

Annual Implementation Report 2017

Implementation of Ireland's Operational Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020



Citizens' Summary



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

The Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) is supported under PEIL 2014-2020

INTRODUCTION

Background

Ireland's Operational Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) was launched in April 2015 (approved by the European Commission in February 2015). The Programme sets out a framework for the allocation of a total of €1.157 billion over the period 2014-2020, comprising €544.5 million from the European Social Fund (ESF), an equal amount from the Exchequer and just over €68 million from the Youth Employment Initiative.

Building on the positive contribution made by the earlier Human Capital Investment Operational Programme (HCIOP) 2007-2013, the PEIL focuses investment in a number of key areas. These areas revolve around activation of the unemployed, improving social and labour market inclusion, enhancing education attainment, and tackling youth employment. It is expected that the allocated funding will help to provide our labour force, and in particular the unemployed, with the skills, experience and qualifications necessary to avail of job opportunities as we emerge from the financial crisis.

This Citizens' Summary accompanies the PEIL Annual Implementation Report (AIR) for 2017 which was submitted to the European Commission in accordance with the relevant Regulations on 31 May 2018, and is the third Citizens' Summary produced under PEIL. It contains summary information regarding –

- the structure of the PEIL OP,
- key national developments,
- overall financial and physical progress, as well as updates for each activity,
- relevant evaluations,
- communications and information activities.

Structure of the Operational Programme

The PEIL OP is comprised of the following thematic objectives from the ESF Regulation No. 1304/2013, (Article 3):

- **Priority 1:** Promoting the attainment of sustainable and quality employment through relevant upskilling measures and supporting labour mobility (*Article 3.1(a)*).
- **Priority 2:** Promoting Social Inclusion and combating discrimination in the labour market (*Article 3.1(b)*).
- **Priority 3:** Investing in Education, Training and Life Long Learning with a view to upskilling and re-skilling the labour force (*Article 3.1(c)*).
- **Priority 4:** Youth Employment Initiative (*Article 3.1 (a) (ii)*).
- **Priority 5:** Technical Assistance

There are 20+ specific activities within the first four priority investments, while the Technical Assistance priority deals with the operation and administration of the overall programme. The Priority Axes are as follows –

[Priority 1: Promoting the attainment of sustainable and quality employment through relevant upskilling measures and supporting labour mobility](#)

€329.7 million or 28% of the total funding allocated to the Programme, is assigned to Priority 1, which is intended to tackle unemployment and enhance labour mobility. Activities within this Priority Axis include –

- ***ETB Training for the Unemployed:*** Provides a range of vocational training courses to meet the needs of unemployed persons or other job-seekers.
- ***Springboard:*** Provide part-time flexible higher education opportunities to reskill or upskill unemployed or previously self-employed people in areas where there are identified skills shortages and where sustainable employment opportunities may arise as the economy recovers.
- ***ICT Skills Conversion Course:*** Provides graduates from other skills areas with the opportunity to upskill or reskill through 1 year full- time Conversion Programmes in core computing/programming skills.
- ***Momentum:*** Focused on funding upskilling programmes for the long-term unemployed and those under 25 years of age.
- ***Intra-EU Mobility:*** This activity funds a number of measures including EURES Ireland, which promotes labour mobility as well as sustainable employment via specific upskilling measures.

Priority 2: Promoting social inclusion and combating discrimination in the labour market

€387.6 million, or 34% of the total funding allocated to the Programme, is assigned to Priority 2 to support active inclusion measures, to promote equal opportunities and to combat discrimination. Activities within this Priority Axis include –

- ***Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP)***: Tackles poverty and social exclusion, with a particular focus on delivering work readiness programmes for the young unemployed.
- ***Youthreach***: Provides education, training and work experience for early school leavers.
- ***Garda Youth Diversion Projects***: Supports young people at risk of/or involved in criminal and/or anti-social behaviour.
- ***Young Persons Probation Projects***: Engages with young offenders in local communities.
- ***Disability Project (Ability Programme)***: Enhanced supported employment services for people with disabilities.
- ***Integration and Employment of Migrants***: Promotes active inclusion and enhanced employment possibilities for vulnerable legally resident migrants.
- ***Tus Nua Project***: Promotes independent living and positive reintegration into the community for women leaving prison and women offenders referred from the community.
- ***Gender Equality***: Supports women wanting to return to the labour market and women entrepreneurs.

Priority 3: Investing in Education, Training and Life Long Learning with a view to upskilling and re-skilling the labour force

€215.4 million, or 19% of the total funding allocated to the Programme, is assigned to this Priority Axis to promote lifelong learning through the following activities –

- ***Third-Level Access***: Enhances 3rd level attainment by disadvantaged students and students with disabilities.
- ***Back to Education Initiative (BTEI)***: Provides part-time learning opportunities for those with less than second level education.
- ***Adult Literacy***: Provides increased access to literacy, numeracy and language tuition for adults.

Priority 4: Youth Employment Initiative

€204.4 million, or 18% of the total funding allocated to the Programme, is assigned to this Priority Axis. The purpose of the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) is to tackle youth unemployment and implement the Youth Guarantee by providing job, education and training opportunities to young people aged 15-24 who are not in employment, education or training (NEET). YEI funding is reserved for use in those regions, including Ireland, where youth unemployment levels exceeded 25% during the reference year of 2012. The specific YEI funding allocation for Ireland of €68 million is matched by equal amounts from our European Social Fund (ESF) allocation and from the Exchequer, giving an overall allocation of €204 million.

There has been a number of changes to the list of activities supported under Priority 4. Following a Government Decision in late 2016, *JobBridge* was closed. It was proposed to discontinue Tús having unsuccessfully explored the potential to use an SCO model for the scheme. It was also decided to discontinue the *Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme SICAP* (tackles poverty and social exclusion, with a particular focus on delivering work readiness programmes for the young unemployed) under Priority 4 and to continue this programme under Priority 2.

Two new activities were introduced under the YEI in 2017. These are the Community Training Centres (CTCs), and the Defence Forces Employment Support Scheme. A third new activity will commence in 2018 entitled the Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS) which will replace JobBridge.

The following activities are now funded under Priority Axis 4, (it should be noted that not all of these activities are aimed exclusively at under-25s):

- ***Back to Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme (BTWEA)***: Promotes the self-employment prospects of long-term social welfare recipients.
- ***JobsPlus Incentive Scheme***: Incentivises employers to offer employment opportunities to the long term unemployed.
- ***Youthreach***: Provides education, training and work experience for early school leavers.
- ***Momentum***: Focussed on funding upskilling programmes for the long-term unemployed and those under 25 years.
- ***Community Training Centres (CTCs)***: Provides early school leavers with the knowledge, skills and confidence to participate in society and progress to further education, training and employment.
- ***Defence Forces Employment Support Scheme***: Exerts a positive influence on participants with the specific aim of equipping them with life skills and other marketable and certifiable skills
- ***Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS)***: To raise the skills and education levels of people eligible for support under YEI, by providing education,

training, work experience and/or work opportunities, including support for self-employment.

