention is a part of the OP architecture, it has a life which spans the whole OP (2007-2013). In the latter case however, a call has a more limited life.

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44 A total of 22 interventions were excluded from the analysis due to missing data on both allocated and actual expenditure. These were interventions coming from DK National OP (6), FR Guadeloupe OP (2), IT Tuscany OP (4), PT Azores OP (3), PT HC OP (7).
(though can span several years), but is typically shorter in comparison to those embedded in the OP architecture. Therefore, there can be calls which could easily reach financial implementation rates of 100% and others which only recently started (e.g. in 2011) and cannot be compared to the interventions running since 2007.

In the interventions with the lower than average financial implementation rates, a range of additional factors explained the low levels of expenditure (see Volume III, Section 4):

- A lack of effective coordination in the implementation between the intermediate bodies and project implementers;
- A lack of the management capacity amongst project promoters, especially among those implementing the ESF for the first time;
- Difficulties in reaching the intended target groups (for example, older workers), including the lack of experience in reaching the target groups, inappropriate targeting and the target group’s lack of interest in the offer;
- The activities aimed at system level changes were slower and more challenging to implement due to the complex and challenging nature of activities supported.

4.1.2 Outputs-The reach of the intended target groups

This is firstly analysed for all 27 Member States, followed by the analysis of findings from the in-depth interventions.

4.1.2.1 Reach of target groups across the 27 Member States

Across the 27 Member States, 49.7 million entries have been registered in the ESF measures supporting the human capital development between 2007 and end 2013 (in the priority axes and sub-priorities assigned to the human capital).

The socio-economic profile of entries varied across the EU-27, with key findings as follows:

- 51% were women, indicating an almost equal gender balance between the participants. The proportion of female participants was the same in the convergence and multi-objective OPs (53%) and lower in the competitiveness OPs (see Volume II, section 4.3.1).
- In terms of the labour market status, 46% of the participants were inactive (mostly in education and training), 42% of participants were employed and finally 11% were unemployed participants. This appropriately reflects the focus of ESF human capital investment towards young people in education and training and employed people, and less so on the unemployed (which were the focus of the other ESF priority on access to employment). The labour market profile of the OP participants differed between the different objective OPs. Whereas in the convergence and multi-objective OPs, the largest group of participants were inactive (mostly in education and training), in the competitiveness OP the employed were the largest group of participants (see Volume II, section 4.3.1).
- In relation to age, young people (15-24) comprised one third of all participants, which reflects the focus on investing in young people. In contrast, older people (55-64) formed only 5% of all participants under the PAs and sub-priorities assigned to the HC field. This indicates an under-used opportunity to reach out to this target group (although there is also a high probability of under-reporting.

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45 The data recording procedures did not allow for differentiating between unique participants and individuals who participated in ESF multiple times. The figures reported are likely to reflect the number of participations - some individuals participated several times. Henceforth, the term ‘participants’ is used, even though the data reflects multiple participations of the same participant. In addition, indirect participants in the intervention were also reported (e.g. all students in a school participating in the ESF project).

46 The percentages add up to 99% due to rounding.
for this category due to the incomplete reporting by the Member States). The proportion of young people was highest in the convergence OPs (43%), followed by competitiveness OPs (32%) and smallest in the multi-objective OPs (24%). In contrast, the proportion of older people was the same in the convergence and multi-objective OPs (4%) and slightly higher in the competitiveness OPs (6%) (see Volume II, section 4.3.1).

- In relation to disadvantaged groups, 13 % of participants in the PAs and actions assigned to the HC field were from a group considered as disadvantaged (this could be considered as a case of under-reporting sensitive data). The different disadvantaged groups were almost equally distributed (all between 3-4 %, covering migrants, ethnic minorities, disabled and other disadvantaged groups). The proportion of disadvantaged group participants was highest in the multi-objective OPs (16%) and lowest in the convergence OPs (7%) (see Volume II, section 4.3.1). The evaluation found some under-reporting in this area due to the sensitive nature of recording data for participants on them belonging to a disadvantaged group and legal constraints.

- In terms of the level of the education attainment, nearly half of all ESF HC investment participants were at ISCED\textsuperscript{47} levels 1-2 (i.e. had completed primary or lower secondary education at the point of entering the ESF activities). This was followed by 28 % of participants who were in secondary education (ISCED 3) and 20 % who were in tertiary education (ISCED 5 and 6). Only 5 % of participants had post-secondary non tertiary education (ISCED 4). This meant that the ESF human capital investment reached across the spectrum of education attainment, but with a clear focus on people in lower educational attainment levels – arguably, one of the target groups most in need of the human capital upgrade. The educational attainment profile of the participants was similar between the different objective OPs (see Volume II, section 4.3.1). The largest group of participants in all OPs were participants with primary / lower secondary education level (47%), followed by participants with upper secondary education (28%). In contrast, participants with post-secondary non-tertiary education were the smallest group of participants (5%).

Analysis of the number of participants by the OP objective shows that 41% of participants were from multi-objective OPs, followed by 32% of participants from Convergence OPs and 24% of participants from Competitiveness objective OPs (see Volume II, Table 23).

The ESF human capital investment also facilitated reaching a significant proportion of the key target groups. The coverage rates were calculated by comparing the annual average of ESF participants in a certain target group category with the overall target group population in the Member State (based on Eurostat data). Such calculations need to be treated with caution though, as noted earlier, as the ESF data refers to the participations (with the possible double-counting of participants, the counting of indirect participants and under-reporting of some sensitive data such as disadvantaged group status) whereas the Eurostat data refers to the number of potential participants.

Looking at the coverage rates by educational level (see Figure 13), the highest coverage rates appear to be for ESF participants at ISCED level 4 (Post-secondary non tertiary education). The ESF human capital investment reached 21 % of students at ISCED level 4 in the 2007-2013 programming period (annual average), ranging from above 100 %\textsuperscript{48} per year in France, Portugal and Slovenia to below 1% in Belgium and the Netherlands.

\textsuperscript{47} International Standard Classification of Education, an international standard classification used to classify the education levels.

\textsuperscript{48} This is likely due to multiple participations of the same participants.
This was followed by the ESF human capital investment reaching 8 % of students at ISCED level 3 (secondary education) in the 2007-2013 programming period (annual average), ranging from 42 % per year in Portugal to 1% in Cyprus and Denmark.

Similarly, across the EU-27, the ESF human capital investment reached 6 % of students at ISCED levels 1 and 2 in the 2007-2013 programming period (annual average), ranging from 60 % per year in the Czech Republic to below 1% in Cyprus, Denmark and Sweden. Finally, the ESF human capital investment reached 6 % of students at ISCED levels 5 and 6 in the 2007-2013 programming period (annual average), ranging from 58 % per year in Estonia to below 1% in Denmark.
Figure 13. The annual average coverage rate of ESF participants by ISCED education level status

Source: ICF analysis of SFC and Eurostat data (Distribution of pupils/ Students by level [educ_ilev]). The three instances of coverage rates above 100% in relation to ISCED level 4 ESF participants could be due to the repeat participations in the ESF activities. No ESF participant status data for Ireland due to the evaluation assessing the OP actions at the level for which Annex XXIII data is not reported.
In relation to the different age groups (see Figure 14), across the EU-27, the ESF human capital investment reached 4% of young people (15-24) in the 2007-2013 programming period (annual average), ranging from 29 % per year in Estonia to below 1% in Cyprus and Sweden. The coverage rate of older people (55-64) was lower, at 1 % at the EU-27 level, with highs of 4-5% in Estonia, Portugal and Slovenia.

*Figure 14. The annual average coverage rate of ESF young and older participants*

![ESF young and older participants coverage rate](image)

Source: ICF analysis of SFC and Eurostat data (Population 1 January by five years age group and sex [demo_pjangroup]). No ESF participant status data for Ireland due to the evaluation assessing the OP actions at the level for which Annex XXIII data is not reported.

Across the EU-27, the ESF human capital investment reached 1% of employed people in the 2007-2013 programming period (annual average), ranging from 11 % per year in Portugal to below 1% in Bulgaria, Cyprus and Denmark (see Figure 15).

*Figure 15. The annual average coverage rate of ESF employed participants*

![ESF employed participants coverage rate](image)

Source: ICF analysis of SFC data, Eurostat (Employment (main characteristics and rates) - annual averages [lfsi_emp_a]). No ESF participant status data for Ireland due to the evaluation assessing the OP actions at the level for which Annex XXIII data is not reported.

However, for the unemployed the coverage rate was higher (see Figure 16). Across the EU-27, the ESF human capital investment reached 3% of unemployed people in the 2007-2013 programming period (annual average), ranging from 42% per year in

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*December 2015*
Portugal to below 1% in eight Member States. The coverage rate for long-term unemployed was slightly lower at 2 %, ranging from 27 % in Portugal to below 1 % in 14 Member States.

*Figure 16. The annual average coverage rate of ESF unemployed and long-term unemployed participants*

Across the EU-27, the ESF human capital investment reached 3 % of disabled people and 1 % of the migrant population (both categories of sensitive data) in the 2007-2013 programming period (annual average), with particularly high coverage rates in the Czech Republic (for migrants), Greece (for disabled) and Italy (for disabled) (see Figure 17).

*Figure 17. The annual average coverage rate of ESF migrant and disabled participants*

Source: ICF analysis of SFC data, Eurostat (Unemployment by sex, age and duration of unemployment (1 000) [lfsa_ugad]). No ESF participant status data for Ireland due to the evaluation assessing the OP actions at the level for which Annex XXIII data is not reported.
Over 2.3 million entities received the ESF support under the priority axes and actions assigned to the human capital policy field. This included 1,997,606 enterprises, over 240,000 educational institutions, and nearly 50,000 NGOs, social partners and other organisations. More than 16,000 networks were created as a result of ESF human capital support by the end of 2013.

Over 2.8 million products (covering a broad range of qualifications, courses, training programmes, educational standards, activities and projects) were created with ESF support under the PAs and sub-priorities assigned to the human capital policy field. This included nearly 420,000 qualifications / courses / training programmes / standards. Limitations were faced when aggregating the indicators relating to entities and products due to different and disparate definitions used in the OPs.

4.1.2.2 The reach of the target groups in the in-depth interventions

Across the 87 in-depth interventions, between 2007 and 2013, 15 million participations49 occurred (or 30% of the total 49.7 million participants in ESF human capital investment). Across the individual clusters of in-depth interventions, the number of participants in the selected interventions differed considerably, from 5.8 million participants in Cluster 4, Quality of school education to 300,000 participants in Cluster 7, Research and innovation (see Volume III, Section 5.1). This shows that the extent of the reach of different target groups varied significantly, with a major focus of ESF human capital investment on young people (especially in the initial education of students).

This reflects the different financial importance of the clusters (see Figure 1). The three clusters associated with the support for young people (clusters 4, 5 and 6) were significantly more financially important compared to the clusters focused on higher education and research and development.

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49 The data recording procedures did not allow for differentiating between unique participants and individuals who participated in ESF multiple times. The figures reported are likely to reflect the number of participations - some individuals participated several times. Henceforth, the term ‘participants’ is used, even though the data reflects multiple participations of the same participant.
**Figure 18. The financial importance of the clusters**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Initial general education</th>
<th>Initial VET</th>
<th>Adult education</th>
<th>Higher education &amp; research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early childhood education and care</td>
<td>€ 2 412 MEUR (66)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of school education</td>
<td></td>
<td>€ 2 267 MEUR (35)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality and labour market relevance of VET</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>€ 1 36 MEUR (31)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction of early school leaving and inclusive education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>€ 1 536 MEUR (31)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research and innovation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>€ 1 127 MEUR (27)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>€ 1 225 MEUR (14)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition to the labour market for young people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>€ 3 110 MEUR (42)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>€ 3 100 MEUR (42)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional up-skilling of employed people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>€ 3 822 MEUR (61)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>€ 3 822 MEUR (61)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up-skilling and requalification of adults</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>€ 2 441 MEUR (47)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation and mobility of HE students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>€ 923 MEUR (18)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ICF analysis of OP monitoring data. Note: the numbers in parentheses refer to the number of interventions in the cluster across the nine in-depth countries.
Overall, the participant profile across the clusters was as follows (see Volume III, section 5.1):

- A slightly higher proportion of women participating than men (52% and 48% respectively), indicating an almost equal gender balance (in favour of women) between the participants of ESF human capital investment. This is similar to the gender breakdown of the ESF human capital activities observed in all 27 Member States (51% women, see section 4.2.2.1).
- In terms of labour market status, the majority (60%) of participants in the 87 selected interventions were inactive (mostly in education and training), followed by the employed (23%) and unemployed (17%). This varies slightly from the labour market status of the ESF human capital activities observed in all 27 Member States where the largest group was also inactive (46%), followed by 42% of employed and 11% of unemployed.
- The variations in ISCED levels of participants by clusters were quite significant and in general reflected the aims of the clusters (e.g. in Cluster 4, Quality of school education most of the participants were students in education and training).

The analysis of this socio-economic data on participants in the selected in-depth interventions showed that the participant profile by cluster was largely in line with the cluster objectives (e.g. in higher education clusters, the majority of participants were at ISCED level 5 / 6 qualification level).

### 4.1.3 Results

#### 4.1.3.1 The ESF human capital investment results in the 27 Member States

The assessment of the key results from ESF human capital investment was challenging. Firstly, all available OP (over 1,300) result indicators have been defined by the Member States across the priority axes and actions assigned to ESF human capital investment. Based on their definition and the evaluators’ judgement, these were classified and aggregated into three common categories of result indicators. Nevertheless, such aggregation is partial. 107 indicators were left out of the aggregation due to their nature and widely differing definitions prevented an aggregation beyond one Operational Programme (see Volume II, Annex II for a full description of the methodological approach and the list of excluded indicators).

The second complication arose because of the different way and the point in time of measuring the results between the Member States. In addition to measuring the number of participants who obtained the positive results, 14 Member States measured the success rates (the proportion of participants achieving the positive results). In these cases, the rates were converted into numbers using the number of total Priority Axis participants.

Merging the two types of measurement is methodologically challenging and requires to be treated with caution. Using this method of estimation, the overall number of results for the participants in ESF human capital investment (covering people gaining or

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50 These are:
- Participants who achieved employment after ESF activity (number and %)
- Participants who obtained a qualification (number and %)
- Participants who obtained a positive result - other than qualification and employment (number and %), such as for example improving skills, competences, successfully completing the activities

51 It is also possible that more than one result could be generated from a single intervention for a participant. In the absence of monitoring data on unique participants this aspect however cannot be captured. However, there is a significant possibility of participants achieving 2 or more results from the same intervention. This is because the results are linked potentially as the individual goes through a process of change due to the intervention. As a result of the intervention, the individual may gain increased skills and competencies and these could be recorded under ‘other positive results’. These new skills and
maintaining a job, obtaining a qualification or acquiring new skills and competences) could be, at end of 2013, estimated to be a minimum of 21 million (see Table 10). The numbers of results should be considered as a minimum achievement as not all available result indicators could be aggregated into the common types (see Volume II, Annex 6). In addition, some result indicators referred to outputs (e.g. participants reached); the available result indicators were representing a fraction of the results and some result indicators were measuring results at a specific point in time (so participants obtaining results before or after that point would not have been captured).

However, it is not the case that at least 21 million participants achieved a result – because there were fewer participants than the number of participations recorded in the OP monitoring systems and a participant could achieve more than a single result.

To put the results obtained in the context, the overall number of 49.7 million participations in the PAs assigned to the HC field has been reviewed as it included both participants from Priority Axes where results were aggregated and participants from Priority Axes where no results were aggregated. Excluding the Priority Axes where no participant results were aggregated from the calculation, the participant number was 45.4 million, and the corresponding result ratio 46.3% (i.e. 21,004,272 aggregated results divided by 45,384,631 participations).

The aggregated result ratio by individual sub-category of aggregated results showed the highest incidence of ‘other positive results’, followed by obtained qualifications and employment results:

- 25% other positive result rate: 11,306,272 ‘Other positive results’ divided by 45,384,631 participations excluding participations from PAs with no aggregated results indicators.
- 13% qualification rate: 5,937,357 ‘qualifications obtained’ divided by 45,384,631 participations excluding participations from PAs with no aggregated results indicators
- 8% employment rate: 3,760,643 ‘employment’ results divided by 45,384,631 participations excluding participations from PAs with no aggregated results indicators.

The most frequent type of results by end 2013 was measured in the category ‘other positive results’ (54%), followed by 27% of results for participants achieving a qualification and 18% of results achieving employment. The results broken down by the objective of the OP showed a similar distribution in the Convergence and Multi Objective OPs. In the Competitiveness OPs, however, the achievement of qualifications was the most frequent type of result.