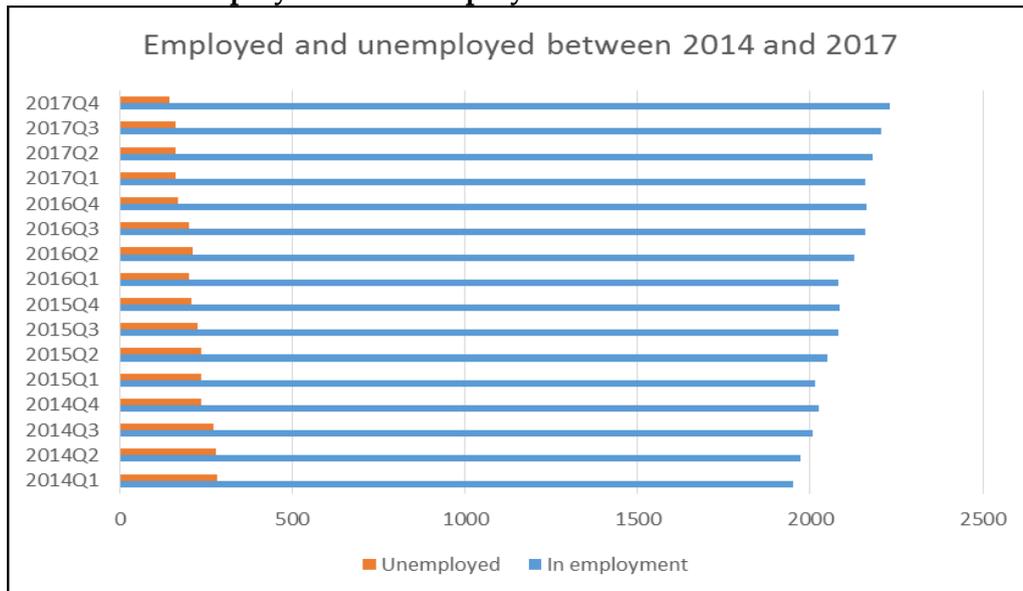
Priority 5: Technical Assistance

€20 million, or less than 2% of the overall funding allocated within the Programme, has been assigned to Technical Assistance to support the various preparatory, management and control, evaluation, information and communication, and audit activities undertaken in to implement the programme. Training and guidance for Intermediate Bodies and beneficiaries are also eligible for assistance as well as the costs associated with the new IT system required for data exchange under the 2014-2020 round.

National Context – Key Recent Developments

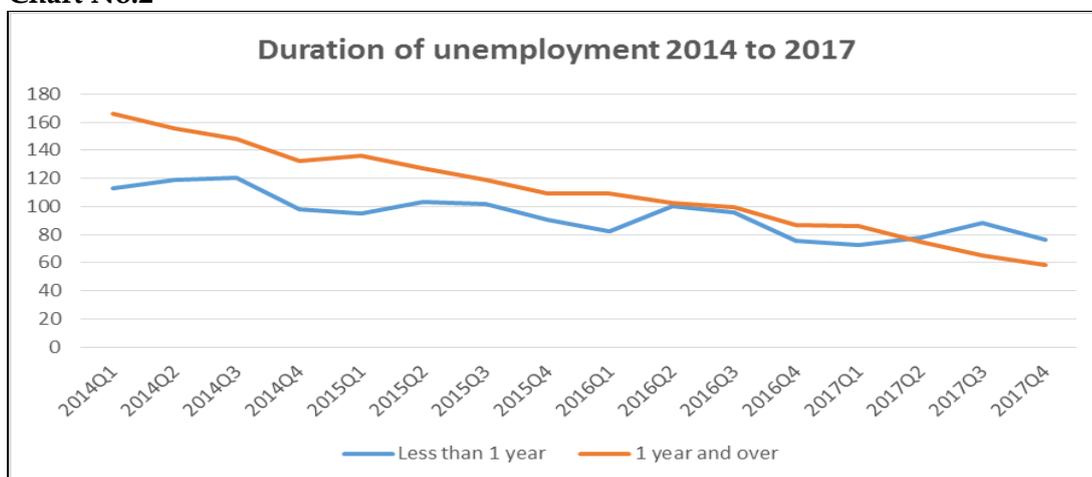
The economy continued to improve during 2017, as can be seen in Chart No.1 here below, and there were more positive improvements in a number of labour market indicators. There was an increase in employment of 3.1% (66,800) to Q4 2017, slightly down on the Q4, 2016 level of 3.8% (or 79,200). The number of persons employed by the end of 2017 reached 2.231 million.

Chart No. 1 - Employed and unemployed between 2014 and 2017



The numbers unemployed decreased by 23,400 over the year to the end of Q4 2017 to 144,100, a decrease of -14%. The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate had decreased to 6.4% by the end of the year (7.1% at Q4, 2016), below the EU average of 7.3%. The number of long-term unemployed reduced by 22,500 (or -22%) to 79,700. The long-term unemployment rate decreased from 3.7% to 2.5% at the end of Q4 2017, approx. 46% of total unemployment, 54.0% a year earlier. The number on short-term unemployment decreased by 15,600 (-19.7%) to 63,600 over the year to the end of Q4 2016 (see Chart No. 2 below).

Chart No.2



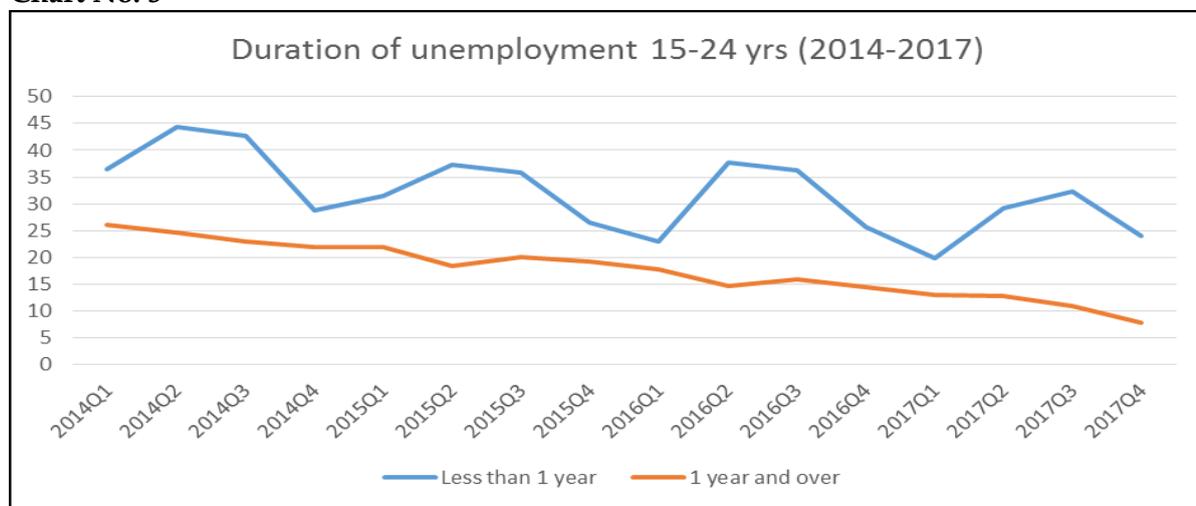
The downward trend for unemployment in respect of 15-24 year olds continued with the youth unemployment rate decreasing from 14.8% in Q4, 2016 to 12.2% by Q4 2017.

Table No.1

	Q4, 2014	Q4, 2015	Q4, 2016	Q4, 2017
Youth unemployment rate: 15-24 yrs	21.1%	18.2%	14.8%	12.2%
Numbers unemployed 15-24 yrs ('000)	57.73	52.73	46.6	36.1

The following Chart No. 3 shows the short-term (less than one year), which is more variable and the long term (1 year and over) which shows a steady decline from 2014 to the end of 2017.

Chart No. 3



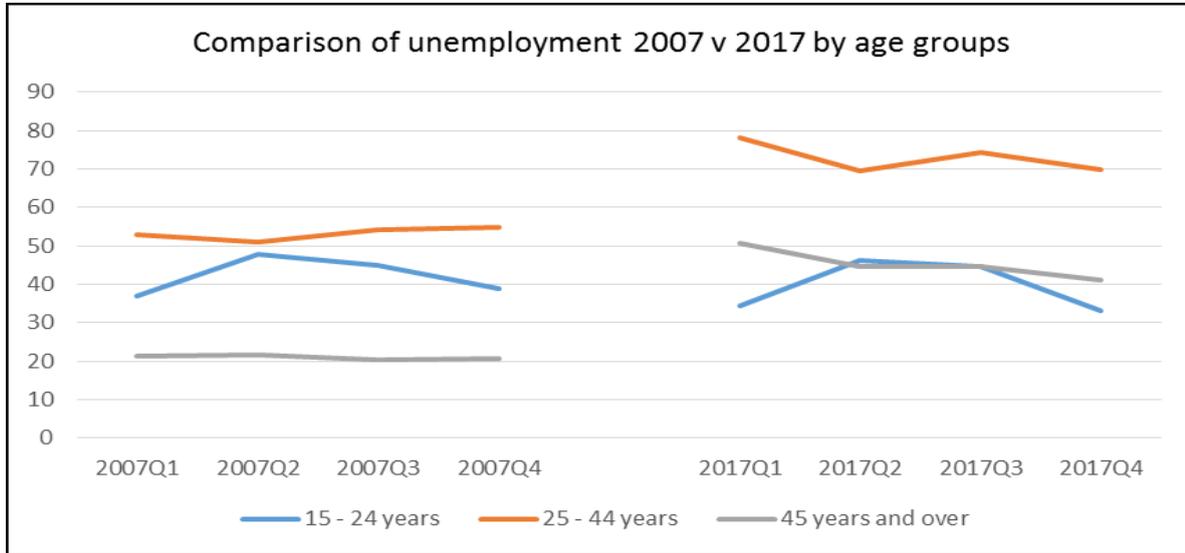
While the numbers unemployed continued to decline, not all age categories reduced at the same rate over the period. Table X here below shows a comparison between the unemployment figures for the year 2007 (pre the economic recession) and for 2017 for three age categories namely the 15 to 24 age group, the 25 to 44 age group and the 45 years and over category. The figures for the 15 to 24 years group are back down to the 2007 level while the other two age categories are still higher; in the case of the over 45s the current figures are double those of 2007.

Table No. 2

	2007Q1	2007Q2	2007Q3	2007Q4		2017Q1	2017Q2	2017Q3	2017Q4
15 - 24 years	36.9	47.7	45.1	38.9		34.5	46.1	44.6	33.1
25 - 44 years	52.9	50.9	54.2	54.9		78.1	69.7	74.3	69.8
45 years and over	21.4	21.5	20.4	20.8		50.7	44.7	44.6	41.2

Chart No. 4 below shows the current higher trend in unemployment for all those over 25 by comparison with 2007. The attainment of the same level of employment in Q4 of 2017 to that of Q4 2007 has not reduced the unemployment figures for all the over 25s; the recovery for these categories seems to be much slower (or the new jobs in 2017 went to under 25s?).

Chart No. 4

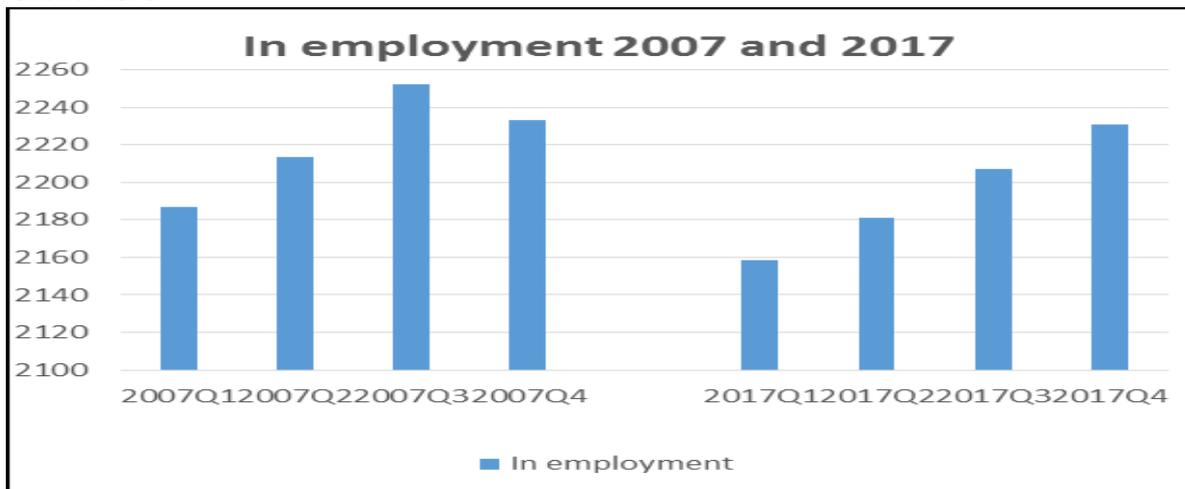


The Table No. 3 and Chart No. 5 here below show the recovery in employment numbers to those that existed at the end of 2007.

Table No. 3

	2007Q1	2007Q2	2007Q3	2007Q4	2017Q1	2017Q2	2017Q3	2017Q4
In employment	2186.9	2213.4	2252.2	2232.9	2158.7	2181.2	2206.8	2231

Chart No. 5



Employment increased in most of the economic sectors over the year 2017. The largest rates of increase were in the Administrative and support service activities (+11.6% or 9,800) and the Construction (+9.9% or +12,000) sectors. The largest rate of decrease was

recorded in the Professional, scientific and technical activities (4.1% or 5,700) sector. (Source CSO LMS Q4 2017).

While the economic recovery that has taken place since 2012 has outpaced projected growth, a number of challenges remain for the future, most notably the outcome of the current Brexit negotiations.

The 2016 Census (<http://www.cso.ie/en/census/>) found that there was a strong relationship between unemployment and the levels of education attained. The unemployment rate for people with only primary education was 34.6%, while the rate for people with third level education was 6.2%.

The education profile of working age persons participating in the labour force has improved, but the share of persons with only NFQ Level 3 (ISCED Level 2) qualifications stands at over 15%, eight percentage points above the target set in the 2007 National Skills Strategy. A number of relevant Government policies, and recent actions, are set out below.

The new **National Skills Council (NSC)** was launched in April 2017. The Council oversees research, advises on prioritisation of identified skills needs and on how to secure delivery of identified needs and plays a key role in promoting and reporting on the delivery of responses by education and training providers to those priorities. A network of nine **Regional Skills Fora** were established to help foster stronger links between employers and the education and training sector. The Department of Education and Skills appointed nine Regional Skills Fora Managers. *The National Skills Bulletin*, (December 2017), a report compiled by SOLAS on behalf of the National Skills Council, stated that there were almost 313,000 more people at work since 2012; over 50% decline in young people unemployed and a 70% decline in long term unemployment.

The Government launched its plan to expand apprenticeships and traineeships in Ireland in 2017, aimed at delivering 50,000 new registrations by 2020. A ministerial briefing was held on traineeships and a new five-step guide and website were launched. Further information is available at www.traineeship.ie

The **Pathways to Work 2016-2020 Strategy** continued the implementation of the Youth Guarantee Scheme Implementation Plan and includes actions to increase the share of the workplace based interventions, to restructure the First Steps (the work experience programme for particularly disadvantaged young people) to ensure monthly engagement with young people is consistently maintained, and to implement the Defence Forces Skills for Life Employment Support Scheme, which is supported under Priority 4.

The **FET Services Plan for 2017** details the list of the fulltime (113,995), part-time (129,357), Community (50,414) and other courses delivered by the 16 ETBs, 22 State Agencies and Bodies and 34 Voluntary Secondary and Community comprehensive Schools.

The Minister for Employment Affairs and for Social Protection, published the ***Pathways to Work Action Plan for Jobless Households*** on the 25th September 2017. Development of the Action Plan was a commitment in the *Pathways to Work 2016-2020* strategy. The Plan also was a response to the level of household joblessness raised in Country-Specific Recommendations to Ireland. The Plan extended activation services to people who were not working, but were not defined as unemployed on the traditional measures. It focused on improving employment rates of households with children – both the traditional ‘nuclear’ family and the lone parent family. In order to drive action on household joblessness, progress against each of the reform actions and milestones will be monitored and reported on quarterly to the Cabinet Committee on the Economy and Jobs. The Plan also set **two new headline targets for 2020** namely reducing the proportion of households that were jobless to 13% or less (from 18% in 2015), and reducing the share of the 18-59 population resident in such households to less than 8% (from 12% in 2015). Performance against these targets will be published on an annual basis.