Table 10. The aggregated results for participants (based on partially aggregated OP result indicators)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of results</th>
<th>Number of results</th>
<th>Convergence OPs</th>
<th>Competitiveness</th>
<th>Multi Objective OPs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants obtaining a qualification</td>
<td>5,937,357</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>2,098,831</td>
<td>2,725,208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants who achieved employment</td>
<td>3,760,643</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>1,116,360</td>
<td>1,690,938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants obtaining other positive results (skills, new competences)</td>
<td>11,306,272</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>3,323,898</td>
<td>2,472,566</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21,004,272</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>6,539,090</td>
<td>6,888,712</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

competencies may then be accredited through a qualification (the second key result). Finally, the individual may then be more likely to enter or retain employment (a third key result).
The numbers of results do not mean that other ESF participants failed to achieve any positive results also due to the fact that some positive results could not be aggregated (although it is also clear that participants did leave the ESF without any positive results upon leaving the ESF intervention). The results measured at the end of 2013 are likely to increase in the subsequent years. This is because participants who started prior to 2013 (and are already counted in the reported participation figures) will complete the ESF activities and are likely to achieve a number of positive results in the future. Indeed, the results measured at the end of 2013 are significantly higher compared to the results measured at the end of 2012.  

When comparing the achievement of results and the total number of OP participants in the priority Axes assigned to the Human capital field (see Table 11), the rate was highest in the competitiveness OPs (54%), followed by convergence OPs (39%) and the multi-objective OPs (37%). However, such direct comparisons need to be treated with caution as the total number of participants includes also indirect participants in the ESF human capital interventions who cannot be expected to achieve results counted in the ESF monitoring system and results do not exclude double counting of cases of participants that re-entered the same intervention.

Table 11. The aggregated results for participants by OP objective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OP Objective</th>
<th>Total number of participants entering*</th>
<th>Total number of results</th>
<th>Total results / participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competitiveness</td>
<td>12,653,410</td>
<td>6,888,712</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convergence</td>
<td>16,653,088</td>
<td>6,539,090</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-objective</td>
<td>20,419,641</td>
<td>7,576,470</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>49,757,057</td>
<td>21,004,272</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ICF analysis of SFC data. * in the priorities assigned to the human capital field (see Volume II, Annex 7).

Other results were calculated for entities supported and products developed by ESF human capital investment.

In the four Member States with relevant result indicators for entities, over 100,000 new businesses were created following ESF activity. The proportion of businesses created averaged 20% (out of supported cases where business creation was promoted) in the four Member States with such indicators. In the six Member States with relevant result indicators, over 190,000 businesses introduced changes in the way they ran their businesses following ESF support (such as innovation, new organisational models, career management systems). The proportion of businesses completing their participation in the ESF activity and introducing the intended changes averaged 18% in the four Member States with such indicators.

In the six Member States with relevant result indicators for products, over 26,000 new and/or innovative products were created following ESF activity.

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52 ESF Expert Evaluation Network (2014) reported 1.2 million of results in the human capital policy field by end 2012. The difference with the results observed in this ex-post evaluation is due to the different definitions of the PAs allocated to the human capital field in in the two studies and resulting different choices of result indicators.
53 Belgium, Germany, Spain, Portugal.
54 Belgium, Germany, Estonia, France.
55 CY, DE, DK, ES, PT, UK.
56 DE, EE, FR, IT.
57 BE, DE, ES, FR, GR, UK.
4.1.3.2 ESF human capital investment outputs and results in the in-depth interventions

The analysis of selected interventions indicated that effectiveness varies in terms of actual relative to planned outputs and results. This analysis relied on the comparison of achievement versus targets and hence did not take into account any potential flaws in the target setting methodology (such as targets having been set too high or too low). An additional factor was the targets for interventions being adjusted during the programming period (give %). Also, for a number of interventions, outputs and results targets were not set (give % or number).

There are a number of interventions analysed with enough evidence (see Figure 20) to suggest that they have performed relatively well against their respective targets, delivered and – in several cases - even (substantially) exceeded the planned outputs and results.

Across the 87 selected interventions, the average rate of output achievement was 105 % (excluding eight interventions where the actual achievement rate was above 300 % and hence could be indicative of issues in the target setting methodology). The proportion of actually achieved outputs versus their original targets ranged from 3 % to over 100 % (see Annex II to this Volume). However, only 11 interventions achieved less than 50 % of the planned targets for outputs (at the point of this ex-post evaluation, in all cases the implementation is ongoing).

Across the 87 selected interventions, the average rate of result achievement was 99 % (excluding two interventions where the actual achievement rate of results was above 300 % and hence could be indicative of issues in the target setting methodology). The proportion of achieved results versus their original targets ranged from 2 % to over 100 % (see Annex II). Only 6 interventions achieved less than 50 % of the planned targets for results (at the point of this ex-post evaluation, in all cases the implementation is ongoing).

On average, 53 % of the 87 in-depth interventions exceeded or met their output targets and 44 % exceeded or met their results targets (see Figure 19). There were however significant variations in the achievement of outputs and result targets by clusters (their key success factors and reasons for variations are analysed in section 4.5):

- The proportion of interventions with exceeded and met output targets ranged from 38 % in Cluster 4, Quality of school education to 80 % in Cluster 2, Quality of higher education.
- The variation in the achievement and exceeding of result targets was slightly narrower, from 14 % in Cluster 5, Quality and labour market relevance of VET to 67 % in Cluster 9 Upskilling of employed.

58 The low achievement rate was observed in the Bulgarian intervention 4.3.04 Development of electronic forms of distance learning in the universities. The main difficulty in the implementation was the delay in the implementation of the activities of some projects caused by prolonged and appealed public procurement procedure. The problems with public procurement procedure were caused by internal features of the project promoters (lack of sufficient experience for carrying out complicated procedures under the Public Procurement Act) and external factors (i.e. the procurement legislation itself). As a large share of the funds for procuring services are for purchase of expensive IT equipment for establishment of the centres and web-based platforms, one procurement procedure in case of a single grant could have saved time, also achieving economies of scale.

59 Ibid.
Figure 19. The proportion of interventions with achievement of outputs and results targets in the total number of interventions in the clusters

Source: ICF analysis of OP monitoring data.

Above expectations (the achievement of target outputs / results is >110 %)
Performance as expected (between 90 %-110 %)
Below expectations (<90 %)
Positive (no targets were set, the number of achieved outputs and results considered)

Overall, the analysis showed that a number of interventions missed targets, and where targets existed, few interventions got their targets right: relatively few interventions were in a range of +/- 10 % of the established targets^60. For a number of interventions, (view also expressed by the stakeholders consulted in the evaluation), the targets were probably set too high or too low.

Across the in-depth interventions, the results data showed an average of:

- 11% employment results were observed immediately after their participation in the intervention – equating to 939,320 results;
- 8% obtaining a qualification – or 565,539 results; and
- 36% achievements of another positive outcome (such as increase in competences or successful completion of courses) – 4,461,882 results.

This is similar to the breakdown of results observed for the ESF human capital investment participants in all 27 Member States (see Table 10).

Figure 20 shows the share of participants achieving results by cluster. However, such comparisons need to be treated with caution because they represent a minimum achievement (as not all available intervention result indicators could be aggregated due to very varied result indicators used in the OPs), and the number of participants used in the denominator includes both indirect and repeat participants (rather than just unique participants). On the other hand, one participants could secure more than a single result recorded in the OP monitoring system.

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^60 In relation to results, across 87 interventions assessed in-depth, 83 result indicators had defined targets, of which only in 27 cases the achievement was within the range of +/-10% the established target.
Figure 20. Results achieved by ESF HC interventions assessed in depth (% of participants)

Source: ICF analysis of MA monitoring data. The data refers to the interventions with both available result data and the available number of participants in the intervention. Where results indicators have been expressed in percentages (e.g. % of participants gaining a qualification), these have been converted into numbers of results using the total number of participants in the denominator. Cluster 3 is not considered in this analysis due to the lack of data on intervention activities focusing specifically on early education.

As the figure shows:

- The highest share of employment results for participants was achieved in Cluster 5 Quality and labour market relevance of VET (47%), followed, at some distance, by Cluster 9 Professional upskilling of employed people (14%). This could be explained by the focus on addressing the labour market readiness of participants in cluster 5 in particular.

- The share of participants achieving qualifications was highest in Cluster 9 Professional upskilling of employed people (49%), followed by cluster 10 upskilling and requalification of adults (22%). Here, a possible explanation could be the nature of target group (employed people and adults).

- The share of participants achieving other positive outcomes was greatest in Clusters 2 Quality of higher education (70%) and 11 Participation of HE students (62%). The results on the share of positive outcomes are more challenging to interpret because of the breadth of positive results included under this definition (which can also include training/employment outcomes measured jointly as results).

The achievement of outputs and results of in-depth interventions was also analysed by the objective (see Volume III, section 6.3). The achievement of the outputs in the in-depth interventions of the three objectives were exceeded – reaching on average 180% (comparing the actual achieved outputs by end 2013 with the original targets). The interventions in the OPs under the convergence objective had the lowest average output achievement rates among the three objectives (120%) and the lowest extreme values. In the multi objective OPs, in the vast majority of clusters (nine out of 11) the outputs were reached or exceeded. The highest average output achievement rates were in interventions under regional competitiveness OPs (366%) which is mainly due to previously mentioned over performance in the Cluster ‘professional up-skilling of employed people’ (923%).

On average the achievement of results exceeded expectations (119%) across the in-depth interventions by OP objective (comparing the actual achieved results by end 2013 with the original targets). The lowest average result achievement rate was in the
interventions under multi objective OPs (93 %). There, the achievement rate was lower than 80 % in five clusters (Cluster 1 Lifelong learning systems and frameworks, Cluster 3 Early childhood education and care, Cluster 4 Quality of school education, Cluster 5 Quality and labour market relevance of VET and Cluster 6 Early school leaving) and in two others no result indicators were set or could be measured (Cluster 9 Employed people and Cluster 11 Higher education students). Not all the interventions under the regional competitiveness OPs had results identified or achievement rates that could be measured. Where they could, 112 % of interventions exceeded expectations. A wider variation of achievement rate across clusters was seen in the interventions under the convergence OPs. There the result implementation rate was 138 % on average.

4.2 The efficiency of ESF HC in-depth interventions

4.2.1.1 The efficiency of achieving outputs

A comparison of costs per outputs (persons supported and products developed) showed a variation across the interventions analysed. Such an approach however has several methodological limitations:

- One intervention covered a range of different activities which are combined in projects in various ways. Consequently, there was a great diversity of outputs and activities between the projects funded. Based on the data available, without a very detailed analysis of individual project budgets it was not possible to accurately analyse the costs per person trained or by individual training programme.
- The monitoring data did not sufficiently reflect the differences in the type of support received by participants: some persons participated in longer training programmes, others through short programmes. Moreover, some persons were supported indirectly (e.g. through innovative study programmes) and were reported as participants.
- The budget monitoring data is available at the level of projects but single projects cover multiple activities and it is not clear what share of the budget went to what types of activities.

The average cost per output varied between the selected interventions and clusters from €133 per output in Cluster 2, Quality of HE, to €2,384 in Cluster 7, Research and development.

The cost per output appeared to be linked to the intensity of the human capital development support received (see Table 12). The costs per output can be categorised into the following categories:

- Very low cost per output (around and below €200): In clusters 1, 2 and 4 aimed at systems the average cost per output was below €200. This is a noteworthy finding given that typically the system level activities tend to be more costly. However, this may be underestimated due to the counting of indirect participants in the intervention outputs (e.g. all students in a school benefitting from an introduction of self-evaluation processes supported by the ESF).
- Low cost per output (between €200 and €1,000) was present in clusters 6 and 9. This reflected from the short duration of training provided to participants and probably the inclusion of indirect participants in the reported outputs.
- Medium cost per output (between €1,000 and €2,000) was reported in clusters 8, 10 and 11 where activities delivered tended to be of longer duration and provide more intensive support.

61 The available monitoring data did not allow to identify the proportion of indirect participants even in the interventions examined in-depth.
The highest cost per output (from around €2,000 per output) were in clusters 5 and 7. In general, this reflected longer courses and more intense training delivered to participants.

Table 12. Comparison of costs per outputs across the clusters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clusters aimed at individuals:</th>
<th>Number of cluster intervention outputs (A)</th>
<th>Actual expenditure of cluster interventions (B)</th>
<th>Cost per output (A/B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 5 Quality of VET</td>
<td>1,083,046</td>
<td>2,071,780,185</td>
<td>1,913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 6 Early school leaving</td>
<td>2,262,021</td>
<td>1,327,410,723</td>
<td>587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 7 R&amp;D</td>
<td>310,135</td>
<td>739,290,067</td>
<td>2,384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 8 Young people</td>
<td>2,906,181</td>
<td>3,519,286,333</td>
<td>1,211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 9 Employed</td>
<td>3,418,641</td>
<td>1,652,853,768</td>
<td>483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 10 Adults</td>
<td>1,237,934</td>
<td>1,627,279,716</td>
<td>1,315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 11 HE participation</td>
<td>672,538</td>
<td>833,953,290</td>
<td>1,240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clusters aimed at systems:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 1 LLL systems</td>
<td>2,167,635</td>
<td>451,693,103</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 2 Quality of HE</td>
<td>1,304,226</td>
<td>173,097,727</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 4 Quality of school education</td>
<td>5,522,491</td>
<td>1,186,565,878</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ICF analysis of OP monitoring data. Outputs are defined as output indicators used in the interventions (mostly participants, but also products), the actual expenditure refers to the expenditure paid out to beneficiaries at the date available (mostly end 2013). Cluster 3 is not considered in this analysis due to the lack of data on intervention activities focussing specifically on early education.

The measurement of efficiency in several wide-ranging interventions may be distorted by the lack of precision in defining the nature of ESF support. This refers to the situations where participants are simply counted without a reflection of the nature and intensity of the ESF support received (hence the cost per output and per result does not reflect the specific nature of the support). This overlooks the reality of some human capital development activities being more costly than others (e.g. a long-duration work placement or a degree course costs more in comparison to awareness raising activities and / or participation in a workshop). Furthermore, the analysis of efficiency was also hampered when indirect participants were counted as participants (e.g. when ESF supported a change in the school curriculum, all of its pupils were reported as ‘participants’, although they only benefitted indirectly from the ESF support). Such approaches can result in very low unit cost calculations and distort the efficiency analysis.

4.2.1.2 The efficiency in achieving results

The cost per result achieved was not available for all of the selected interventions. This was when the interventions did not define result indicators or the data on defined result indicators was not available. The available information on the costs per achieved result therefore should be treated with caution (see Table 13).

The average cost per result ranged from €198 in Cluster 2, Quality of higher education to € 8,340 in Cluster 10, Upskilling of adults (see Table 13).

As expected, the cost per result was higher compared to cost per output. This was the case in all ten clusters where cost per results information was available. However, such direct “like for like” comparisons are limited due to the different nature of indicators considered in the interventions within the same cluster and between the different clusters. Hence, the data needs to be treated with caution due to the aggregation of different types of result indicators. In addition, most interventions are still ongoing at the time of analysis (end 2013) and the analysis could change once the final expenditure data is available.
Comparing the cost per result achieved between the different clusters, similar to the cost per output shown in Table 12, the average cost of result achieved was linked to the intensity of the human capital support received. The highest costs per results observed in Cluster 10, Upskilling of adults and Cluster 5, Quality of vocational education and training reflect the nature of activities in those clusters, which included longer duration training and upskilling activities as well as system level activities such the development of study programmes, new qualification standards or operation procedures. In contrast, the lower average costs per results are observed clusters 1, 2 and 4. This is a surprising finding given that typically the system level activities tend to be more costly (although, as shown in Table 12, the outputs in system level clusters were also less costly compared to other clusters). However, this finding could also be due to the counting of indirect participants in the cluster intervention results (e.g. all students in a school benefitting from an introduction of self-evaluation processes supported by the ESF).
### Table 13. Comparison of costs per results across the clusters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clusters aimed at individuals:</th>
<th>Types of result indicators</th>
<th>Number of cluster intervention results*</th>
<th>Actual expenditure of cluster interventions**</th>
<th>Cost per result</th>
<th>Intensity of support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 5 Quality VET</td>
<td>Successfully supported school staff</td>
<td>553,828</td>
<td>1,972,221,182</td>
<td>3,561</td>
<td>Mostly in-depth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improved job access rate for participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of vocational education students directly supported by ESF out of all vocational education students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of participants gaining a further or higher education and training qualification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coverage rate of target group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 6 ESL</td>
<td>Children and pupils with special education needs integrated in the general education system</td>
<td>693,107</td>
<td>1,255,031,052</td>
<td>1,811</td>
<td>Equal number of in-depth and mixed interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reducing the number of early school leavers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of participants successfully completing programme or achieving certification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of participants progressing to further education/training or employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 7 R&amp;D</td>
<td>Number of successfully supported academic and research workers</td>
<td>163,276</td>
<td>249,340,373</td>
<td>1,527</td>
<td>Mix of in-depth and mixed support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of successfully supported students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The gross job placement effect after 12 months from the conclusion of the intervention</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The number of PhDs awarded annually</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 8 Young people</td>
<td>Number of successfully completing participants</td>
<td>1,395,169</td>
<td>3,454,642,110</td>
<td>2,476</td>
<td>Mix of in-depth and mixed support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of newly created-innovated products with national impact</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 9 Employed</td>
<td>Share of participants who gained professional qualification or key competence</td>
<td>239,211</td>
<td>848,820,950</td>
<td>3,548</td>
<td>Mostly mixed support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Impact of ESF on the number of employees in the company</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proportion of participants who improved their competences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of participants who found job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of participants whose income increased</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of participants who shifted from fixed-term contract to open-ended contact for those already employed and shifted from unemployment to employment for those who did not have a job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 10 Adults</td>
<td>Number of successfully supported persons</td>
<td>186,441</td>
<td>1,554,937,671</td>
<td>8,340</td>
<td>Mix of in-depth and mixed support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 11 HE participation</td>
<td>The number of additional graduates</td>
<td>238,780</td>
<td>320,286,287</td>
<td>1,341</td>
<td>Mostly in-depth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of participants gaining qualification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Clusters aimed at systems:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clusters aimed at systems:</th>
<th>Types of result indicators</th>
<th>Number of cluster intervention results*</th>
<th>Actual expenditure of cluster interventions**</th>
<th>Cost per result</th>
<th>Intensity of support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 1 LLL systems</td>
<td>Number of participants who satisfactorily concluded the course</td>
<td>437,678</td>
<td>451,693,103</td>
<td>1,032</td>
<td>Mostly in-depth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of newly created-innovated products with national impact</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 2 Quality HE</td>
<td>Number of students successfully accomplishing course</td>
<td>874,739</td>
<td>173,097,727</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>Mix of in-depth and superficial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of successfully supported pedagogic and academic workers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The share of successfully supported persons employed at least six months later % of participants gaining a qualification/certification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 4 School education</td>
<td>Number of pupils participating in out of school activities</td>
<td>1,184,511</td>
<td>474,671,481</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>Equal number of in-depth and mixed interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of newly created-innovated product with national impact</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Successfully supported school staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schools implementing new methods</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coverage rate of participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attendance certification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students who improved their grades</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of participants achieving a qualification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ICF analysis of OP monitoring data. Results are defined as result indicators used in the interventions, the actual expenditure refers to the expenditure paid out to beneficiaries at the date available (mostly end 2013). Cluster 3 is not considered in this analysis due to the lack of data on intervention.
activities focussing specifically on early education. *Where results indicators have been expressed in percentages (e.g. % of participants gaining a qualification), these have been converted into numbers of results using the total number of participants in the denominator. **The interventions with no result indicators have been removed from the calculation of the total expenditure of the cluster.

Efforts were also made to compare the costs per outputs and results with similar non-ESF interventions for comparable target groups, implemented in similar socio-economic environments. However, these efforts were hampered by the lack of evaluations providing clear cost (as well as output and result) data. Even where comparators were provided⁶², they were often not aimed at precisely the same target groups and were implemented within different socio-economic contexts.

4.3 The key success factors of the ESF human capital investment (what has worked for whom and why)

The implementation of some ESF activities aimed at the human capital development was more successful than others (see Table 14). Such analysis needs to be treated with caution because of the following limitations:

- The limited validity of the current assessment basis due to the low number of interventions examined (in two clusters, only 4-5 interventions were analysed in-depth) and gaps in the data on targets and/or outputs and results;
- Large variability of the definitions of results across the interventions makes the comparison of results achieved methodologically problematic and hence the average values used hide large variations;
- Differing content of the interventions in the same cluster (i.e. Cluster 5 Quality of VET the interventions include teacher training; programme quality; measures to improve access/participation; etc.);
- Differing scope of the interventions (both financial investment intensity and the number of participants);
- Comparing interventions at different implementation phases at the time of ex-post evaluation.

⁶² One comparable non-ESF financed national intervention was found in Bulgaria, two in France, two in Italy, two in Portugal, see Volume III, section 4
### Table 14. Overview of the clusters of ESF human capital investment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster**</th>
<th>Achievement outputs results***</th>
<th>Cost output* per Financial implementation rate</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Financial importance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reference source in the report:</td>
<td>Figure 19</td>
<td>Table 12</td>
<td>Figure 12</td>
<td>Figure 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment:</td>
<td>+ below 50 %</td>
<td>+ below 1,000 €1,000-€3,000+++ above 80 %</td>
<td>+ below 50 %</td>
<td>+ below 1 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>++ 50-80 %</td>
<td>++ €1,000-€3,000+++ above 80 %</td>
<td>++ 50-80%</td>
<td>++ 1-2 million</td>
<td>++ €1-2 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+++ above 80 %</td>
<td>+++ above 80%</td>
<td>+++ above 80%</td>
<td>+++ above 2 million</td>
<td>+++ above €2 billion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Cluster 1 Lifelong learning systems | ++ | + | +++ | + |
| Cluster 2 Quality of higher education | +++ | ++ | +++ | + |
| Cluster 4 Quality of school education | ++ | +++ | +++ | +++ |
| Cluster 5 Quality of vocational education | + | +++ | ++ | +++ |
| Cluster 6 Reducing early school leaving | +++ | ++ | ++ | ++ |
| Cluster 7 Research and innovation | +++ | +++ | + | ++ |
| Cluster 8 Transition to the labour market of young people | ++ | +++ | +++ | +++ |
| Cluster 9 Support to upskilling of employed | ++ | +++ | +++ | +++ |
| Cluster 10 Upskilling of adults | +++ | ++ | + | +++ |
| Cluster 11 Participation in higher education | +++ | +++ | + | + |

Source: ICF analysis of OP monitoring data. *cost per output was used as indicator for the cost-efficiency as the cost per result was not possible in all the clusters. ** cluster 3 early school education is not considered in this analysis due to the lack of sufficiently robust data on the interventions focussing on the issue. *** based on the comparison of achieved vs target outputs and results.

Bearing the methodological limitations in mind, a contrast across the different activities shows that the implementation of the following groups of ESF human capital investment activities were particularly successful:

- Cluster 6, Reducing early school leaving, several types of successful activities were successfully supported as described below.63 Specific training courses for

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63Similarly, the ESF Expert Evaluation Network also found that strategies to prevent school drop-out (such as diversifying provision) appear to be successful both at reducing drop-out and increasing academic achievement, see ESF Expert Network (2014).
early school leavers or young people at risk were successful as they offered an attractive learning offer (including the components of vocational training and the use of technologies). Integrated packages of support measures were developed and succeeded in addressing the needs of young people through a range of measures delivered in a flexible and individualised way (see box below). The involvement of parents and teachers in the activities was also key. The interventions aimed at tackling early school leaving were less successful when they supported a wide and disparate range of activities as well as when they were implemented by delivery partners with insufficient management capacity and experience of managing the EU funds.

Box 3: Examples of ESF activities reducing early school leaving

The **Youthreach intervention in Ireland**\(^{64}\) offered the provision of an out-of-school mode by which both young people and young adults may return to and/or complete their education in a non-threatening learner centred environment. It was successful in supporting the groups targeted with many centres succeeding in providing individualised, flexible and balanced programmes helping learners move towards positive participation in society.

The **Bulgaria intervention for children with special needs** focused on establishing a supportive environment for children with special educational needs (SEN) to facilitate their integration in the general education system. Most importantly, over 3,000 children with SEN have been integrated in the general education schools and in the social life. Schools improved their capacity to provide suitable environments for the education of children with SEN and teachers increased their knowledge and competences in working with children with SEN. Activities were carefully programmed to address the lack of supportive environments integrating the general education of children and pupils with SEN. The activities corresponded to the needs of the target groups and contributed to the solution of existing problems.\(^{65}\)

In **Italy**, the national-level ‘interventions to promote academic success for schools of the first cycle’ G1 focused on addressing the disadvantages of primary and lower secondary school pupils at risk of social and cultural exclusion in convergence regions. Vulnerable groups such as disabled pupils and pupils with a migrant background were targeted. The intervention focused on improving disadvantaged children’s access to education through the involvement of families and the promotion of civic and environmental education as well as culturally sensitive learning environments.

In **Latvia**, the intervention ‘Implementation of support measures for decreasing social exclusion of youth and integration of disabled youth into education’ focused on the development of a variety of innovative educational support measures targeting pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities to prevent their social exclusion. The intervention’s resources were also used to support teaching assistants, psychologists, and social educators.

- Cluster 8, Transition to the labour market for young people, activities succeeded when they offered the vocational apprenticeships and shorter term internships in demand both by the young people and the employers, due to the attractiveness of learning experience and the conducive economic context. Having a career guidance element ensuring that young people are supported in their labour market choices, was also an important factor in success.\(^{66}\)
- Cluster 2, Quality of higher education, activities supported more system level changes such as the improvement of study programmes, staff training and the use of e-learning. The activities were more successful when supporting the overall reform agenda of higher education in the national context. This

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\(^{64}\) The national evaluation of Youthreach in 2010 found generally positive overall findings but with numerous areas for improvement. See “An Evaluation of Youthreach” Inspectorate Evaluation Studies, Department of Education and Skills, 2010.

\(^{65}\) This was confirmed by interviews in the country where the interviewed experts and surveyed beneficiaries stress the long term effects of the intervention for the target groups and evaluate highly the sustainability of the intervention.

\(^{66}\) Similar critical success factors for interventions aimed at young people were also found in the evaluation of ESF support to Lifelong learning, see Ecorys (2012).
however, made them also prone to the changes in the political climate. Some activities were less successful when the university staff implementing the ESF projects were less familiar with the implementation procedures and hence delays in implementation and achievement of outputs and results.

- Cluster 11, Participation in higher education, activities were aimed to support individuals in their higher education studies. Most of the interventions offered the support in form of scholarships to students of higher education (which explains their high cost per participant). The overarching success factor was the high demand for such scholarships amongst the students (which indicates that the high level of external demand is conducive to successful implementation), as well as the clearly established selection criteria, fast and well managed applicant selection and scholarship implementation processes between the delivery partners.

- Cluster 10, Upskilling of adults, activities provided mostly training courses for the adults, including the unemployed. Activities worked well because the training provided was connected to labour market needs and the participants were able to increase their employability. Success was supported with broader national campaigns to increase the skills of the workforce as well as the nature of the learning courses offered, including the e-learning and flexible provision.

Box 4: Examples of activities to upskill the adults

In Denmark, intervention 1.1.1 education and training cover primarily professional upskilling of the labour force in employment to improve the competences available to enterprises. More than half of the projects funded are “development projects” aiming to develop test approaches to competence development among specific groups.\(^{67}\) The intervention has impacted positively on competence development – albeit at a slightly lower level than the set targets.

The Portuguese mainland OP intervention ‘Group: 2.2, 8.2.2, 9.2.2 Education and training courses for adults’ led to a direct change for the individual participants in the courses (improvements of qualifications obtained and improved employability). It also opened the way for their future involvement in lifelong learning activities. The intervention courses were part of the broader national campaign of the Initiative “New Opportunities”. This public awareness campaign successfully disseminated the idea that it is worthwhile to invest in individual upskilling and re-qualification.\(^{68}\)

Conversely, the implementation of the following activities was comparatively less successful:

- Cluster 4, Quality of school education, where the success differed across the different types of activities implemented:
  - The teacher training activities were successfully implemented when they offered training courses on new and innovative teaching methodologies which could be applied in the educational processes by the teachers,
  - The development of schools’ capacity (including support to self-assessment, quality assurance procedures, development of educational outputs) were less successful due to the lack of focus on the areas in most need of support and the lack of guidance on the quality requirements in the development of educational outputs.

\(^{67}\) The national evaluation of human capital theme in the Denmark OP also found that the programme developmental projects will in the longer run have a positive influence on the general employment policy in terms of new solutions, methods, and innovative initiatives, see LB Analyse (2012) Ternævaluation af den danske strukturfondsindsats 2007-2013 – ”Udvikling af menneskelige ressourcer”.

\(^{68}\) Similar findings were reported in the national evaluation of the New Opportunities Initiative which reported that the ESF-support allowed to provide a very large number of EFA-participants to achieve a higher level of qualification (estimate of approximately 100,000 EFA-participants who finished the course with a certification). Without the 70% ESF contribution this number would have been much lower. See Carneiro (Coord.) (2010) Iniciativa Novas oportunidades – Resultados da Avalição Externa 2009-2010.
- The development of student skills and competences were effective when based on an attractive offer of learning for young people (including the use of technologies) and a combination of traditional classroom based and out-of-school learning activities.

- In Cluster 7, Research and innovation, most of the interventions offered financial support to the researchers (which explains their high cost per participant) or the development of skills required in research and innovation. The activities were successful when there was a high demand for such support amongst the researchers (which indicates that the high level of external demand is conducive to the successful implementation), as well as clearly established selection criteria, fast and well managed applicant selection and scholarship implementation processes between the delivery partners.

- In Cluster 9, Upskilling employed people was delivered through training courses. Activities were more successful when they fulfilled a clear gap in the labour market (e.g. training for a sector specific qualification in a sector with labour shortages, training for entrepreneurship, see box below), provided an easy and flexible access to training for employed (e.g. in the form of individual vouchers) and were well marketed to the employed and companies. Activities struggled when faced with challenging specific groups of employed people to participate in training. In particular, attracting older workers to training was a challenge indicating the need for other more effective solutions.

Box 5: Examples of ESF activities to upskill the employed

The Czech Human Resources and Employment OP intervention ‘Training of employees’ had statistically significant positive impacts for certain individual employer-led projects on the ‘number of employees’ variable. On average, the support measures increased the number of positions by ten for each supported company. Disaggregating this result by company size, impacts were clearly discernible among large (+15 job positions) and medium-sized companies (+8 job positions). However, there were no, or even negative, impacts among the small companies supported. Education in technical skills and in foreign languages had the most positive influence on the ‘number of employees’ variable among the support measures provided. In contrast, training focusing on soft skills seems to have had the lowest impact on employment. The evaluation also found positive impact on economic results of large firms.

The France National OP 1.3.1 intervention ‘Support to entrepreneurs and buyers’ supported the development of entrepreneurship, notably for women and for people who have difficulty accessing the traditional banking system, and to train and support people in creating businesses. It was mostly carried out by the major national networks that work on supporting business creation (non-profit organisations in the main cases). These networks are well equipped to support business creation and have years of experience. The ESF intervention allowed them to target specific groups with great success. Thus, the data on the survival rate of new business activities developed in the context of the intervention showed good results in comparative terms. The survival rate was 70 % while the survival rate for enterprises that did not receive ESF support was 66 %.

69 Similarly, the ESF Expert Evaluation Network found that where competencies of existing employees have been developed, these are seen as useful in the workplace, especially the development of interpersonal skills, see ESF Expert Evaluation Network (2014).

70 This finding is echoed in the evaluation of the ESF support to lifelong learning, which also found that older workers were hard to reach because many have not trained for some years and because they have a lower priority than the other target groups, see Ecorys (2012).

71 See the national counterfactual impact evaluation „Pilotní counterfactual impact evaluation OP LZZ, oblast podpory 1.1“.

72 See the France National OP Evaluation Report 2012. It also pointed out the existence of a significant financial leverage effect for the 1.3.1 intervention. Due to the large panel of organizations (mainly national networks for business creations, regions councils and other public institutions) involved in co-financing the intervention, for ESF 1 euro spent, 2.3 euro was mobilized from other funders. In the case of the rest of the OP, the figure is lower: for 1 euro coming from ESF, 1.8 euro was mobilized.
Comparing the clusters, implementation of the following activities was least successful. However, this does not mean that they have failed completely as some interventions in these clusters have shown a very positive performance:

- **Cluster 1**, Lifelong learning systems, activities were aimed at instigating system level improvements in the form of new programmes, education management procedures and accompanying staff training. Such system level activities took a longer time to develop due to their complex nature and long lead-in time for development. Therefore the measurement of their success at the end 2013 might be misleading and could under-report the final performance as many activities were still being implemented. The activities were affected by changes to the political climate during the implementation period, which contributed to delays in the project delivery, changes in the project budgets and significant shifts of emphasis between the intervention’s objectives. They were also affected by the insufficient management capacity of partners which was especially important in the implementation of large scale activities in the cluster.