The **Action Plan for Jobs 2017** aimed to create 50,000 extra jobs in 2016 in the context of the overall goal of 200,000 net additional jobs by 2020. According to the CSO’s LFS Q4 report, there were 65,100 additional persons in employment at the end of 2016. Under the heading of Addressing New Labour Market Challenges, The Plan aimed to develop and reform the State’s public employment services to help ensure that the number of people on the Live Register was reduced as the economy recovered and the labour market responded flexibly and efficiently to employment growth.

The **Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024** continued to build on the main strategic priorities, namely to build skills, capacity and independence; to provide bridges and supports into work; to make work pay; to promote job retention and re-entry into work; to provide co-ordinated and seamless support; and to engage with employers.

The **National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-19** continued to promote the five key goals set out in the plan to mainstream delivery of equity of access in HEIs, namely to assess the impact of current initiatives to support equity of access; to gather accurate data and evidence on access and participation to inform policy; to build coherent pathways from further education and foster new entry routes into higher education; and to develop regional and community partnership strategies for increasing access to higher education with a particular focus on mentoring.

Progress towards our EU 2020 Targets

Europe 2020 is the EU’s ten-year growth and jobs strategy, launched in 2010. Five headline targets have been set for the EU to achieve by the end of 2020, of which three are relevant to this Programme – employment, education, and social inclusion and poverty reduction. Positive progress has been made towards the achievement of Ireland’s targets, and data relating to the targets on employment and education are set out below -

Indicator	Position in 2010	Position in 2016	Position in 2017	Target 2020
Employment				
% 20-64 year olds in employment	64.7%	70.3%	73%	69-71%
Education				
Early school leavers	11.4%	6.9%	6.1%	8%
Tertiary attainment of 30-34-year-olds	50.1%	52.3%	53.3%	60%

The employment target of 69-71% for 2020 has already been exceeded by Ireland; the employment rate for 2017 was 73%.

The target for early school leavers (i.e. 18-24 year olds with at most lower secondary education and not in further education and training) fell to 6.1% in 2017 and is already below the 2020 target of 8%.

The target for third level education attainment reached 53.3% in 2017 (it exceeds the EU average of 39.7%).

To reduce the number of people in consistent poverty to 4% by 2016 (interim target) and to 2% or less by 2020, from the 2010 baseline rate of 6.3%.

The Irish contribution to the Europe 2020 poverty target is to reduce by a minimum of 200,000 the population in ‘combined poverty’ (i.e. at-risk-of-poverty or basic deprivation).

Consistent poverty fell from 8.7% in 2015 to 8.3% in 2016; gradually decreasing from 9.1% in 2013. The interim target of 4% by 2016 was not achieved. There has been improvement in ‘combined poverty’ with the rate falling from 33.7% in 2015 to 29.2% in 2016 (or 1.39 million people), and is close to the 2010 baseline. Consequently, 180,000 people will need to be lifted out of combined poverty to meet the Europe 2020 target.

Progress to Date

The Table here below shows the progress made in terms of expenditure at both Priority Level and by individual Activity within each Priority. The total expenditure reported for the OP at the end of 2017 reached €1,037m. This total exceeds the funding allocations for the years 2014 to 2017 by €468m. However, it should be noted that this expenditure is indicative until such time as related payment claims have been submitted to the Commission.

PEIL 2014-2020	IB	AIP No.	Total Allocations 2014-2020	Allocation 2014-2017	Expenditure 2014-2017
PRIORITY 1					
ETB Training - Unemployed	SOLAS	ESF 1.1	€245,702,368	€101,686,856	€328,621,233
Springboard	HEA	ESF 1.2	€54,752,372	€51,602,800	€81,701,421
ICT Skills Conversion Course	HEA	ESF 1.3	€12,373,358	€12,373,588	€22,874,995
Momentum	SOLAS	ESF 1.4	€13,700,000	€13,700,000	€16,741,836
Intra EU mobility	DSP	ESF 1.5	€2,700,000	€1,350,000	€983,027
Transnational	DES	ESF 1.6	€500,000	€500,000	€0
Priority 1 Total			€329,728,098	€181,213,244	€450,922,512
PRIORITY 2					
SICAP	DRCD	ESF 2.1	€60,000,000	€0	€0
Youthreach	SOLAS	ESF 2.2	€213,624,578	€0	€0
Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs)	DJE	ESF 2.3	€75,125,160	€36,120,954	€37,622,803
Young Persons Probation (YPP)	DJE	ESF 2.4	€11,648,000	€5,744,000	€5,478,962
Disability Project	DSP	ESF 2.6	€10,000,000	€5,714,284	€0
Transnational	DES	ESF 2.11	€500,000	€500,000	€0
Sub Priority total:			€370,897,738	€48,079,238	€43,101,765
Integration / employ Migrants	DJE	ESF 2.7	€3,325,000	€1,850,000	€663,279
Tus Nua project	DJE	ESF 2.8	€2,392,830	€1,184,694	€1,293,071
Gender Equality	DJE	ESF 2.9	€11,000,000	€5,000,000	€1,185,386
Sub Priority total:			€16,717,830	€8,034,694	€3,141,736
Priority Totals			€387,615,568	€56,113,932	€46,243,501
PRIORITY 3					
Third Level Access	HEA	ESF 3.1	€22,400,000	€12,800,000	€32,470,789
Sub Priority total:			€22,400,000	€12,800,000	€32,470,789
BTEI	SOLAS	ESF 3.2	€100,940,000	€53,480,000	€94,783,869
Adult Literacy	SOLAS	ESF 3.3	€91,557,150	€48,700,008	€100,770,243
Transnational	DES	ESF 3.4	€499,998	€499,998	€0
Sub Priority total:			€192,997,148	€102,680,006	€195,554,112
Priority Totals			€215,397,148	€115,480,006	€228,024,901
Priority 4					
(BTWEA) Scheme	DEASP	ESF 4.1	€4,647,870	€4,647,870	€2,368,530
JobsPlus Incentive Scheme	DEASP	ESF 4.2	€7,992,000	€7,992,000	€7,047,000
Youthreach	SOLAS	ESF 4.5	€101,156,387	€101,156,387	€259,504,343
Momentum	SOLAS	ESF 4.6	€13,800,000	€13,800,000	€8,370,918
CTCs	SOLAS	ESF 4.8	€60,000,000	€60,000,000	€31,833,203
DFESS	DDef	ESF 4.9	€840,000	€840,000	€311,712
YESS	DEASP	ESF 4.10	€16,000,000	€16,000,000	€0
Priority Totals			€204,436,257	€204,436,257	€309,435,706
Priority 5					
Technical assistance for OP	DES	ESF 5.1	€20,000,000	€11,428,568	€2,415,292
Total OP:			€1,157,177,071	€568,672,007	€1,037,041,912