- **Cluster 5**, Quality of the vocational education and training, where support was mostly provided to the participation in VET courses (and to a smaller extent to VET teacher training). Activities worked better when ESF support was given to boost the participation in the existing VET courses with established delivery models and high quality partners.

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**Box 6: Examples of successful ESF VET activities**

**The Latvia OP intervention 1.2.1.4 Promotion of the attractiveness initial vocational**

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73 This is shown in the regional evaluation of the intervention undertaken, which also found the training of healthcare assistants would have impacted positively on the economic and employment context of Apulia, see IPRES, Attività di valutazione ex post “Qualificazione/Riqualificazione Operatori Socio Sanitari” nell’ambito dei progetti per attività formative cofinanziate FSE, dallo Stato e dalle Regione Puglia POR 2000-2006 nonché dal POR FSE 2007-2013, Asse I Adattabilità.

74 The interviews with the stakeholders in Malta showed that the OP project 2.139 Increasing Accessibility, Flexibility and Innovation to MCAST Life-Long-learning Course Offer shows a real promise in delivering innovation in the course delivery. However, its final outputs and results will only be recorded in 2015 and 2016. Hence, it would be misleading to assess it as underperforming at the end of 2013.

75 For example, interviews with stakeholders in the Czech Republic showed that ESF activities aimed to support the reform of higher education (e.g. introduction of tuition fees model) were affected by frequent personnel changes at the Ministry of Education. This negatively affected the project management and the delivery of the projects, particularly when they addressed politically and socially sensitive issues.

76 Similarly, the ESF Expert Evaluation Network found mixed evidence on the effectiveness of vocational training in terms of developing skills (AT, FR), see ESF Expert Evaluation Network (2014).

77 For example, in the Sicily OP intervention ‘Training courses in the second, third and fourth years of the technical and professional secondary schools (Call for tender 19/2011)’ only the 50% of the resources allocated were paid to beneficiaries at the time of this evaluation. Interviews with stakeholders confirmed that this was mainly due to the delays in the beneficiaries uploading the data on payments in the payment monitoring system and consequent delays in validating the advanced payment, which entailed the payment deadlock. Considering that the activities supported are interrelated (they are the three annual courses of an integrated pathway that entail the achievement of a vocational qualification), the financial/management problems of even just one of the activity negatively impact on other activities.
**education**: For many years vocational education in Latvia suffered from low prestige, attracting mainly students with low knowledge and poor motivation to study. The ESF stipends have contributed to turning round the situation by generating a virtuous circle whereby attendance and discipline is improved, there is motivation to deliver better education, it becomes clear that vocational education is a route to a respectable profession and the prestige of the schools increases, resulting in better and more motivated students. Successful graduation from the vocational education programmes has a direct medium and long term benefit to the students in terms of better job prospects. The ESF activity delivery model is straightforward: enrolling students receive the initial stipend and provided they perform adequately they can proceed to a higher stipend.

**For the Portugal OP intervention ‘Professional Courses’** the national evaluations showed\(^78\) that the expansion of professional courses (secondary education path with a strong connection to the labour market) in public schools to be the most important investment in the education and training of young people. This option has contributed most to the overall increase of students in paths of dual certification. They also showed that there are signs that professional courses have gained their own identity and recognition and are valued as a specific educational path and not only as a last resort in the fight against school failure. Young people are receptive towards them.

In addition to the cluster-specific reasons for success, a number of more general factors were identified across the clusters. The following reasons were identified as contributing to the successful implementation and effectiveness:

- Good financial planning and management amongst the delivery partners including the managing authorities, intermediary bodies and project implementers;
- Well-established partnerships and delivery models;
- An ability to attract the target groups by offering appropriate services based on a well-grounded understanding of the target group’s needs;
- Quality partners ensuring the services are delivered in an effective way; and
- Meeting the real identified needs on the ground.

In contrast, the cross-cutting factors for explaining the under-performance included:

- Delays in project selection and contracting procedures;
- A lack of coordination in delivering the projects leading to confusion in the roles and responsibilities of the intermediary bodies and project implementers;
- The organisational challenges faced when implementing completely new approaches and partnerships (which are to be expected when implementing activities from scratch and mean in the future extra attention should be devoted to nurturing new activities which require additional support in the set-up phase);
- Difficulties in attracting the intended target groups;
- Delays caused by an obligation to use public procurement procedures and project partners not being familiar with the public procurement rules and the ESF.

These findings are confirmed by the analysis of good practice examples from the ESF human capital activities (see Volume IV). The **key factors fostering a successful performance** in the good practice examples related to the adequate planning of the delivery, involvement of stakeholders especially the employers, the provision of tailored support based on the identified needs and flexibility and openness in the communication with participants. While not being a complete guarantee of success,

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\(^78\) Agência Nacional para a Qualificação – ANQ, External evaluation of the post-training paths of graduates from professional courses within the context of the expansion of this offer on the national qualification system; Agência Nacional para a Qualificação – ANQ, External evaluation of the impact of the expansion of professional courses on the national qualification system.
these factors have clearly contributed to the successful performance of the good practice examples.

4.4 The sustainability of the ESF HC interventions

Various aspects of sustainability of ESF human capital interventions were considered, covering both the sustainability of results for individuals and systems as well as the sustainability of interventions themselves following the ESF support.

4.4.1 Sustainability of results for interventions aimed at individuals

In the case of the sustainability of results for individuals, no pre-determined time horizon was set, but in the few cases where data was monitored, it tended to be for sustainability of employment 6 or 12 months after leaving the intervention. However, available data at intervention level was limited and in many cases qualitative assessments were made.

In general, quantitative data on the sustainability of results of interventions within a specific time horizon for individuals and systems was missing. There was very little evidence of follow-up surveys or other methods of measuring the sustainability of results having been undertaken among the selected interventions (see also Table 15, where all the available information across a small number of interventions is summarised). This lack is especially serious given the long-term nature of the human capital investment which is expected to lead to results in the medium to long term.

This is despite the point that in principle, for interventions aimed at individuals (such as Cluster 8, Transition to the labour market for young people and Cluster 9, Upskilling of employed people), sustainability could be well evidenced. Results achieved could be measurable and easy to count, for example, entering employment, accessing further education and training and – using participant surveys – behavioural shifts (e.g. change of attitudes to education and training). Participants gained knowledge and skills which usually continued to be applied over a longer period (based on the available self-assessments of participants). As a consequence, mostly qualitative evidence available was used to evidence the sustainability of the selected interventions, and where available, quantitative measurements of results for participants after their ESF participation.

The review of sustainability indicated a considerable variety in the legacy of the interventions reviewed for individuals. The key types of sustainable results observed were continuing positive employment results, lasting improvements in skills and competences and the continued use of the products developed with the ESF support.

Continuing positive employment results or increases in employability were present in all clusters except Cluster 4, Quality of school education where the labour market orientation was not the primary focus of cluster activities (focussing on the development of student skills in the initial education sector). The 14 interventions where sustainability of employment data was available were distributed across six clusters and showed a wide variation in the proportion of employment results sustained, from 30 % to 91 %. Continuing positive employment results were especially high in activities associated with higher education (targeting higher education students and staff) (in clusters 2, 7 and 11), reflecting the already high levels of human capital amongst the target group which after ESF support had few difficulties in entering the labour market. In contrast, sustained employment results were lower when working with a challenging target group (such as long-term unemployed in Cluster 10, Upskilling of adults). This is signalling the importance of paying attention to the target group characteristics in ensuring the sustainability of results.

Lasting improvements in participant skills and competences were reported to a lesser extent (in four clusters 1, 4, 5, 6, covering a variety of target groups such as general education students, young people and people in lifelong learning). However, this could
be due to the difficulties in capturing such sustained results even qualitatively and hence should not be over-interpreted.

**Table 15. Available evidence on the sustainability of results of the interventions for individuals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Available evidence on the sustainability of results for individuals in the cluster interventions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 1 LLL systems</td>
<td>Increase in employability through recognition / validation of prior learning and work experience and participation in training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster Quality HE 2</td>
<td>Czech intervention 'Quality of higher education': continuing use of the products developed Czech intervention 'Improving the quality of programmes in post-secondary and higher education (3.3)': positive continuing employment results (in, 91 % of successfully supported individuals (within the whole priority axis 3) who achieved ISCED level 3 qualifications (i.e. those who are likely to be higher education students) either continued in their studies or are employed six months after the end of support. The equivalent figure for those who achieved ISCED level 5 or 6 qualifications was 83 %).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster ECEC 3</td>
<td>n/a (due to the difficulty in isolating the elements of human capital interventions specific to early childhood education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster School education 4</td>
<td>Italian NOP intervention 'Improving the knowledge and competence levels of youths'; Maltese project 'Increasing Student Capacity': improved student competences The Apulia OP intervention Rights at School: Reduction in the probability of early school leaving Sicily OP 'Integrated Plan for primary and secondary schools' intervention: improved relationships between the students and teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster Quality VET 5</td>
<td>French OP 4.1.1 Intervention 'Innovation and pedagogical adaptations': long-term effects of improving the professional skills and improving non-professional skills Latvia intervention Attractiveness of VET: increased attraction of VET (in Latvia, the proportion of VET students rose by 15 p.p. in 2012/2013 compared to the baseline; in Portugal, the proportion of graduates from vocational courses rose by 250 % from the baseline) Portugal intervention 1.2 Professional courses: the expansion of the numbers Professional courses had also an important impact on the growing number of individuals who achieved a double certificate (upper secondary school degree and professional qualification level IV). This increased the individuals’ employability and their chances to enter further education and training at a higher level. Sicily OP intervention 'Training courses in the second, third and fourth years of the VET system' intervention; Portugal mainland and Azores OP's 'Professional courses' interventions: increased employability of participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 6 ESL</td>
<td>Ireland Youthreach intervention, IT National OP F.1 Interventions to promote academic success for schools of the first cycle, IT National OP G.1 Flexible training interventions aimed at the recovery of basic education for young people without qualifications and adults, PT Intervention 1.3 Courses for young people: improved positive attainment rates Ireland Youthreach intervention, LV HRE OP 1.2.2.4.2 Implementation of support measures for decreasing social exclusion of youth and Integration of disabled youth into education; PT mainland OP 1.3, 8.1.3, 9.1.3 Education and training courses for young people: reduction of drop-out rates Ireland Youthreach intervention; FR National OP 3.2.2 Fight against early school leaving, IT Piedmont OP Fight against school abandon (Curative actions for dropouts) : increased employability of participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 7 R&amp;D</td>
<td>Apulia intervention Support to PhDs: positive continuing employment results (half of the PhD-holders that participated in the survey found a job within 3 months from the attainment of the PhD degree; 86 % of candidates who completed their PhD more than 48 months ago had a job) Portugal intervention 4.1 Advanced training scholarships: positive employment effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 8 Transition to the labour market of young people 8</td>
<td>Reduction in youth unemployment (IT Piedmont Labour market intervention) the employment effects after one year of action 1 (basic training) were very good (the net placement difference is 25%) but the long term effects of the second component of the intervention were less positive; in Malta 1.36 Youth employment programme six months following completion of assistance, 88 % of young people assisted continued to be in employment or further study; in Portugal young people at this qualification level funded by the ESF 1.1 intervention (3 and 4) needed half the time to find a first job after education than those with a lower qualification: 14.8 months in comparison with 26 months). Positive continuing employment results (in the Bulgarian intervention Student internships, over 15 % of students who had completed an internship were offered a job by the same employer; in the French intervention 2.2.1 52 % were employed less than 6 months after the training actions, which declined to 50% of employed more than 6 months after the training actions, in the Azores 1.2.1 intervention 57 % of young people continued to be employed after 6 months ) Positive continuing contacts with employers (in the CZ Intervention Traineeships of youth over 45% of trainees continue to cooperate with internship providers three months after the end of support) Portugal OP 1.1 Intervention Vocational apprenticeships, data on the average employability of apprentices are not available. However, the employment rates of young people with the qualification level that corresponds to the level achieved in apprenticeships (Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (levels 3 and 4)) indicate that the intervention may have had a positive and enduring effect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster Employed 9</td>
<td>CZ OP HRE intervention 'Training of employees': positive continuing employment results (96 % of beneficiaries are in employment or further education even six months after receiving support (data relates to the whole Priority Axis of the CZ HRE OP). In French intervention 3.1.1 Support to entrepreneurs and buyers the enterprise survival rate for participants of the intervention reached 70% (survey in 2012, all participating hitherto)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 10</td>
<td>Positive continuing employment results (IT Sicily Training courses for long-term unemployed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Evidence showed that types of results differ in terms of sustainability depending on the implementation context. Examples include the use of training vouchers in the Bulgarian intervention ‘I Can’. Training vouchers provided participants with a high degree of choice concerning the type of training, but such choice can detach training from the specific needs of the labour market. In practice, training courses were not always linked to specific jobs as the individuals were simply using the vouchers to access training. Another example is the French National OP Intervention 1.1.3 Support to job mobility and employees outplacement, where the sustainability of results (defined as the upskilling / obtaining employment) is considered to vary greatly depending on the region in which the intervention’s projects were implemented. This was influenced by the different socio-economic contexts of the regions where the participants found it easier to access employment in the regions less affected by the crisis.

### 4.4.2 The sustainability of results for interventions aimed at systems

Across the 87 selected interventions, 25 interventions aimed at delivering system oriented activities of human capital development (such as new educational programmes, processes for improved education system management, staff capacity building). Sustainability was expressed by beneficiaries’ improved organisational capacity, including their technical capacity in terms of equipment and resources, capacity for managing projects co-financed from the ESF, increased competitiveness, establishing sustained partnerships that are already used for other actions. Innovative pedagogical approaches and practices were developed under the analysed interventions that continue to be used and indeed even transferred into other stakeholders’ activities. New links with other organisations and good partnerships for joint actions have been established amongst the stakeholders. As information on sustainability was not available for all interventions, it was not possible to draw distinctions by OP objective in this respect.

Seven interventions have already produced results beyond the interventions’ scope (see the examples below). For a number of interventions, the activities developed were integrated into national systems and they contributed to changes in education policies at the system level (see section 4.5.3).

**Box 7: Examples of the sustainable activities at the systemic level**

In the **Czech intervention ‘Quality assurance in initial education’**, the continued use of self-assessment products developed by the intervention is ensured through the public teacher-oriented web portal. This indicates that the tools continue attracting interest. The outputs are also promoted on the relevant section of the website of the Ministry of Education. The National Institute for Further Education (the major training body for staff in education and training) delivers training courses integrating the topic of school-level self-assessment. The IT systems developed in the intervention have already been partially launched and integrated into the website of the Czech Republic School inspection authority. The testing of students in 5th and 6th grades will be maintained using the approach and systems developed in this intervention.

In the **Czech intervention ‘Development of human resources in research’**, one out of two international partnerships supported with the ESF funding continued to last after the end of ESF support.

In **France**, the intervention 4.1.1 ‘Innovation and pedagogical adaptations’ supported the development and implementation of the national Key Skills programme by strengthening its focus on personalised training paths for people with low qualifications.
One of the main achievements of the **Latvian intervention focusing on teacher performance** (Educator Competitiveness) was the introduction of a quality evaluation scheme which is still in use at the time of evaluation. The quality evaluation scheme continues as part of an ongoing reform of teachers’ pay and achievement of the top quality grades in the competence scheme is expected to be an indicator in the new programming period. This can be regarded as a system effect.

For the **Malta project ‘2.139: Increasing Accessibility, Flexibility and Innovation to MCAST Lifelong Learning Course Offer’**, the key sustainable result of the project is an established resource which could be used beyond the timescale of the project. This provides a step forward in the accessibility of lifelong learning in Malta. It introduced flexible learning options that were new to the lifelong learning offer in Malta and introduced an unprecedented degree of accessibility to participants.

High sustainability was reported in the Maltese project ‘**Professional Development Programmes for MCAST Staff and Students’ Top-Up Degrees (1.36)**’. The developed degree programmes are still delivered by MCAST as part of their new curriculum.