ESF New Participants 2017

PEIL 2014-2020	AIP No.	New Participants 2017
Priority 1: Promoting the attainment of sustainable and quality employment through relevant upskilling measures and supporting labour mobility.		
ETB Training for the Unemployed	ESF 1.1	11,666
Springboard	ESF 1.2	4,128
ICT Skills Conversion Course	ESF 1.3	1,545
Momentum	ESF 1.4	0
Intra EU mobility	ESF 1.5	0
Priority 1 Total		17,339
Priority 2: Promoting Social Inclusion and combating discrimination in the labour market		
Social Inclusion and Activation Programme (SICAP)	ESF 2.1	0
Youthreach	ESF 2.2	0
Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs)	ESF 2.3	1,469
Young Persons Probation (YPP) projects	ESF 2.4	172
Disability Project	ESF 2.6	0
Sub Priority Total		1,641
Integration and employment of Migrants	ESF 2.7	450
Tus Nua project	ESF 2.8	35
Gender Equality	ESF 2.9	1,004
Sub Priority Total		1,489
Priority 2 Total		3,130
Priority 3: Investing in Education, Training and Life Long Learning with a view to upskilling and re-skilling the labour force		
Third Level Access	ESF 3.1	11,176
Sub Priority Total		11,176
BTEI	ESF 3.2	16,344
Adult Literacy	ESF 3.3	27,392
Sub Priority Total		43,736
Priority 3 Total		54,912
Priority 4: Youth Employment Initiative		
Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) Scheme	ESF 4.1	110
JobsPlus Incentive Scheme	ESF 4.2	479
Youthreach	ESF 4.5	2,960
Momentum	ESF 4.6	0
Community Training Centres (CTCs)	ESF 4.8	1,538
Defence Forces Employment Support Scheme	ESF 4.9	31
Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS)	ESF 4.10	0
Priority 4 Total		5,118
Overall Total		80,499

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY UPDATES

PRIORITY 1

ETB Training for the Unemployed

This activity includes the following programme groups:

- *Specific Skills Training* - mainline courses which are employment-led and lead to qualifications that offer learners both generic skills and skills specific to particular jobs or occupations. Both short courses and longer 6+ month courses are included.
- *Bridging-courses* for people who have left school early, or for other reasons need broader-based, generic skills training.
- *Traineeships* - occupational-specific training courses, typically of 9 months duration that use a combination of off-the-job and structured on-the-job workplace training.

The target for Traineeships for 2017 of 2,600 enrolments was exceeded, and seven new traineeships were commenced. There are currently 1,500 employers working with ETBs offering traineeship opportunities including business, retail, care, construction, engineering, fashion and beauty, finance, ICT, hospitality, sports and leisure and logistics. A ministerial briefing was held on traineeships and a new five-step guide and website were launched. Further information is available at www.traineeship.ie

In relation to the Specific Skills Training programme, SOLAS has commissioned an evaluation (Vocational Training and Opportunities Scheme is also included). The evaluation commenced in March 2018 with the aim of generating policy-relevant knowledge concerning the appropriateness, conduct and impacts of the Specific Skills Training provision; to learn about the appropriateness and effectiveness of the current policy on Specific Skills Training provision.

There were 11,666 new participants on Skills Training activities in 2017.

Springboard

Springboard is an initiative to help unemployed and previously self-employed people remain as close as possible to the labour market by accessing part-time flexible higher education and training opportunities to upskill or reskill in areas where there are skills shortages and where sustainable employment opportunities may arise as the economy recovers. This is actioned through the funding of places on courses at levels 6 to 9 on the National Framework of Qualifications and are provided by public and private higher education providers across the country. Providers and courses are selected for Funding through an annual competitive calls process.

Even though the unemployment rate had fallen to 6.8% at the end of 2016, just prior to the call for proposals, there is still a significant demand for skilled employees and addressing these skills needs is seen as crucial to sustainable economic growth. The following changes to the eligibility criteria for participation on Springboard funded courses were approved under the 2017 call.

- Persons not in receipt of a payment from the Department of Social Protection out of the work environment for a number of years due to childcare or other Carer obligations and had a previous history of employment but may require upskilling, reskilling or cross-skilling to transition back to the workforce (“Homemakers”) were included in the eligible categories of applicants.
- Persons, irrespective of their employment status, who wished to upskill or reskill to meet a specific emerging skills gap in the Biopharma/Med Tech sector were eligible. In addition, persons with a L7 qualification in ICT sector became eligible to upskill by taking 1 year part-time add-on courses to upskill to a L8 BSc qualification, regardless of their employment status. Prior to 2017 all Springboard courses were only open to the unemployed. The rationale for opening up the eligibility criteria for these courses was to address the skills need in the ICT and Biopharma/MedTech sectors.

The number of people who enrolled on Springboard courses in 2017 was 4,128.

ICT Skills Conversion Courses

The ICT skills conversion programme was introduced as a means to address concerns by industry and the enterprise development agencies about continuing difficulties in sourcing ICT graduates with the requisite skills in Ireland, not only to fill existing vacancies, but also to support expansion of their activities and potential employment opportunities. Therefore the activity aims to increase the number of high level ICT skills graduates by providing places on specialised graduate conversion programmes aimed at non-ICT graduates. Programmes are selected for funding on the basis of an annual competitive calls process.

1,545 people enrolled on ICT Skills Conversion Courses in 2017.

Intra-EU Mobility

This activity supports a number of measures to promote labour mobility within Europe, including finding workers for “difficult to fill” vacancies in Ireland, finding jobs in Europe for mobile Irish jobseekers, undertaking focussed recruitment campaigns and jobs fairs and assisting migrant workers coming to Ireland.

In 2017, 4 persons were provided with employment placements through EURES Ireland's co-sponsored programme. This number, whilst less than anticipated, reflects the continuous decrease in the live register and the sharp improvement in employment opportunities available within Ireland.

Work continued in 2017 to match applications with vacancies for transnational employment opportunities and to more generally facilitate better integration of EU labour markets. Three jobs fairs were held in Dublin, Meath and Donegal which were all well attended together with an online Job Day in Cork targeting the ICT and business sectors. Three DIALOG events, an initiative aimed at providing a platform for identifying the labour market issues of EU/ EEA workers living in Ireland and a platform for developing solutions were also held during the year. Finally, EURES Ireland also signed Service Level Agreements with three EU Member States, France, Sweden and Germany to facilitate closer collaboration with those countries' labour markets.

PRIORITY 2

Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDP)

Throughout 2017 the Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs) continued to deliver assistance and support to young people at risk of/or involved in criminal and/or anti-social behaviour. 1,469 young people joined the service in 2017.

A new pilot "work to learn" programme was introduced in 6 GYDPs in 2017 with the aim of targeting participants who are ready to explore the world of work. The programme has two target groups, GYDP participants and the business community, often the target of youth crime and anti-social behaviour. The programme exposed participants to the world of work and the skills required to operate effectively in it, through a structured and supported process involving preparation, placement and reflection and challenges the young person involved to undertake a paid part-time job with all the responsibilities that that entails. It is intended to expand the programme in 2018 and future years to, subject to funding.

Young Persons' Probation (YPP) Projects

Participants in the four YPP projects (*Le Chéile*, a nationwide mentoring service; *Céim ar Chéim* and *Southill* projects in Limerick City, and *Dóchas don Óige* project in Galway) come from marginalised backgrounds and socio economic deprived areas, and require the highest levels of support and interventions. The clients are presenting with increasing complex issues, including mental health issues. The YPP projects address a number of challenges in their work with juveniles (most of whom would have low

levels of educational achievements) by focussing on the needs of those furthest from the labour market and with the highest poverty risk.

The levels of young people coming through the Irish Courts system has reduced in the past few years, resulting in fewer young persons' being referred to YPP projects. The number of participants in the YPP projects is slightly up on the figure for 2016, with 172 joining in 2017. The Probation Service is intending to review its approach to services to young persons and young adults.

Céim ar Chéim run two main programmes (1) a full-time Education & Training Day Centre offering an accredited programme in QQI modules Levels 1-3 and the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme and (2) an Evening Programme which includes interventions such as Restorative Practice, Aftercare support, and Counselling services. The project held an awards ceremony in June 2017, where 42 young people received QQI qualifications. Five students are progressing to third level courses, and three students are graduating from UCC with a third level qualification. As part of its initiative of project participants giving back to their Community, participants from the project ran a Summer Programme for the children of asylum seekers in Direct Provision.

Dóchas don Óige provides (1) a 48 week Core Programme including FETAC accredited Education and Training courses to the young adults/children, and (2) an Evening Support Programme/ Young person Club, catering for between 5-20 children or young adults. Other programmes include Driving and Road Safety programmes; Substance Misuse and Mental Health programmes. In August 2017, the project held an "EU in My Region Event" to showcase its work and at the open day, the projects participants received their qualifications from the GRET. The project also tailors its interventions to cater for participants from traveller backgrounds, and children who are from ethnic backgrounds.

Le Chéile provides a range of mentoring and family support programmes. Mentoring of young offenders and parent mentoring are the core services provided, including Young person mentoring service, Mentoring of Young People in Detention, and Parent mentoring service/Parenting Programmes/Family support interventions. Le Chéile also provides a Restorative Justice Service in the Limerick region and incorporates Restorative Practice throughout services nationally. In March 2017 Le Chéile published the evaluation report on its mentoring activities. The research confirmed that mentoring is making a positive difference for young people, their parents and society overall. The report also found that mentoring reduces offending behaviour and contributes to reducing the economic and social impact of crime. The evaluation quantified the positive impacts on soft skills areas such as communication skills and self-confidence, which are fundamental skills to empower participants to progress to a better future.

Southill provides a range of services and supports young offenders and other young persons at risk of offending from Limerick city and surrounding area. The interventions provided include Group Work, Carpentry & Mechanics Programmes, an Inreach Programme and an Outreach Outdoor Adventure Programme. The Mechanics Programme provides participants with the practical elements of car maintenance, but it also includes a road safety element. A training module has been developed for delivery of the programme and it is hoped that this module can be used at national level in areas where there are high levels of car related crime. The project has also produced its own short film, entitled Joyride, which won the All Ireland Award for Best Documentary by Radharc, to show the real impact of 'joyriding'. In June 2017, the project held a photographic exhibition to celebrate the work of the project and acknowledged the funding and support the project receives through the European Social Fund.

Disability Project

The objective of this activity is to promote employment prospects and meaningful social roles for young people with disabilities. It aims to bring participants who are not work-ready closer to the labour market using a range of person-centred supports.

The **Ability Programme** was launched on the 18th of September, 2017 by the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and the Minister of State for Disability Issues. National, regional and local organisations that have experience of working with people with a disability were invited to submit proposals for funding to Pobal, who are the administrative agents of the programme for the Department. The minimum grant is €200,000 while the maximum grant will be for €750,000 over the funding period. Organisations submitted applications for funding, either in their own right or as a part of a consortium.

The application process closed at the end of January 2018 and 59 applications were received. Successful applicants will be notified shortly.

Integration and Employment of Migrants

The objectives of the Migrants Activity are to promote active inclusion, equal opportunities, active participation and to improve employability through social inclusion employability programmes and the socio-economic integration of marginalised communities who are experiencing barriers to participation and employment. The categories of persons in the target group are EEA Nationals who are resident in Ireland and Third Country Nationals with permission to enter employment in Ireland.

Following on from the selection of five projects in 2016, a project initiation meeting was held with each of the projects in 2017. Following the submission of revised budgets and work plans five organisations were contracted to deliver initiatives in 2017.

These projects were as follows:

Project Name	Organisation
EPIC	Business in the Community
Kilkenny Migrants “New Start” Program	County Kilkenny Leadership Partnership
JUMP	Cultúr Celebrating Diversity Ltd
Migrant Access Programme	New Communities Partnership
Welcome to Work	Seetec

In 2017, there were 450 participants engaged in the five funded projects.

The projects participated in the 60 year celebratory ESF conference in Dublin Castle in November 2017. EPIC presented on their programme the conference and was subsequently selected as an emblematic project for the Commission’s Cohesion30 Campaign. The EU Funds Unit produced a brochure describing the funded projects which has been disseminated widely.

The Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality with special responsibility for Equality, Immigration and Integration established the Communities Integration Fund in 2017. This new fund enabled small organisations to become involved in fostering integration. While the fund is targeted at local organisations and the grants are small (up to €5,000) it has enabled 131 local organisations to receive funding for integration measures. The EU Funds Unit continues to work with the Office for the Promotion of Migrants in Ireland (OPMI) to ensure there is no duplication.

Tus Nua Project

Tus Nua provides a support service for women leaving prison and women referred from the community (with a history of offending), and in particular with safe supported housing and a positive environment as part of a 6 month supported residential programme. The project support participants in their transition and reintegration into the wider community. The participants in the project have complex support needs, and are aged between 18 and 65. *Tus Nua* can actively address and support women around Accommodation Provision; Needs Assessment & Planned support; Resettlement and Aftercare Support; Access to external support services (including a range of training and educational support); Skills for independent living and personal development; Dealing with domestic violence; Dealing with self-harm and harm reduction techniques; Supporting women engaged in prostitution; Access to counselling relating to addiction, mental health and other issues; Alcohol and drugs programmes; and Programmes addressing mental health and related issues Family supports.

Tus Nua plays a central role in the Joint Probation Service-Irish Prison Service Strategy 2014-2016 “An Effective Response to Women Who Offend”, which was designed to provide a more tailored women centric intervention, to reduce offending and improve opportunities for reintegration as well as positive outcomes more generally. The numbers of women using Tus Nua Centre has remained at its 2015/2016 levels due to alleged anti-social behaviour. Collaboration and consultation with local agencies, residents/businesses and the centre’s residents has assisted the project in overcoming these challenges, and the project is currently fully operational.

Gender Equality

The objective of the Gender Equality Activity is to support a cohort of those women who are currently detached from the labour market, in order to assist their return to the labour market. This will be done by offering them a locally delivered development course which will comprise a series of training opportunities focusing self-development and work related skills. The categories of persons in the target group are (1) Strand A – Women Returning to the Workforce (WRW) i.e. women who are detached from the labour market and the objectives are to develop and deliver one or more training models to offer self-developmental training in employment related skills on a part time basis to women who currently detached from the labour market. (2) Strand B – Women’s Entrepreneurship (WE) i.e. women who can be supported to increase the rate of women’s entrepreneurship, the objectives are to develop and deliver interventions aimed at addressing the gender gap in entrepreneurial activity through targeted supports for women’s entrepreneurship.

In 2016, 18 projects were selected and a project initiation meeting with each of the projects held in early 2017. Following the submission of revised budgets the 18 organisations were contracted to deliver initiatives, 14 under Strand A and 4 under Strand B.

The total number of participants who have commenced activities in the 18 projects is 1,004.

The 14 projects funded in 2017 under Strand A are:

Project Name	Organisation
Healthcare Opportunities for Women	Ballyhoura Development CLG
Get Ready, Get Steady, Go	Cavan Monaghan ETB
Women into Employment Programme	Cork City Partnership
Working Women	Equal Ireland
Duhallow Work Opportunities for Women Project	IRD Duhallow
Women's STEPS to Employment Programme	NCCWN
Moving On	North East and West Kerry Development

New Futures for Lone Parents - Retail, ICT & Healthcare Careers	One Family
Women's Integration, Skills and Employment (WISE)	People 1 st
Bridge to Work	Ruhama
Wexford Women Working	South East Training and Education Centre Ltd
Repower	Southside Partnership
The Carlow Catalyst Programme for Women	St. Catherine's Community Services Centre
Increasing Female Labour Force Participation and Employment in Westmeath	Westmeath Community Development Limited

The 4 projects funded in 2017 under Strand B are:

Project Name	Organisation
Empower	GMIT
Building Better Futures	Migrant Rights Centre Ireland
WEB NET	PARTAS
Women's Rural Entrepreneurial Network (WREN)	SECAD (South and East Cork Area Development Partnership)

During 2017, the Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality with special responsibility for Equality, Immigration and Integration launched the Women and Girls Strategy 2017-2020. The Strategy contains a specific action to Advance Socio- Economic Equality for Women and Girls. Action 1.7 commits to *fund the provision of locally delivered courses for women, comprising a series of training opportunities on self- development and work related skills, to assist a return to the labour market and promote entrepreneurship.*

PRIORITY 3

Third Level Access

There are two broad objectives under this measure: The Student Assistance Fund (SAF) which aims to support students facing ongoing or temporary financial hardship which would otherwise negatively impact on their chances of retention or completion of their higher education course. The Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD) supports students in overcoming barriers to participation in higher education due to disability. Support under both these objectives are offered to eligible students on full-time higher education courses. For practical purposes, the two objectives are administered separately as sub-programmes.