However, the sustainability of results aimed at systems varied by cluster. The available evidence showed the sustainable results in about half of the interventions aimed at systems. System impact was more sustained in the relevant interventions in the Cluster 1, Lifelong learning systems, Cluster 7, Research and innovation and Cluster 2, Quality of higher education:

- In Cluster 1, Lifelong learning systems interventions show a high degree of sustainability. Sustainable results were identified in all four system-oriented interventions in this cluster. Indeed, products and system level tools are still being used after the ESF support (e.g. in the Czech intervention the continued use of self-assessment products developed by the intervention and made accessible on the public teacher-oriented web portal indicates that the tools continue attracting interest).

- In Cluster 7, Research and innovation, two interventions developed system tools to attract and manage researchers which have remained in use. National partnerships and methodological tools are also frequently being used. However, training programmes and technologies can become obsolete (and have done so in approximately two out of five cases). Due to the long-term effects of research and innovation, the sustainability of intervention impacts at the system level depends on the capacity of organisations to integrate them. In this regard, two interventions analysed had an “institutional networking approach”. Creating networks and promoting the involvement of all relevant stakeholders (such as public institutions, research centres, universities and enterprises) was a key factor for the sustainability of the ESF contribution.

- The sustainability of five system oriented interventions within Cluster 2, Quality of higher education depended, to a large extent, on the usefulness of developed study programmes over a longer period of time, which in turn depends on the institutional capacity built to deliver and sustain the programmes. This appears to be achieved in the five cluster interventions.

In contrast, sustainability was less in Cluster 4, Quality of school education and Cluster 5, Quality of vocational education and training:

- In Cluster 4, Quality of school education, sustainability was only partially achieved across the 10 system oriented interventions analysed. Whilst it was expected that the projects carried out were to have a lasting impact on schools’ working and teaching methods, there are uncertainties as to whether the educational outputs developed in the projects will be mainstreamed and used further in the years to come. Key reasons for the lack of sustainability related to the questions over the quality of the educational outputs produced, the choices made to purchase ICT equipment (which is quickly obsolete), and the lack of follow-up funding secured for the interventions after the ESF support.
• Similarly, there is a mixed picture with regards the sustainability of the four system oriented interventions analysed in Cluster 5, Quality of VET. In some cases, sustainability issues were clearly not taken into consideration during the implementation. The follow-up and implementation of activities developed was not considered beyond the end of ESF funded activities.

4.4.3 Sustainability of interventions after the ESF support

The selected interventions differed in terms of their likely continuation after ESF support.

On the one hand, 70% of interventions (or similar activities) are likely to be continued either with the ESF support in the 2014-2020 programming period or through national resources. This applies especially to the most of the types of activities implemented in Clusters 1, 9, 10 and 11.

In a number of interventions, there are elements of activities which have been mainstreamed into the national systems and are thus continuing post ESF support (see Box below for examples of such sustainability).

Box 8: Examples of mainstreamed activities

In France Guadeloupe OP intervention 3.4, a new regional platform to fight early school leaving has been launched to continue similar activities.

In the Latvian intervention on educator competitiveness a quality evaluation scheme representing a significant innovation is being continued after the completion of the intervention.

In the Czech intervention ‘Quality assurance in initial education’, the main IT products and tools developed have been integrated into the national education systems.

Indeed, a number of interventions supported the delivery of existing measures of the development of human capital (such as pathways for transition to the labour market through apprenticeships in the relevant France, Italy and Portugal interventions). Hence, their continuation either through new ESF resources or national resources is very likely.

On the other hand, for a third of selected interventions little evidence has been found to establish whether and how the activities supported are sustained following the ESF support.

A number of situations can be distinguished. Firstly, for 15% of interventions there is a lack of evidence on how and whether they are continuing after the ESF support (see Box below).

Box 9: Examples of interventions lacking evidence on their continuation

In Cluster 4, in relation to the Czech Republic intervention ‘Quality of initial education’, it was not possible to conclude whether individualised support courses will be continued in the absence of ESF funding. In the Italy NOP C1 intervention ‘Improving the knowledge and competence levels of youths’ there is no evidence that the activities carried out have been mainstreamed across the country and whether the schools participating in the intervention are sustaining them today. In Cluster 8, the longer-term sustainability of the Czech Republic intervention ‘Quality of HE’ and CZ intervention ‘Improvement of study programmes’ depends to a large extent on whether study programme innovations and further education results remain useful over a longer period of time. There is no assessment available in the OP of the continued use of innovated programmes. Similarly, there is no evaluation of whether competencies achieved through further education remain useful after the end of the project.
Secondly, 10% of interventions will not be continued due to political choices changing or because the needs they addressed are no longer relevant (see examples below).

**Box 10: Examples of activities not continued because the needs are met**

In Cluster 5, the Latvian intervention 'Promotion of the attractiveness of initial vocational education' was effective in attracting more students to undertake VET, but the stipend offered under this intervention has been discontinued. It is therefore uncertain whether VET education will continue to be as attractive for students in Latvia. Also in Cluster 5, the Latvian OP intervention 'Promotion of educator competitiveness' was a one-off intervention to address the restructuring problems in the education system and will not be continued. In Cluster 7, the Latvian intervention 'Support to doctoral studies' will not be maintained during the 2014-2020 period. Looking forward efforts appear orientated towards supporting post-doctoral positions.

Finally, 5% of interventions are unlikely to be continued due to the management issues (see Box below).

**Box 11: Examples of interventions unlikely to be continued due to management issues**

In Cluster 5 Improving the Quality of VET, the continuation of the Sicily OP Training courses in the second, third and fourth years of the Vocational education and training system intervention is unclear due to the management and performance issues encountered. In 2014 only 12% of total resources committed were certified and 50% of the resources allocated were paid to beneficiaries. This was mainly due to the delays in the beneficiaries uploading the data on payments in the payment monitoring system and consequent delays in validating the advanced payment. The management and the financial reporting difficulties affected the financial sustainability of the intervention. Considering that the activities supported are interrelated (they are the three annual courses of an integrated pathway that entail the achievement of a vocational qualification), the financial/management problems of even just one of the activity negatively impact on other activities, and this it is likely that it has led to the closure of some courses.

### 4.4.4 Influencing policy and practice

Finally, the in-depth ESF interventions had influenced the national practices, and to a lesser extent the policy, which represented sustained effects following the end of ESF funding. Such influences identified included:

- ESF provision offering the opportunity for organisations to work together for the first time, and establish working relationships and integrate into existing networks which continued after their ESF funding. This was present where a new organisation and method of delivery was important for the development of partnerships between students/pupils, teachers, tutors and employers (e.g. the Bulgarian intervention on pupil and student practices or the Maltese Youth Employment Programme which has also fostered new ways of working). New models for delivering services were also funded in interventions through the delivery of part time training and personalised approaches that combined open and distance education (e.g. the France National OP intervention 1.2.1 or the Maltese project 1.25 ‘STEPS’ changed how the mainstream schemes providing scholarships operate).

- The sharing of lessons between the organisations with similar interests. The ESF human capital investment fostered new ways of working between the education stakeholders, as well as fostering synergies between the different activities implemented (present in 14 interventions, see Volume III, Section 5.4 Error! Reference source not found.). Importantly, this included building lasting partnerships between the education providers and employers, as well as
the career guidance professionals and education and evaluation experts. In this sense, the interventions involved a wide range of partners who have a stake in the human capital development.

- The adoption of approaches, or elements of them, between similar providers and/or mainstreamed nationally – so supporting their continuation. Nine interventions (see Volume III, Section 5.4) had an influence on the education processes of the institutions, which included setting quality standards to be followed by other education and training providers, building additional internal capacity amongst the education and training providers to deliver the new curriculum. In nine further interventions (see Volume III, Section 5.4), there was evidence of developing the administrative capacity through encouraging the schools and public authorities to work together to improve their planning and management methods, and increasing the monitoring and reporting discipline and transparency of delivery.

4.5 The gender sensitivity of the ESF HC interventions

The gender sensitivity of selected interventions was assessed on the basis of whether gender issues were taken into account in the design, implementation and monitoring of interventions (including assessment of participation and effectiveness by gender).

4.5.1 Context

In the area of participation in education and training, fewer gender inequalities exist compared to other areas of support addressed by the ESF, such as access to employment or social inclusion. Indeed, the extent of sex discrimination in access to compulsory education is very low. In terms of educational results, at the EU-27 level, women tended to have higher HE education attainment rates, participate to a greater extent in LLL and were less likely to leave education early without qualifications (see Volume II, section 2). Given that women are outperforming men in several education and training indicators, gender sensitive approaches should also pay attention to issues faced by men in their human capital development. However, significant further gender equality issues in the area of education and training do exist, such as education and training sector staff being mostly women, the continuing use of gender stereotyped curricula and learning materials and gender segregation in study subjects (e.g. women being under-represented in science, technology, engineering and maths subjects).

4.5.2 Participation by gender

In general, the outputs of the analysed in-depth interventions were gender-disaggregated. This means that gendered aspects of the intervention reach could be measured. On average across the selected interventions, there was a slightly higher proportion of women participating than men (52% and 48% respectively). This is a positive achievement of the ESF investment which also reflects the overall positive female participation rates in various stages of education and training (see Volume II, section 2). This is similar to the gender breakdown of the ESF human capital participants in all 27 Member States where on average women were also slightly over-represented (51% of all participants, see this Volume, Section 4.3.1).

Overall, the gender breakdown varies between the selected interventions in clusters, with men over-represented in Clusters 7 (Research and innovation), 8 (Transition to the labour market by young people) and 9 (Upskilling of employed people) and women in Clusters 2 (Quality of higher education), 4 (Quality of school education), 10 (Upskilling of adults) and 11 (Quality of higher education) (see 0).

Figure 21. Gender breakdown of participants in the clusters

Source: ICF analysis of OP monitoring data. Cluster 3 early school education is not considered in this analysis due to the lack of sufficiently robust data on the interventions focussing on the issue.

A comparison between the analysis of cost per participant and the gender breakdown of cluster participants shows (see Table 16) that women were not disadvantaged in a sense of accessing only less costly human capital development activities as women accessed both higher and lower costs activities. Indeed, the proportion of women participants was higher in clusters associated both with higher average cost clusters 1, 5 or 11 as well as in the clusters associated with lower average cost (4, 6). Similarly, the proportion of women participants was lower in the clusters associated with the higher average cost (7) and lower average cost (8).

Table 16. Comparison of costs per participants and gender breakdown across the clusters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Proportion of participants</th>
<th>Cost per output (€)</th>
<th>Intensity of support*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 1 LLL systems</td>
<td>52 %</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>Mostly in-depth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 2 Quality HE</td>
<td>53 %</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>Mix of in-depth and superficial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 3 ECEC</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>Mix of in-depth and superficial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 4 School education</td>
<td>53 %</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>Equal number of in-depth and mixed interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 5 Quality VET</td>
<td>51 %</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>Mostly in-depth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 6 ESL</td>
<td>52 %</td>
<td>2,101</td>
<td>Equal number of in-depth and mixed interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 7 R&amp;D</td>
<td>45 %</td>
<td>848</td>
<td>Mix of in-depth and mixed support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 8 Transition to the labour market of young people</td>
<td>48 %</td>
<td>2,347</td>
<td>Mix of in-depth and mixed support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 9 Employed</td>
<td>46 %</td>
<td>1,420</td>
<td>Mostly mixed support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cluster 10 Adults 62 % 1,105 Mix of in-depth and mixed support
Cluster 11 HE participation 62 % 2,619 Mostly in-depth

Source: ICF analysis of OP monitoring data.

4.5.3 Effectiveness by gender

The effectiveness of the selected interventions by gender was also assessed, particularly where the selected interventions addressed individual participants and where results data broken down by gender were available. Overall, there appears to have been few differences in the effectiveness of selected interventions between the genders (see Table 17). Out of 87 in-depth interventions, only 10 had displayed gendered differences in the results, of which in two cases the results were more positive for men than women, and in eight cases the results were more positive for women than men. This indicates that there were few cases of differences in the achievement of results between the different genders, and where they were detected, in most cases women achieved more positive results compared to men.

Table 17. Available evidence on the gendered results of the interventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Available evidence on the gendered results in the cluster interventions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 1 LLL systems</td>
<td>● n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 2 Quality HE</td>
<td>● n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 3 ECEC</td>
<td>● n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 4 School education</td>
<td>● n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 5 Quality VET</td>
<td>● n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 6 Reducing early school leaving</td>
<td>● n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 7 R&amp;D</td>
<td>● Two interventions: men achieved slightly better positive results ● One intervention: the share of women among participants who finished the projects is higher ● One intervention: women had a lower job placement rate ● One intervention: women had a higher job placement rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 8 Transition to the labour market of young people</td>
<td>● One intervention: male participants showed a higher competence development rate and a higher new employment situation rate ● One intervention: women had better labour market placement results but worse contractual conditions than men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 9 Employed</td>
<td>● One intervention: women obtained better results judging by the survival rate of the businesses created (7-12 points higher than men) ● One intervention: the coverage rate of trained workers amongst the total workers is higher for women, reflecting more prominence given to the sectors where female workers are prevalent, as well as he female participation in manufacturing sectors where male workers are still the majority. However, the distance between female and male coverage rate is less favourable to women than expected in the initial targets for the intervention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 10 Adults</td>
<td>● n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 11 Higher education participation</td>
<td>● One intervention: women had lower job placement rates ● One intervention: female participants registered a better placement performance and also achieved better contractual conditions: a greater number of open-end contracts and fewer atypical contracts than males.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ICF analysis of OP monitoring data.

4.5.4 The presence of gender sensitive approaches

Across the 87 selected interventions, there was very little evidence of a systematic gender sensitive approach in planning, implementing and delivering activities aimed at tackling existing gender inequalities in human capital development. It is possible that interventions have paid specific attention to the issue of gender stereotypes but this is not apparent in the materials reviewed. Equally, there is no evidence that gender sensitivity was afforded specific attention during the project selection and emphasised.
in the calls for proposals on a systematic basis (beyond very general wording). This indicates that the gender considerations in the ESF human capital investment were sporadic and patchy.\footnote{The evaluation of the ESF support to gender equality also found a critical concern in the lack of gender sensitiveness of project along with the logic of project-selection criteria and the screening ability of project-selection assessors, a lack of status of the gender-equality objectives, see GHK and Fondazione G. Brodolini (2012).}

Gender equality was usually considered a horizontal principle in the operational programmes. However, most analysed interventions did not include actions directly addressing gender sensitivity and gender equality was not explicitly articulated in the interventions’ design, objectives and target groups. There was no evidence of corrective policy actions to overcome gender disparities where such exist or of evaluations focusing on gender equality issues or gender impact assessments linked to the implementation of the analysed interventions.