New guidelines were developed for the Student Assistance Fund in 2017 for Higher Education institutions including guidelines for students. Part time students who are lone parents or members of the other access target groups are now eligible for Student Assistance Fund. In 2017, the model of allocation for the fund changed to 40% of funding for each HEI based on Full Time Equivalents and 60% Socio Economic Groups as collected through Equal Access data collection

A review of the Fund for Students with Disabilities was published in October 2017 to design and implement a new Fund for Students with Disabilities funding allocation model. A new allocation model will allow timely allocation and payment within the calendar year. An Implementation group has been established to oversee this change in funding allocation. The full report can be found on the HEA website at:

<http://hea.ie/policy/national-access-plan/access-publications/>

There were 11,176 new participants supported under either the Fund for Students with Disabilities or the Student Assistance Fund in 2017.

Back to Education Initiative (BTEI)

For BTEI programmes, as in previous years, continued attention was paid to prioritising the provision of integrated programmes leading to major awards (as opposed to the provision of single modules or components) through Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI).

ETBs continued to develop new approaches to enhance opportunities for learners to engage in part-time provision through the Back to Education Initiative. Examples include:

- Learner engagement programmes to meet the needs of those most removed from the education/training environment

- Increased flexibility in the timing of courses, to include weekends
- Increased outreach provision, as well as enhanced pre-assessment policies and procedures to ensure the identification of best-fit programmes for learners
- The development of Open Learning Centres in F.E. colleges to support learners with assignments

16,344 people enrolled on BTEI Courses in 2017.

Adult Literacy

SOLAS, ETBI and its member ETBs, as well as the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), AONTAS, the national adult learning organisation, and a range of other key stakeholders funded by SOLAS have again worked closely in 2017 to further develop the structures required to progress the implementation of the **Literacy and Numeracy Strategy**. SOLAS commissioned ICF Consulting to undertake independent research to expand the evidence base to inform embedding literacy and numeracy across all of FET provision. SOLAS also commissioned ETBI to undertake research with regard to best practice in relation to Initial and Ongoing Assessment of Adult Literacy and Numeracy at NFQ levels 1-3 as well as English Language Provision for Low-Skilled and Unemployed Migrants - Recommendations for Good Practice at NFQ levels 1-3 in ETBs. Please click on the below link for this document: [Initial and Ongoing Assessment of Adult Literacy and Numeracy](#).

These reports relate to elements of the Further Education and Training Literacy and Numeracy Strategy which aims to promote, develop and encourage literacy, numeracy and English language acquisition for adults in Ireland. Guidelines for Inclusion of Learners with Intellectual Disabilities in adult literacy provision have also been finalised by NALA and ETBI.

A 2017 campaign www.takethefirststep.ie was launched on 8 September by the Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton TD. The 2017 campaign performed strongly in terms of recall and reach. The campaign featured learners talking about authentic experiences of going back to learning and appealed to a number of segments such as: young recent school leavers, adults looking to improve their employment prospects, learners with more complex issues such as limited basic skills, attention and concentration, those who would benefit from accessing literacy and numeracy rich return to learning for personal development.

27,392 participants enrolled on Adult Literacy Courses in 2017.

PRIORITY 4

Back to Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme (BTWEA)

The main purpose of the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) is to encourage those of the long term unemployed who may have had an idea for a business to develop it and set up their own enterprise and become self-employed. BTWEA allows them to retain a reducing proportion of their qualifying social welfare payment whilst their business becomes established.

Following a review of the BTWEA, published in February 2017, new guidelines for the Scheme were issued and came into effect in July 2017. Amongst the recommendations the amended BTWEA guidelines:

- Provide for greater cooperation between DEASP and the Local Enterprise Offices and Local Development Companies when examining applications to ensure no needless duplication of effort and resulting confusion;
- Clarify the role of the DEASP officer in focussing more closely on the applicant's readiness to establish his or her business with particular emphasis on training requirements and whether a more realistic and suitable activation option is available;
- Provide greater clarity on the minimum requirements of a new business plan when considering a new entrant onto the Scheme.

110 participants under the age of 25 joined the BTWEA Scheme in 2017.

JobsPlus Incentive Scheme

Operational since July 2013, this scheme supports longer term jobseekers back into employment. The initiative is targeted at employers who take on additional employees from the Live Register and those transitioning into employment. The ESF and the YEI has co-financed JobsPlus Youth since 2015. Under the Scheme employers can recruit persons under the age of 25 who had been unemployed for at least 4 months out of the previous 6. Employers are paid a grant of €7,500 in respect of these employees. A higher grant rate of €10,000 is payable to employers if the employee has been unemployed for at least 624 days (20.5 months) out of the previous 30 months.

479 YEI participants started JobsPlus placements in 2017.

A Policy Assessment of the JobsPlus Scheme was undertaken by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and published in August 2017. Amongst its main findings were that:

- Over the lifetime of JobsPlus, more than 12,000 people who were long-term unemployed have gained employment through the scheme and over 8,000 employers have benefitted from JobsPlus grants.
- 87% of employees who participated on JobsPlus remain off the Live Register between 30 and 36 months after their commencement date on the scheme. For employees who complete 24 months on the scheme, this percentage rises to 94.8%.
- There are currently more than 4,000 employers approved for payment of a JobsPlus grant in respect of over 5,500 employees. These numbers compare very favourably with the 1,454 employers supported in 2011 by the schemes it replaced.

Youthreach

Youthreach is the national response to the needs of unqualified early school leavers in Ireland. The programme is designed to offer up to two years integrated education, training and work experience for young people aged 15-20 who have left school early without qualifications or incomplete qualifications or vocational training. The programme aims to provide participants with the knowledge, skills and confidence required to participate fully in society and progress to further education, training and employment.

The Plan for Education 2018 includes the commitment (Action 62.1) to conduct and complete an evaluation of the National Youthreach Programme. In addition, Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025 refers to programmes which provide opportunities for those who left the school system early with specific reference to Youthreach and Community Training Centre provision as a means for young people to develop skills and confidence and prepare for further education or work.

The Further Education and Training Strategy (2014-2019), Strategic Objective 4.4, requires SOLAS to organise independent evaluations of key lines of Further Education and Training provision to ensure that they are effective in delivering the objectives of the programme for learners; this includes the National Youthreach Programme. Following a competitive tendering process the ESRI were commissioned by SOLAS to undertake the evaluation. Research began in September 2017 and is expected to be completed by the summer of 2018.

Youthreach-centres and Community Training Centres are mostly located in disadvantaged areas. 2,960 young people joined Youthreach in 2017.

Community Training Centres (CTCs) – NEW

Community Training Centres (CTCs) offer programmes to provide young people with basic skills training and work experience, to improve motivation, and aid progress to further training or employment. Participants are generally between 16 and 21 years of age, who have left school without completing formal examinations or who have incomplete qualifications; who are experiencing difficulties finding a job; and who are keen to gain a qualification. CTCs can also provide for other young people under the age of 25 who are disadvantaged and/or unemployed, with the agreement of the relevant Education & Training Board. Courses have a strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy training. CTC courses are full-time and participants can avail of training opportunities within a CTC for a period up to two years. CTCs are part of the Youthreach initiative.