However, in 20% of selected interventions, gender considerations were taken into account in the implementation and delivery of activities (see Table 18 where approaches from 19 interventions are presented). The types of approaches varied, but the most common type of approach were the activities in 10 interventions taking account of the needs of female or male participants through providing specific support services (e.g. the Malta project 1.25 ‘STEPS’ provided those studying abroad with an allowance for childcare costs). Six interventions prioritised gender issues in the project selection and design. In two interventions, the approaches were to deliver the public facing activities of the interventions (e.g. websites or marketing materials) in a gender neutral way. One activity targeted the human capital development of women (e.g. female entrepreneurs) as a specific target group.
Table 18. Available instances of the gender sensitive approaches in the selected interventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Available evidence on the gender sensitivity of results in the cluster interventions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 1 LLL systems</td>
<td>Tuscany intervention ‘Continuous training’: guidance services were used to ensure that participants (mostly women) were appropriately supported in their training decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 2 Quality HE</td>
<td>The KREDO project under the Czech intervention ‘Support to reform of higher education’ promoted among the participating universities an incorporation of gender perspective into strategic planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 4 School education</td>
<td>In the Guadeloupe intervention to prevent early school leaving, the projects implemented were orientated towards a male audience given that the early school leaving in the region predominantly occurs among boys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 5 Quality VET</td>
<td>• Among its project selection criteria, the Sicilian intervention ‘Training courses’ envisaged a specific provision to promote a gender sensitive participation in VET by awarding one additional point to project proposals entailing specific measures to favour female participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Whilst demand for vocational courses is usually greater among male students, the project promoter tried to promote opportunities for vocational learning among females where appropriate under the Maltese intervention ‘Creating word class vocational training &amp; making VET Education More Relevant and Attractive’. For example, the inclusion of distance learning and part-time possibilities also meant that there was a facility which enabled those with childcare responsibilities to take part in the project. Those studying abroad with children were also provided with an allowance to assist with costs. As a result, this project would certainly have assisted those with familial responsibilities - regardless of whether these were male or female.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 6 ESL</td>
<td>Italian Piedmont regional intervention Tackling early school leaving which, in accordance with regional regulations, included a specific course on gender equality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 7 R&amp;D</td>
<td>• In Apulia, both ‘Back to the Future’ interventions (for PhD and Master degrees) pregnant women could interrupt the course for a period of time without losing their scholarship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Gender sensitivity has been included as one of the project selection criteria in two Danish interventions ‘1.2.1 Education and training’ and ‘1.2.2 Cooperation on innovation’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 8 Young people</td>
<td>A gender approach was among the formal criteria for selecting projects in the Danish intervention ‘2.2.1 Entrepreneurial competence’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 9 Employed</td>
<td>• The CZ HRE OP Intervention ‘Training of employees’ project delivery included at least some gender considerations – on average three out of four organisations receiving support claimed that principles of gender sensitivity were built into their projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Similarly, gender-specific approaches were carried in some projects in the FR National OP Intervention 1.3.1 ‘Support to entrepreneurs and buyers’ aimed at increasing female entrepreneurship. Here, one of the strand’s activities focused on business start-ups for women. Accordingly, the intervention had a set target for the proportion of women supported starting businesses which was exceeded over the 2007-2013 period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• In the Piedmont OP intervention ‘Continuous training’ in order to promote gender equality, besides the provision of measures aimed at strengthening female participation, the Region set a specific incentive aimed at reducing the private co-financing rate for the external training by 10 %, if the training addresses workers employed in professions/sectors characterised by a gender disparity of 25 % higher than the average gender disparity in other sectors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• In the Tuscany OP ‘Continuous training’ intervention, instruments including the possibility to purchase care services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 10 Adults</td>
<td>• In the IT National OP intervention ‘G.1 Flexible training interventions aimed at the recovery of basic education for young people without qualifications and adults’, the provision of parental assistance services was likely to favour the participation of women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• In the IT Sicily OP intervention ‘Training programmes to strengthen the employability and adaptability of the Sicilian workforce in 2012-2014’ among the selection criteria the gender dimension was taken into account insofar points are awarded to the project proposals entailing activities promoting female participation into employment and to support the dissemination of the gender equality principle. The projects focussing on such objective can be awarded up to 3 points, the total maximum points being 100.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 11 HE participation</td>
<td>• The Maltese project ‘Strategic Educational Pathway Scholarships – STEPS (1.25)’ included distance learning and part-time possibilities so those with childcare responsibilities could also take part. Additionally the project provided an allowance for coming from abroad participants with family responsibilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• An equal opportunities expert with certified experience in this area was involved in establishing educational paths in the Piedmont’s intervention ‘Strengthening of Higher Education (SHE)’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The Tuscan intervention ‘High vocational training and education (IFTS)’ projects included actions aimed at ensuring gender equality, by setting a quantitative objective for the presence of participants by gender, intended to favour and ease female participation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Available evidence on the gender sensitivity of results in the cluster interventions

- In the Apulian intervention 'Back to the Future - Masters (BFM)’ the fact that participants went on maternity leave did not result in them losing scholarships awarded.
4.6 The ESF human capital investment for young people

The ESF support to the human capital development of young people was an important policy priority both at the EU and national levels in the 2007-2013 period. ESF was assigned an important role in the implementation of a number of EU policy developments in the area of youth. Support for young people became even more urgent in view of drastic increases of youth unemployment, especially in the southern Member States, in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis.

The ESF HC investment in the 2007-2013 period reached a significant number of young people. Young people (15-24) formed a third of all participants under the PAs and sub-priorities assigned to the HC field – or 15.6 million participants. This ranged from 62 % of participants in the Programmes in Germany to 5 % in the Programme in Sweden, indicating the range of reach for young people at the national level and different programming and implementation choices made.

Young people were also amongst the most frequently addressed target groups in the PAs and sub-priorities assigned to the HC policy field. General education students were targeted in 24 Member States and early school leavers were also targeted in 25 Member States. Over 3.5 million students (including various groups defined in the indicators such as young people, pupils, students in the general education), and 1.7 million VET students (including apprentices) were supported by the ESF by end 2013. The numbers of supported students were particularly high in the Czech Republic, Germany and Greece. The numbers of VET students were particularly high in Germany, reflecting the focus of ESF HC activity on the apprenticeship systems.

Data on the expenditure associated with the ESF support to young people across the 27 Member States is not available, but in nine in-depth countries the expenditure on activities aimed predominantly at young people were €9 366 million and represented 50% of the overall ESF allocation (€18 672 million) in the nine in-depth countries.

The results of ESF human capital specifically for young people were not possible to measure using the existing OP result indicators. Given the priority placed on supporting young people through ESF since the onset of the global recession, this represents a major flaw in the existing monitoring systems and an area for development in the future.

The interventions aimed at young people were very versatile, and supported a wide range of activities (such as internships with employers, stipends for VET, acquisition of skills and competences, support for out-of-school activities, and the development of new learning programmes and curricula).

Following the cluster intervention review, particularly successful were interventions aimed at early school leaving, transition to the labour market and the participation in higher education. Less successful were activities to increase the quality of school education and improve the quality of vocational education and training. For young learners in the initial stages of their human capital development, the attractiveness of the learning offer made a difference, including a combination of traditional classroom based and out-of-school activities, the inclusion of vocational training, the use of e-learning and the flexibility of learning delivery (including from home). This requires

81 The data recording procedures did not allow for differentiating between unique participants and individuals who participated in ESF multiple times. The figures reported are likely to reflect the number of participations - some individuals participated several times. Henceforth, the term 'participants' is used, even though the data reflects multiple participations of the same participant.

82 Ibid.

83 Activities in the Clusters 3 (early school education), 4 (quality of school education), 5 (Quality and labour market relevance of VET), 6 (reduction of early school leaving) and 8 (transition to the labour market for young people). See Volume III, Section 2.3, Figure 4.
teaching staff trained and confident to use the new teaching approaches and tools. Well-integrated accompanying measures (including career advice and guidance) were also key, especially for young people at risk (such as early school leavers). To the extent possible given the diversity of activities aimed at young people, the key cross-cutting success factors identified include:

- The provision of individualised assistance based on the needs of young people, covering both classroom based learning activities but also out-of-school activities and practical work experiences in the real working environment,
- Attention provided to instigating changes in the relationships between young people, educational institutions and employers,
- Support provided to the acquisition of both formal qualifications recognised in the education and training system but also the development of softer competences and skills.

4.7 The Community added value of ESF human capital interventions

4.7.1 The overview

The most visible were the volume effects present across all the ESF human capital interventions. The process and role effects were fewer (in 33 and 32 interventions respectively) with least interventions containing the scope effects (26 interventions). Annex IV to this Volume provides an overview of the Community added value in the individual clusters.

The profile of the added value was in a sense ‘unique’ to each cluster (see Table 19). In five clusters, one type of the added value predominated (Cluster 4, 6, 7, 8, 11). On the other hand, in four clusters, there was an equal distribution of the process, role and scope effects, indicating a considerable value added of such activities across various dimensions (clusters 1, 2, 9, 10). In two clusters, the scope effects were missing and in general the added value of activities was limited (cluster 3 and 5).

This also meant that in the different clusters the importance of the different aspects of the Community added value varied. The scope effects were mostly present in the clusters 4, 8, 9 and 11. The role effects were most often observed in the clusters 6, 8 and 9. The process effects were mostly provided in clusters 4, 11, 5 and 6.

Table 19. The profile of added value across the clusters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Total number of interventions in the cluster</th>
<th>Number of interventions with the added value effects:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 1 LLL systems</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6 Volume effects 2 Scope effects 1 Role effects 1 Process effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 2 Quality HE</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5 Volume effects 2 Scope effects 1 Role effects 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 3 ECEC</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4 Volume effects - Scope effects 1 Role effects 1 Process effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 4 School education</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13 Volume effects 4 Scope effects 3 Role effects 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 5 Quality VET</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8 Volume effects - Scope effects 3 Role effects 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 6 ESL</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12 Volume effects 1 Scope effects 7 Role effects 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 7 R&amp;D</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9 Volume effects 1 Scope effects 3 Role effects 3 Process effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 8 Transition to the labour market of young people</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15 Volume effects 4 Scope effects 6 Role effects 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 9 Employed</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15 Volume effects 4 Role effects 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 10 Adults</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8 Volume effects 3 Role effects 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 11 HE participation</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9 Volume effects 4 Role effects 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ICF analysis of OP monitoring data. The total number of interventions is higher than 87 due to double-classification of some interventions into two clusters.
4.7.2 The volume effects (the extent to which the ESF supported actions add to existing actions)

The most visible aspects of CAV were the volume effects in providing the additional resources used to reach and increase participant numbers. They were present in all clusters and all in-depth interventions.

In the 27 EU Member States, the overall financial envelope assigned to the HC policy field (covering both the HC and Adaptability themes) was €51 billion of total EU and national funding (see Volume II). The importance of the ESF HC investment was also clear in the national context compared to the national expenditure on education and training. As shown in section 3.1, on average, across the 26 Member States (no data is available for Greece), the ESF human capital investment accounted for approximately 1 % of the national education and training expenditure. This however varied between the Member States from 0.2 % in the Netherlands and Sweden to 10 % in Portugal.

Analysis of the significance of the ESF human capital investment by Convergence / Regional Competitiveness objectives shows that out of eight Member States with a high number of Convergence OPs, six Member States had medium and high levels of ESF human capital investment significance in the national education and training expenditure. This signals a more important role played by the ESF human capital investment in the Convergence OPs.

Across the 27 Member States, 49.7 million participations have been registered in the ESF measures supporting the human capital development between 2007 and end 2013 (in the priority axes and sub-priorities assigned to the human capital). This shows a significant reach of the ESF human capital investment, particularly in the countries where the ESF funding had a high volume effect.

Across the 11 clusters analysed in the nine in-depth countries, €19 billion of the ESF expenditure was allocated to address the various human capital development challenges (see Figure 1). The financial scale differed between the clusters, from the highest allocations in clusters dedicated to the transition to the labour market of young people, upskilling of employed and adults to smaller allocated financial volumes in the clusters associated with HE support activities.

Across the 87 selected interventions in the nine in-depth countries, 15.6 million participants have been reached (see Volume III, section 5.1). Across all 27 Member States, overall, by end 2013, 49.7 million participations were recorded in the ESF human capital development (see Volume II, section 3).

The same level and scale of participant reach and number of products developed would have not been achieved without the ESF and interventions on this scale and reach would not have been developed. This was particularly present in the countries where the ESF human capital investment was of high significance in the national education funding (e.g. Portugal, Czech Republic, and Bulgaria). Indeed, national resources allocated to the interventions would have been lower in the absence of the ESF, especially in those countries with severe national budget restrictions following the

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84 The data recording procedures did not allow for differentiating between unique participants and individuals who participated in ESF multiple times. The figures reported are likely to reflect the number of participations - some individuals participated several times. Henceforth, the term ‘participants’ is used, even though the data reflects multiple participations of the same participant.

85 The data recording procedures did not allow for differentiating between the unique participants and individuals who participated in ESF multiple times. The figures reported are likely to reflect the number of participations - some individuals participated several times. Henceforth, the term ‘participants’ is used, even though the data reflects multiple participations of the same participant.

86 Ibid.
crisis which resulted in substantial cuts to the national education budget (e.g. Czech Republic, Ireland, Italy, and Portugal). On their own, the employers, universities and R&D institutions would still have spent resources on training, the study programme innovation and staff development, but the scale of the activities and the degree of change would have been much lower. In several interventions, there was no national funding available for a number of activities supported through the interventions analysed (e.g. in the Czech Republic, in-company training, curriculum development or traineeships for young people).

4.7.3 The scope effects (the extent to which the ESF broadens existing action)

The mapping of ESF human capital investment priorities across the 27 Member States showed (see Table 20) that the ESF HC investment has been widely used to provide additional funding to support activities of the education system (AT, BG, CZ, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LT, MT, PL, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK), reach new target groups and to improve the education and training delivery systems and methods (which could also be considered to be a process effect) (AT, BG, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LV, MT, PL, PT, RO, SK, UK). The only exceptions are Luxembourg and Sweden. In Sweden, delivery systems were not funded, while in Luxembourg, the ESF HC investments were centred in other areas such as implementing innovative activities (which could also be considered to be a role effect) and used as supplementary funding for reforms. With regard to funding reforms, ESF was mainly used to fund supplementary reforms rather than as core funding.

Table 20. Overview of the linkages between Member State policies and ESF human capital investment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MS</th>
<th>ESF provided additional funding to the education system (supplementing national funding)</th>
<th>ESF was used to reach new target groups</th>
<th>ESF was used to improve the education and training delivery systems and methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BG</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>CY</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>CZ</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>DK</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>EE</td>
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<td>EL</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>ES</td>
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<td>FI</td>
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<td>LU</td>
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<td>LV</td>
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The analysis of 87 in-depth interventions in nine in-depth countries showed that several types of scope effects in 26 interventions which included reaching new learner groups, new economic sectors and increasing the scope of education services (see Volume III, Section 5.4 which summarises the observed scope effects identified by interventions in different clusters).

The key scope effect was widening access to human capital development to groups which previously did not access learning or only to a lesser extent. This effect was present in 16 interventions. These new learner groups included a range of groups across the education and training spectrum in the need of upskilling:

- People with disabilities
- Young people at risk of early school leaving
- Unemployed with low qualifications
- Employees on fixed or short term contracts
- Adults with lower level of education
- Researchers across the disciplines.

The online aspect of the delivery of many activities was especially important in this respect in broadening access to education and training and reaching out to new groups of learners. A particular scope effect was noted in Bulgaria and Czech Republic where the activities supported reached a substantial number of schools, enabling them to adapt to strategic national reforms. By allowing a large number of teachers to acquire new skills.

In cluster 9, four interventions reached employers and sectors previously under-represented in the learning activities or not participating in the training sufficiently.

The second aspect of the scope effects was increasing the scope of mainstream services of key education, training and employment institutions, also increasing the scope of public investments for people affected by the crisis by supplementing the limited national budgets for the implementation of national human capital policies. This was observed in four interventions in clusters 2, 6, 7, 10 and 11. To a certain extent, this is overlapping with the volume effects of the interventions, but refers to widening of the scope of the education services delivered.

Analysis of the observed scope effects by the Convergence / Competitiveness objective of the interventions shows that the scope effects were observed slightly more frequently in the interventions from the Convergence OPs (13 interventions or 33% out of 39 Convergence OP interventions assessed in-depth), followed by interventions from the Regional Competitiveness OPs (6 interventions or 22% of 27 Regional Competitiveness OP interventions assessed in-depth) and multi-objective OPs (5 interventions or 24% out of 21 Multi-objective OP interventions assessed in-depth). These relatively minor differences are likely due to the wider scope of ESF human capital investment in the Convergence OP interventions.

4.7.4 The role effects (the extent to which ESF human capital interventions supported innovation)

The mapping of ESF human capital investment priorities across the 27 Member States showed that overall, ESF HC investment was used to test and implement innovative activities (covering a wide range of activities in the development of human capital activities new to the national or regional context such as development of new ways of working between education system stakeholders or pedagogical innovations in the curriculum and delivery of learning) in 25 countries (AT, BG, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, HU, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, PL, PT, RO, SE). Exceptions included Ireland, the Netherlands and Slovenia. In Ireland, many of the activities in this area were funded...
previously, while in Slovenia investment from ESF HC funding was focused on training and development activities with a long-term effect.

The analysis of 87 in-depth interventions in nine in-depth countries showed that the role effects were identified in 32 interventions (see Volume III, Section 5.4).

The key type of the role effect (present in 25 interventions) was ESF support to the implementation of innovative education and training activities, providing financing to the development of pilot and seed activities, changing the modes, practices, tools and methods of delivery of teaching and learning and mainstreaming activities into the daily practices of education providers.

To a lesser extent, role effects were also manifested in interventions where a new organisation and method of delivery was important for the development of partnerships between students/pupils, teachers, tutors and employers (e.g. the Bulgarian intervention on pupil and student practices or the Maltese Youth Employment Programme which has also fostered new ways of working). New models for delivering services were also funded in interventions through the delivery of part time training and personalised approaches that combined open and distance education (e.g. the French national OP intervention 1.2.1 or the Maltese project 1.25 ‘STEPS’ changed how the mainstream schemes providing scholarships operate).

Analysis of the observed role effects by the Convergence / Competitiveness objective of the interventions shows that the examined role effects were observed slightly more frequently in the interventions from Convergence OPs (17 interventions or 45% out of 39 Convergence OP interventions assessed in-depth), followed by interventions from the Competitiveness OPs (10 or 37% out of 27 Regional Competitiveness OP interventions assessed in-depth) and multi-objective OPs (6 interventions or 29% out of 21 Multi-objective OP interventions assessed in-depth).

4.7.5 The process effects (the influence of ESF human capital interventions on the Member State administrations’ policy and practice)

The mapping of ESF human capital investment priorities across the 27 Member States showed that the ESF also provided funding to reforms implemented in the 2007-2013 period (see Table 21). The ESF was used to fund a range of reforms, ranging from improvements in the quality of lifelong learning (Bulgaria, France), measures to improve teacher training (Bulgaria, Czech Republic), new curriculum developments (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Poland), the introduction of new management and evaluation methods in initial education (Bulgaria, Italy), reforms to reduce the early school leaving (Malta), changes to the management, quality assurance and definition of study programmes in HE (Bulgaria, Germany, Czech Republic, Italy, Malta), reform of the initial education school network (Latvia, Malta, Poland) and introduction of measures to improve the quality and structures of VET (Czech Republic, Italy, Malta, Poland).

Table 21. Overview of the linkages between Member State reforms and ESF human capital investment

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>MS</th>
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<tr>
<td>EL</td>
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The analysis of 87 in-depth interventions in nine in-depth countries showed that the types of process effects identified in 33 interventions included the development of new ways of working, changing the education processes and improving the management and administrative capacity of education system stakeholders (see Volume III, Section 5.4).

The most frequent process effects included ESF human capital investment fostering new ways of working between the education stakeholders, as well as fostering synergies between the different activities implemented (present in 14 interventions). Importantly, this included building lasting partnerships between the education providers and employers, as well as the career guidance professionals and education and evaluation experts. In this sense, the interventions involved a wide range of partners who have a stake in the human capital development.

The second most frequent type of the process effect (present in 9 interventions) was the influence on the education processes of the institutions, which included setting quality standards to be followed by other education and training providers, building additional internal capacity amongst the education and training providers to deliver the new curriculum.

Finally, in nine interventions the process effects were manifest in developing the administrative capacity through encouraging the schools and public authorities to work together to improve their planning and management methods, and increasing the monitoring and reporting discipline and transparency of delivery.

An interesting process effect in terms of fostering an evaluation culture in the ESF human capital was also identified (see box below).

**The process effects: fostering the robustness of ESF human capital investment evaluation**

The Czech HRE OP Intervention ‘Training of employees’ was the first to be comprehensively assessed in the Czech Republic using counterfactual impact evaluation methods. The evaluation was used also in this ex-post evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the intervention. The results and methods of the pilot counterfactual were showcased to the Czech policymakers and thus helped to spread awareness of the method. It also identified further areas in which this type of evaluation could be applied in the future. The Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs considered both of these activities to be highly successful.
Analysis of the observed process effects (see Volume III, Section 5.4) by the Convergence / Competitiveness objective of the interventions shows that the process effects were observed most frequently in the interventions from Convergence OPs (21 interventions or in 43% of 39 Convergence OP interventions assessed in-depth), followed by interventions from the Competitiveness OPs (5 interventions or 19% out of 27 Regional Competitiveness OP interventions assessed in-depth) and multi-objective OPs (4 interventions or 19 % of 21 Multi-objective OP interventions assessed in-depth).

4.8  The socio-economic impact of the ESF human capital investment

The socio-economic impact of the ESF human capital investment has occurred at micro, meso and macro levels, each of which are analysed in turn.

4.8.1 The micro level socio-economic impacts

At the micro level of individual participants, significant achievements in the further development of individuals’ human capital were observed both across the 27 EU Member States and the 87 in-depth interventions (see section 4.2.3). It is at this level that the socio-economic impacts are most pronounced.

By the end of 2013, 49.7 million participations have been registered and 21 million results have been obtained by participants in the ESF human capital investment. This is a minimum achievement as some result indicators could not be aggregated and also the number is likely to increase as the ESF delivery is finalised in the 2007-2013 period. The most frequent type of results was measured in the category ‘other positive results’ (54%), followed by 27% of results for participants achieving employment and 18% of results achieving a qualification.87

Quantitative surveys on the extent to which these immediate results of the ESF investment were sustained in the medium and long term were generally missing, but the available qualitative evidence available indicated a considerable variety in the legacy of the interventions for individuals. The key types of sustainable results observed were continuing positive employment results, lasting improvements in skills and competences and the continued use of the products developed with the ESF support.

Importantly, the ESF human capital investment also reached a significant proportion of the key target groups in the EU’s population:

- Across the range of education attainment spectrum: 21 % of students at ISCED level 4, followed by 8 % of students at ISCED level 3, 6 % of students at ISCED levels 1 and 2 and 6 % of students at ISCED levels 5 and 6.
- 4% of young people (15-24) and 1% of older people (55-64)
- 1% of the employed people, 3% of the unemployed people and 2% of the long-term unemployed
- 3 % of the disabled people and 1 % of the migrant population in the EU-27.

4.8.2 The meso level socio-economic impacts

At the intermediate level of education and training system stakeholders, a number of improvements in the system level capacities to deliver better quality education and training activities were supported by the ESF (see sections 4.7.4 and 4.7.5). Hence, a considerable impact of ESF human capital at this level can be discerned and identified.

The ESF human capital investment increased the scope of mainstream services provided by the key education, training and employment institutions, and also

87 However, it needs to be pointed out that whilst these results are associated with the ESF human capital investment, some unknown proportion (which is not possible to estimate in the absence of a counterfactual evaluation) would have entered a job in any case.
increased the scope of public investments for people affected by the crisis by supplementing the limited national budgets for the implementation of national human capital policies.

In addition, ESF HC investment was used to test and implement innovative activities across the Union. It provided financing to the development of pilot and seed activities, changing the modes, practices, tools and methods of delivery of teaching and learning and mainstreaming activities into the daily practices of education providers.

There were also a number of relevant policy developments and reforms in the 2007-2013 period across the Member States, supported by the ESF investments. This included support to reforms to increase the participation in education and training, improve the quality of education and training systems and change some of education delivery mechanisms, to address the particular human capital needs of certain target groups and react adequately to the challenges posed by the economic crisis. Member States also used ESF HC investments to address a number of the Country specific recommendations (CSRs) in the areas of adaptability and human capital.

Finally, the impacts at the meso level were also manifested in interventions where a new organisation and method of delivery supported by the ESF was important for the development of partnerships between students/pupils, teachers, tutors and employers. New models for delivering services were also funded in interventions through the delivery of part time training and personalised approaches that combined open and distance education.

4.8.3 The macro level socio-economic impacts

The macro level impact would be observed when the ESF investment had an influence on addressing the key high level human capital challenges in the Member States. At this macro level, it appears that the social and economic impact of the ESF human capital investment has been limited. However, it also needs to be borne in mind that the macro level socio-economic impact is the most difficult to evidence and a sophisticated macro modelling of such impacts should be considered to be developed in the future.

The key human capital development trends (as described in section 2.1) show no or limited correlation with the share of ESF human capital investment in the national context (see Table 5). However, it needs to be borne in mind that changes in the human capital trends take time to materialise as an investment process is involved with costs incurred in the short run and returns in terms of higher productivity, enhanced earnings and other key impacts secured over the long term.

Figure 22 summarises the changes in the indicators’ values between 2007 and 2013 and the average annual share of the ESF expenditure in the national education and training expenditure. The share of ESF expenditure in the national education and training expenditure is a valid indicator of the ESF importance in the national context due to its focus of ESF financial contribution. The limitations of using this indicator relate to the data availability on the national education and training expenditure (i.e. not all Member States report this data to Eurostat consistently), different contents of the two expenditure indicators (the national expenditure includes the wages of the education sector staff, whereas the ESF expenditure usually did not finance the staff wages) and the different time period used in the two expenditure indicators (the national expenditure was available up to year 2011 and changes have occurred since; whereas the ESF expenditure was recorded for the period of 2007-2013 and annual average was used).

88 Similarly, the ex-post evaluation of the ESF 2000-2006 period found little socio-economic impact at the macro level, see LSE et al (2010).
Among all indicators describing human capital in Europe, only the change in the number of early school leavers is correlated with the average annual share of ESF funding within the national education and training expenditure. But this correlation is dependent on the position for one MS (Portugal). If we exclude this outlier, the correlation becomes insignificant and countries with higher share of ESF in national education and training expenditure (mostly new Member States) made a smaller progress in reducing the number of early school leavers. The unemployment of young people increased in a majority of Member States (the exceptions are Germany and Malta) and there is no significant correlation between the ESF expenditure and the developments of this indicator. During the same period, the employment rate of the low skilled decreased in the majority of Member States. This does not seem to be correlated with ESF funding share. Between 2007 and 2013 the difference between old and new Member States in the share of adults participating in lifelong learning increased but the changes observed are not correlated with the significance of the ESF spending in the national expenditure. Participation in higher education increased in both new and old Member States, but again a significant correlation with the share of ESF in national expenditure was not detected. Finally, there are no clear patterns between the increases of R&D spending and share of ESF in the national education and training expenditure

However, there have been many other influences on these indicators and trends other than the ESF expenditure, including principally the differential impact of the recession across the Member States and on different sub-groups of the population.

*Figure 22. Share of ESF funding (allocated and actual expenditure) in national expenditure and change in key human capital indicators*
### Av. annual share of ESF allocation in nat. education and training expenditure

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<tr>
<td>CY</td>
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<tr>
<td>CZ</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>HU</td>
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<td>LT</td>
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<td>PL</td>
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<td>RO</td>
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<td>SI</td>
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<td>SK</td>
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Source: ICF analysis of SFC and Eurostat data. Both the overall ESF allocation to the human policy field in the period 2007-2013 and the ESF certified expenditure up to end 2013 were used.
The unemployment of young people increased in a majority of Member States (the exceptions are Germany and Malta) and there is no significant correlation between the ESF expenditure and the developments of this indicator. The differences between new and old Member States are also not statistically significant, although the higher increase in the number of unemployed young people was in the new Member States where ESF constituted a smaller share of national funding.

In the six Member States particularly affected by the crisis (see Figure 24), the number of young unemployed increased by 23 p.p. comparing to 7 p.p. in the remaining countries. The share of ESF funding in these countries varied from 0.7 % in Spain where the number of young unemployed increased by 37.4 p.p., to 10.4 % in Portugal with a 16.6 p.p. rise of value of the indicator.

During the same period, the employment rate of the low skilled decreased in the majority of Member States. This does not seem to be correlated with ESF funding (See Figure 25). Again the direction of regression slope depends on the performance of

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**Figure 23. Early school leavers period change 2007-2013 correlation with ESF allocated expenditure**

Source: ICF analysis of SFC and Eurostat data.

**Figure 24. Unemployment of young people period change 2007-2013 correlation with allocated ESF expenditure**

Source: ICF analysis of SFC and Eurostat data.

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89 EU 12: BG, CY, CZ, EE, HU, LT, MT, PL, RO, SI, SK, LV. EU 15: EL, ES, IE, IT, PT, AT, BE, DE, DK, FI, FR, LU, NL, SE, UK.

EU 6 (countries particularly affected by crisis): LV, EL, ES, IE, IT, PT. EU 21: BG, CY, CZ, EE, HU, LT, MT, PL, RO, SI, SK, AT, BE, DE, DK, FI, FR, LU, NL, SE, UK.
Portugal were ESF constitutes a significant share of annual national expenditure in education and training. Similarly to the previous indicator, the situation deteriorated more in new Member States where in 2013 on average 6.3 pp less low skilled people were employed.

Figure 25. Employment of low skilled period change 2007-2013 correlation with ESF allocated expenditure

Source: ICF analysis of SFC and Eurostat data.

Between 2007 and 2013 the difference between old and new Member States in the share of adults participating in lifelong learning increased but the changes observed are not correlated with the significance of the ESF spending in the national expenditure (see Figure 26).

Figure 26. Participation in LLL period change 2007-2013 correlation with ESF allocated expenditure

Source: ICF analysis of SFC and Eurostat data.

Participation in higher education increased in both new and old Member States, but again a significant correlation with the share of ESF in national expenditure was not detected (see Figure 27).
There are no clear patterns between the increases of R&D spending and share of ESF in national education and training expenditure (see Figure 28).

Throughout the programing period the gap between new and old Member States decreased in the majority of human capital related indicators. It is difficult to attribute this change to ESF investments since more significant progress in a reduction of the number of early school leavers and the rise in the share of adults participating in lifelong learning was made in the old Members States where the ESF funding constituted a smaller share of annual education and training expenditure (see Figure 29).
The indicators above were used to create one composite indicator of human capital changes in Member States (see Figure 30). The countries’ performance below or above the EU-27 average in the key human capital indicators was not correlated with the share of ESF within the national educational and training budget (using both total allocated and actual expenditure by end 2013). For example, the share of ESF funding within the annual national education and training budget was similar in Malta, which performed better than the EU average, as well as in Bulgaria and Italy, where the progress was below the European average.
Figure 30. Performance in key human capital indicators and significance of the ESF in the national education and training budget

Source: ICF analysis of SFC and Eurostat data. Based on the Member States performance between 2007 and 2013 one composite human capital indicator was created. First, the selected variables were reviewed in terms on data availability in order to impute missing data or exclude variables without complete data sets. Later in order to normalise data the indicators above (or equal) and below EU 27 mean were given values 1 or -1 respectively. The composite indicator is a sum of normalised values of selected and reviewed indicators.

The apparently limited ESF macro level impact is probably due to the variations in key human capital indicators resulting from factors such as improved productivity driving the economic growth, better matching between the labour supply and demand, or improved employment rates. These are influenced by many other factors besides the ESF investment. The ESF impact can be assessed effectively only within a macro modelling analysis.

In addition, the significance of the ESF human capital investment was, on average, too limited in the national contexts to realistically expect a measurable macro level impact in the key socio-economic indicators. On average, across the 26 Member States for which data were available (except Greece), the ESF HC investment represented only 1% of the national education and training expenditure, although this varied substantially from 0.2% in the Netherlands and Sweden to 10% in Portugal.

It is however important to note that across the EU-27 in the 2007-2013 period, early school leaving rates decreased on average by 3 percentage points, higher education attainment rates increased by 4.4 percentage points and gender gaps in the key education and training indicators narrowed (see this Volume, section 2.1). In addition, expenditure both on education and training and research and development increased, albeit minimally (by 0.2 percentage points). ESF played a role in their achievement as the ESF investment covered all of these key areas where positive developments are noted.
5 Overview of the key lessons learnt

The key lessons were formulated on the basis of main conclusions and findings from the ex-post evaluation in relation to:

- Policy choices,
- Target groups chosen,
- Appropriate programming,
- Effective implementation,
- Robustness of monitoring systems,
- Robustness of evaluation systems.

These are presented in turn below, summarising the key findings of the evaluation, conclusions drawn, and the key lessons learnt (see also Volume I, Annex 6).

5.1 Policy choices

Firstly, the Member States implemented various ESF human capital investment activities. The evaluation evidence showed that certain types of human capital investment activities were more effectively implemented than others (see section 4.4 and Volume III).

The key success factors amongst the more effective activities (for example, tackling early school leaving, supporting labour market transition of young people, improving the quality and participation in higher education and upskilling of adults), point to the need to:

- Provide an attractive learning offer (including a vocational training component and e-learning for young learners and training clearly linked to the labour market needs for adults),
- Offer a host of integrated and holistic but flexible support measures (including career advice and counselling), and
- Meeting a real identified need of the target groups (e.g. providing scholarships for higher education students in the context of expansion of higher education).

Future ESF policy choices need to take account of these key success factors facilitating the effective implementation. They also need to take account of the broader political and socio-economic context of the ESF investment (the higher education activities were more successful when linked to the relevant national reforms; vocational apprenticeships tend to be less popular with employers unwilling to hire long-term apprentices in the economic decline).

Secondly, consideration needs to be given to the quality of implementation partners and existing delivery mechanisms. The capacity of organisations implementing the ESF was the key success factor and needs to be reflected in the policy choices of which types of education provision to fund (see Volume III, section 4). The balance between supporting new and existing activities needs to be maintained carefully. Any policy choice in favour of a well-established education provision should not however negate the very important role of the ESF human capital investment in fostering innovation in the delivery of education and training (see the analysis of the role effects in section 4.7). The policy choices should therefore continue to provide space for the development of new approaches, methodologies, tools and processes in the education system. That said, when new activities are supported, sufficient time is needed to set them up appropriately before they can deliver products and services to participants. Their targets therefore need to be realistic, yet appropriately, ambitious.

Thirdly, the authorities used a degree of flexibility in how they implemented ESF funds to respond to the external shocks and the implementation challenges (see section 4.3 and Volume III). This flexibility in adjusting the policy choices needs to be continued in the future. The changes in the socio-economic environment can require changing the target groups and / or activities. Conscious changes in funding and flexible modifications (but not deviating from the main policy orientation) should be made in
the ESF interventions following the changes in the external environment and the needs generated by these changes. It is important to pursue a well-balanced stable policy direction with flexible (and documented) modifications, if needed.

### 5.2 Target groups chosen

Firstly, across the 87 interventions examined in depth in the evaluation, the intended target groups were engaged in appropriate volumes (see the analysis of socio-economic profile of participants in section 4.5.2 and in Volume III). Looking forward, the authorities need to reflect whether the choice of and focus on particular target groups in the ESF human capital investment continues to be appropriate in the medium and long term.

Secondly, the evaluation found the following key success factors for different target groups (see section 4.4 and Volumes III, V).

- **For young learners in the initial stages of their human capital development**, the attractiveness of the learning offer made a positive difference, including a combination of traditional classroom based and out-of-school activities, the inclusion of vocational training, the use of e-learning and the flexibility of learning delivery (including from home). This requires the teaching staff trained and confident to use the new teaching approaches and tools. Well-integrated accompanying measures (including career advice and guidance) were also key, especially for young people at risk (such as early school leavers).

- **Students in higher education and researchers in R&D** are usually an already highly motivated group, hence for them the key to success was providing the support which met a real demand (scholarships for studies, support internationalisation, links with employers), as well as ensuring that the ESF supported implementation procedures are well managed.

- **For employed people**, training worked well when it fulfilled a clear gap in the labour market (e.g. training for a sector specific qualification in a sector with labour shortages, training for entrepreneurship), provided an easy and flexible access to training (e.g. in the form of individual vouchers) and was well marketed to the employed and companies. However, the needs of particular target groups (e.g. older workers) were not so well met and here the need for different approaches is apparent.

- **For adults** it was important to ensure that the training provided was connected to labour market needs and the participants are thus able to increase their employability. The success is also supported by the nature of the learning courses offered, including the use of e-learning and other more flexible provision. This is particularly important for disadvantaged adults, such as long-term unemployed and those with low or no qualifications.\(^{90}\)

Thirdly, the more general lesson is the need to support the development of a framework for the implementation of ESF HC investment that promotes the customisation of interventions to the needs of specific target groups (see Volume III, sections 4 and 5). The lessons learnt from this evaluation should be applied in the future when targeting certain groups:

- **For young learners**, offering a mix of learning activities combined with advice and guidance.

- **For higher education students and researchers**, providing support which meets the demand.

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\(^{90}\) The evaluation did not include have enough interventions focussing on specific disadvantaged groups (such as low-skilled, disabled, migrants, ethnic minorities) and older workers to provide the evidence to draw out specific lessons to these target groups.
• For employed, providing training which fills in existing gaps and is delivered in a flexible way.
• For unemployed and adults, providing training connected to the labour market needs.
• For disadvantaged adults (such as long-term unemployed and people with low skills), pay particular attention to the nature of the courses offered (which should be linked to the labour market needs and build on the existing skills of the participants) and to delivering courses in a flexible and attractive way (including flexible scheduling, use of ICT learning tools and delivery of learning outside the classroom).

Finally, there is a need to improve the gender balance between ESF participants in different areas of ESF human capital investment. The evaluation found that men were over-represented in Clusters 7 (Research and innovation), 8 (Transition to the labour market by young people) and 9 (Upskilling of employed people) and women were under-represented in Clusters 2 (Quality of higher education), 4 (Quality of school education), 10 (Upskilling of adults) and 11 (Quality of higher education) (see Section 4.5.2). This is particularly important given that only in 20% of interventions assessed in-depth were gender considerations taken into account in the implementation and delivery of activities.

5.3 Appropriate programming

Firstly, in most cases the OPs had a range of broad priorities and more narrowly defined sub-priorities which enabled the programming flexibility in terms of the design of calls for proposals. On the other hand, sometimes the OP architecture was so broad that it did not clearly define the nature of interventions (see section 4 and Volume III). The breadth in defining priorities was the norm across the OPs. In some OPs an overly broad architecture appeared to lead to less well defined interventions (where the nature of interventions was defined very broadly and allowed for the implementation of very wide ranging activities). Therefore, the objectives for the different priorities could be defined in a more robust way and supported by clear and measurable targets.

Secondly, a number of ESF interventions have been selected, supported and delivered in the absence of targets set for the achievement of outputs and, even more importantly, results. Often the targets were set to measure what was easily measurable rather than measuring achieved progress in reducing the problem and the ESF contribution to the reduction of the problem (see section 4.4 and Volume III). It was also not the case generally that the target levels were set on some appropriate and systematic basis. In addition, where targets have been established, it was difficult to know whether they have been set in a common comparative way both across the OPs and across the Member States (and targets tended to be set too low or too high).

Hence, a key lesson is a need for a common target setting methodology (including the definitions, procedures and the desired types of targets) to ensure the targets are set in a comparable and appropriate way across the OPs and countries and a more systematic approach to setting more appropriate target levels is adopted. This would allow to set common and appropriate level of ambition for interventions across the varied range of the ESF activity in different Member States. This is important to ensure the appropriate programming and strike the right balance between the initial ambition and the outputs and results achieved at the end of the implementation.

Thirdly, the use of evidence-based programming was uneven across the Member States (see section 4.4 and Volume III, Section 2). Some interventions were funded

91 Across 87 interventions examined in-depth, 45% (93 of 207) output indicators and 47% (73 of 156) result indicators did not have targets set.
without a prior appraisal of their anticipated effectiveness or considerations of similar experiences in the past. Therefore, there is scope for even more evidence-based programming where the choice of particular activities in the human capital development is informed by evidence of their past effectiveness or ex-ante assessment of potential impacts.

Fourthly, sharing the programming and engaging the right stakeholders/partners is one of the key success factors (see section 4.4 and Volumes III, IV). Shared programming involving all the relevant stakeholders, such as social partners, enterprises, universities, research bodies and other stakeholders, can increase the commitment of stakeholders to ensuring effective programming and subsequently effective implementation. Significant stakeholder support for the choices and the implementation of the interventions is very important for their success. This is particularly important when ESF support is given to the new types of activities and experimentation for innovation where the quality of the partners can make or break the activity.

Finally, information was lacking (see section 4.5 and Volume III) to assess the sustainability of ESF human capital interventions to help guide future policy making. Factoring in the sustainability from the outset means that plans for sustaining the activities should begin alongside the programming (involving contingency planning for follow-on activity and / or appropriate exit strategies). In addition, information on the participant results by gender and age were also missing to assess the impact of ESF investment on key priority groups (such as young people or women).

5.4 Effective implementation

Firstly, across the less successfully implemented ESF activities, one recurrent factor was the lack of clear and efficient delivery and governance structures and the insufficient management capacity of delivery partners (see section 4.4 and Volume III). Ultimately, the quality of project promoters and their systems was paramount to effective implementation and this signals the need to continuously improve the ESF management and coordination practices. This could involve further capacity building, training and on-going mentoring / support (particularly among stakeholders new to the ESF). Further work could be done to ensure that application procedures are well-organised and supporting documentation and materials are clear and easy to follow. Furthermore, detailed methodological guidelines with clear parameters and clear instructions on financial requirements are essential to facilitate sound administrative and financial management and reporting by beneficiaries.

Secondly, the use of technologies and e-learning in the ESF delivery increased the transparency, access and interest among the target groups and in several interventions generated sustainable practices (see section 4.3.3). Approaches based on electronic communications have many advantages as they provided an easy, cost effective, transparent and well-accepted mode of communication between the stakeholders and the target groups, and should be further utilised. Hence, it is important to utilise the technologies in the implementation of future ESF human capital development activities.

Thirdly, the ESF implementation differed between the broad and narrow focused mechanisms (see section 4.5 and Volume III, section 5). In the broad focused mechanisms, a range of activities was funded, giving greater flexibility for projects and facilitating the design of activities that are in line with project applicants' needs and capacity. However, this leads to interventions lacking a clear and specific focus with an embedded diversity of actions and little steer from the managing authorities towards interventions that have proven to be effective. Combined with a wide definition of potential activities to be funded, a broad target audience can lead to a modest and scattered effect. Also, projects that are very diverse make learning and sharing between projects challenging. In contrast, the more narrowly focused implementation mechanisms only fund a certain type of activity. In relation to the
appropriate choice between broad and narrow implementation mechanisms, an implementation approach whereby a specific methodology would be tested at a small scale and then upscale in consequent projects could be used in the future.

Fourthly, implementation choices were also made between a limited number of large scale national projects and a large number of smaller projects (see Volume III, section 5). The large scale national projects benefit from the concentration of existing expertise usually across the range of institutions. Additionally, they have sufficient scale and duration to support thorough and evidence-based development of actions, testing/piloting and subsequent adjustments. On the other hand, such projects mobilise important resources, requiring strong project management and risk control as the costs of failure are very high. Smaller projects allow more scope for experimentation, they are typically more flexible and respond to clearly identified needs, though typically generating smaller scale outputs.

Finally, the implementation choices were made between ESF support to new delivery mechanisms and their testing with the ESF resources and mechanisms which have been existing and established before the ESF support (see Volume III, section 5). Mature implementation mechanisms have a track record and have been tested before the ESF. Hence, ESF can capitalise on their existence and past lessons learnt and broaden the scope of the delivery to new sectors, target groups and activities. However, exclusive focus on mature mechanisms means neglecting appropriate space for social innovation through the ESF (which in certain countries, especially in the economic recession, is one of the few funding channels for such activity).

5.5 Robustness of monitoring systems

Firstly, the key challenge for the evaluation was the lack of reliable and comparable result data to inform an ex-post assessment, due to a number of factors:

- As shown in section 4.3, over 1,300 result indicators were identified in the ESF human capital investment activities, and the lack of common result indicators has impeded the monitoring of ESF achievements (see Volume II, section 4 and Volume II, Annex 6 which details 108 result indicators which could not be aggregated into the common types).
- Occasionally, the definitions of specific outputs and results were mixed and the defined OP result indicators were really measuring outputs (e.g. number of participating schools was treated as a result indicator, see Volume III, section 4). Differences in interpreting what is an output and what is a result hinder the assessment of the overall success. Hence, there is a need to further reflect on the distinction between the output and result indicators.
- At the same time, the authorities should be discouraged from the use of global impact indicators for high level developments (e.g. reduction of early school leaving, see Volume III, section 4) without a possibility to ascertain the contribution of ESF to these developments.
- Information about participant results 6 or 12 months after their completion of the intervention was generally missing (see section 4 in this volume and Volume III, section 4). However, the development of human capital is an investment process and the results for this investment will accrue over potentially quite a long period of time and therefore monitoring sustainability (and progression) will need to be rather sophisticated. The lack of data on sustainability of results hinders the assessment of the overall ESF success. This indicates the need to undertake exit and follow-up surveys to assess the impact of ESF support within a specific time horizon after the end of the support.
- There were also difficulties in linking ESF data with other administrative datasets in many countries – MAs indicated that it was not possible to link ESF participant information to national administrative datasets, which would make it possible to follow participants up in the longer term (see Volume III, section 4.
Reasons for this vary (and include issues over confidentiality and data protection), but it is mainly due to a lack of unique identifiers, which might make such a link possible, not being specifically recorded.

In the 2007-2013 period, the lack of comprehensive, reliable and comparable result indicators was due to the lack of definition of the standard common types of output indicators based on Annex XXIII categories and result indicators in the ESF legal framework. The issues are already being addressed in the 2014-2020 programming period through the introduction of common types of result indicators, the introduction of the medium and longer term result indicators in the ESF legal framework and encouraging the Member States to link ESF with other administrative datasets.

Secondly, a number of other monitoring issues have been highlighted in the evaluation (see Volume III, section 4):

- Differentiating between unique participants and repeat participants taking part in an intervention more than once,
- Establishing whether an individual participant achieves two or more results from the same intervention,
- Differentiating between the different types and intensity of support provided to participants,
- Avoiding counting indirect participants of the intervention (e.g. all students in a school which participated in an intervention),
- Ensuring the cumulative as opposed to annual achievement values are reported by all MAs,
- Ensuring that clear distinctions are made between the indicators where values are estimated by the MAs and indicators based on actual values achieved,
- Data on socio-economic characteristics of participants was not uniformly available and often incomplete or partial. The collection of such data for all participants needs to be supported by clear guidance on the interpretation of categories and definitions used to avoid errors and gaps.

Thirdly, clear, unambiguous guidance about the indicator definitions could improve the monitoring function and help those with monitoring, evaluation, or wider performance management responsibilities (see section 4.3 of this Volume and Volume III, section 4). This could include the precise definitions about which results indicators are to be used, how they are to be defined, collected and calculated (including with real ESF examples). A number of developments in the 2014-2020 period are already addressing the issues encountered (counting only the unique participants, common types of outputs and results indicators, and clear methodological guidance). Moreover, a regular annual exercise of reporting the ESF achievements across all the OPs could encourage better monitoring data management and reporting, as well as give visibility to the programme achievements on a systematic basis (this has not yet been introduced in the 2014-2020 programming period).

Finally, the assessment of the efficiency was hindered by the lack of data on individual project activity costs (see Volume III, section 4). The lowest level of cost information available is the level of project. However, as each project combines a range of activities (for example teacher training and the employment of a school psychologist, etc.) the budget also covers a range of activities. To facilitate the measurement of efficiency (in terms of funds spent per type of activity), monitoring data should capture the costs of different types of activities, alongside with their outputs and results.

5.6 Robustness of the evaluation systems

Firstly, the key challenge for the evaluation was the lack of reliable result data which would inform an ex-post assessment (see also section 5.5).

Secondly, the existing EU and national level evaluations evaluated different evaluation objectives and levels of OP architecture (see Volume III). Not all important human capital themes were assessed in all Member States/ or assessed at different points in the implementation process. This made an aggregation of evaluation findings across the existing evaluations very difficult. Hence, the planning of evaluations at the European and national levels could be further improved:

- At the EU level, there is a need to plan the EU level evaluations of ESF at the start of the programming period (including defining the evaluation object in the OP architecture and questions and promoting a coordinated evaluation approach at the national / regional level).
- At the national level, there is a need to further harmonise the evaluations conducted, including the agreements and coordination of the evaluation object (ranging currently from the whole OP, a Priority Axis, sub-priority, a thematic priority or a horizontal principle to project level). The definitions of the ESF priorities and level of OP architecture to be evaluated at the EU level should be carried through at the national level. The evaluation coverage and depth across the Member States could be further expanded to ensure that all important themes are assessed on a systematic basis. This is particularly applicable in relation to the size of the OPs in the national / regional contexts. In the OPs with more significant ESF resources more and greater depth evaluations should be expected, including differentiating between the different types and intensity of support. The current focus of evaluations on the implementation progress and challenges faced is understandable, but there is a need to ensure that the assessment of outputs, results and impacts achieved and the impact evaluation of the ESF investment takes place as well across the OPs.

Thirdly, ESF interventions were continuing to operate at the time of the ex-post evaluation (see Volume III, section 4). It was not possible to provide final, cumulative data for expenditure, outputs and results. Hence, the timing of ex-post evaluations needs to be reviewed either to ensure that they take place after the closure of the OPs or the expectations for the ex-post evaluation are managed to reflect the fact that many activities are still ongoing. The timing of an ex-post evaluation must balance the need for completeness in the data presented with the need to provide learning to inform the subsequent programme period.

Finally, different evaluation methods and techniques have been used to assess similar types of ESF activities in the human capital investment (see Volume III, section 4). Although examples of Counterfactual Impact Evaluations of ESF provision were identified, those with a specific HC focus were rare. There is a need to improve the robustness of the evaluations undertaken, and promote the use of counterfactual approaches in future programming periods. The 2014-2020 programming period already includes an enhanced emphasis on advanced and counterfactual evaluation approaches. However, if this is to be achieved active encouragement and methodological support to the ESF partners is likely to be required. Additionally periodic monitoring and surveys of beneficiaries across all projects would provide longitudinal data to understand the long term results and impacts from ESF assistance. Surveys have been undertaken but disaggregation of individual beneficiaries by intervention/project was not possible on a systematic basis. Such analysis would provide a better basis for counterfactual impact analysis (for example through robust statistical analyses).
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