CTCs, which are owned and managed by local community groups, are funded and supported by SOLAS / ETBs. This activity commenced operations on 1st January 2017 under the PEIL OP, and 1,538 participants have been reported as commencing the activity during 2017.

Defence Forces Employment Support Scheme (ESS)

The Defence Forces Employment Support Scheme is targeted at unemployed 18-24 year olds who face significant barriers to gaining employment. The Scheme seeks to provide these participants with new skills, competencies and self-development that will enhance their capacity to pursue employment, work experience or further educational opportunities. The Scheme is one of the actions to be implemented under the Department of Social Protection's Pathways to Work 2016-2020. It encompasses a training programme of 10 weeks duration, consisting of 5 weeks of military orientated training interspersed with 5 weeks of educational orientated training.

A pilot programme for the Scheme was held in Gormanston Camp from June to August 2016 with 25 participants, all of whom successfully completed the programme. Following a successful evaluation of the pilot programme, two programmes took place in 2017, one involving 15 participants took place in Limerick and ran for 10 weeks from May to July 2017. The second programme with 16 participants took place in Gormanston Camp and ran from October to December 2017. The next programme is due to commence in Cork in June 2018. An interim review of the scheme has commenced.

Youth Employment Support Services - NEW

Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS) is scheduled to be introduced in Quarter 2 of 2018. It is targeted at young jobseekers who are long-term unemployed or who face

barriers to employment. The programme aims to provide them with the opportunity to learn basic work and social skills in a supportive environment while on a work placement. Candidates must be aged between 18 and 24 and have been out of work and in receipt of a qualifying payment for at least 12 months, or if unemployed for less than 12 months, be considered by a case officer to face a significant barrier to work.

There is no activity to report on this Scheme in 2017 as it is scheduled to commence in 2018.

PRIORITY 5 - Technical Assistance

Technical Assistance activities include the preparatory, management and control, evaluation, information and communication, and audit activities undertaken by the Managing Authority, Certifying Authority and Audit Authority in implementing the Programme. The costs associated with the new e-Cohesion system attributable to the ESF will be supported from this Priority, as will training and guidance measures for Intermediary Bodies and Beneficiaries.

Output Indicators						
Indicator	Measurement Unit	Output 2014	Output 2015	Output 2016	Output 2017	Target Value 2023
Audit Output indicator	Number of audits p/a	0	0	0	0	270
Number of Employees	Number of Employees	6	5	5	4	6
Number of Meetings per Annum	Number of Meetings p/a	0	1	2	2	14

EVALUATION ACTIVITY

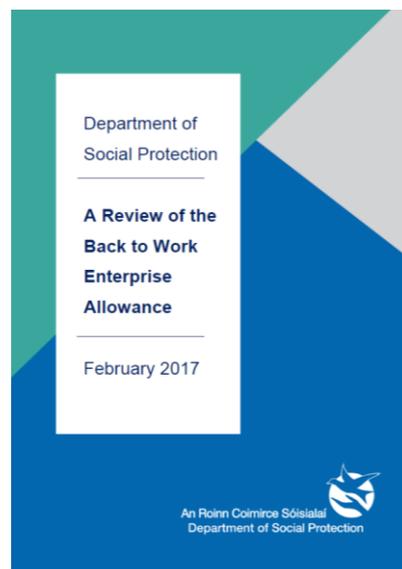
The Evaluation Plan for PEIL was prepared by the Managing Authority in 2015 and provides an overall framework for the evaluation of PEIL 2014-2020. The European Commission provided its observations on Ireland's ESF Evaluation Plan in May 2016 and, as a result, the plan was revised and updated.

The Mid-Term Evaluation of PEIL and the Final YEI Impact Evaluation are due to be completed by the end of 2018. The Mid-Term Evaluation had been originally timetabled for 2017. However, to ensure that the evaluation can yield useful information and recommendations, it was deferred until 2018 and will incorporate the second YEI evaluation, which is due to be completed by end of 2018. The procurement process to appoint an external evaluator is currently underway, with a view to completing the evaluations by end-2018. The Impact Evaluation on Priorities 1, 2 and 3 is due to be completed by the end of 2019.

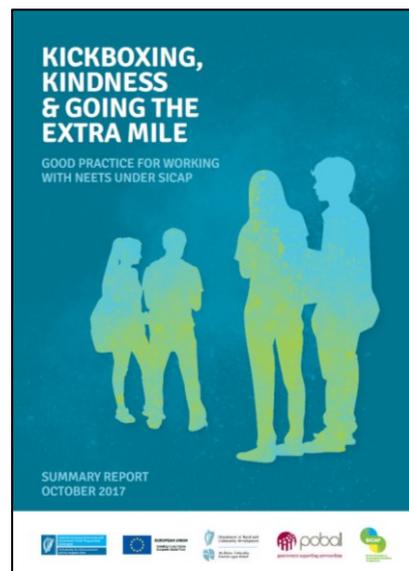
The Plan also notes that other relevant evaluations, outside the scope of the evaluation plan itself, are planned and will take place over the course of the programming period. These evaluations are noted within the Plan itself, together with any relevant recommendations/findings. This is to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are made aware of relevant evaluation work, in the interest of transparency and emergent learning.

Of particular note during 2017 were –

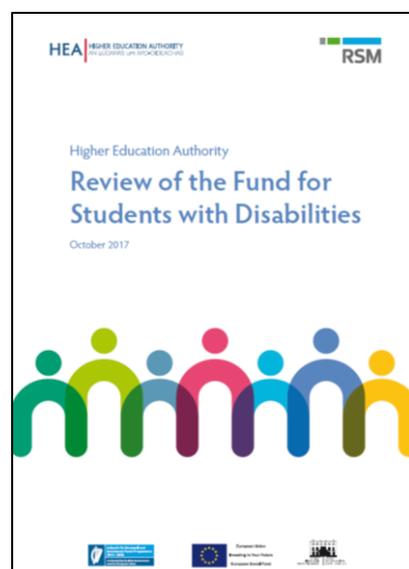
- The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) undertook A Review of the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) in 2016. The report was published in February 2017. The review focused on the extent to which the BTWEA is meeting its objectives and identifying best practice. The main findings of the review included that the BTWEA offered effective support for the long term unemployed that it supported the development of new enterprises and that participants were twice as likely to remain off the Live Register after 6 and 18 months. Recommendations included that clarity is required regarding the specific role of DEASP case officers, the need to tailor supports to individual needs, and a need for greater emphasis on training. A counterfactual evaluation of BTWEA participants and non-participants in the period May 2009 to December 2011 was carried out as part of the review.



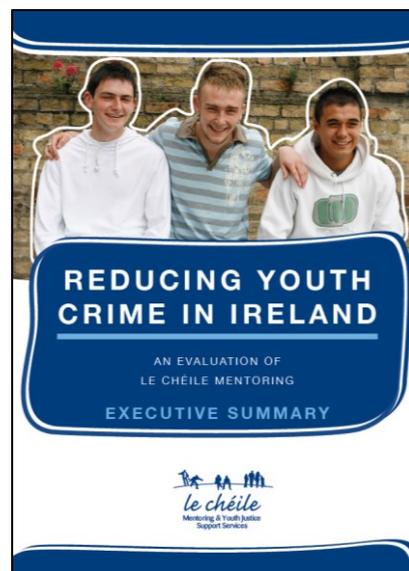
- In late 2016, research to identify good practice in relation to service delivery to NEETs was commissioned by Pobal, which manages SICAP on behalf of the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD). The research was part-financed by the DCRD and the ESF MA. The report of the research, *Kickboxing, Kindness & Going the Extra Mile: Good Practice for Working with NEETs under SICAP*, was published in October 2017. The research identified 19 good practice recommendations under 4 categories: engaging young people; working with young people; partnership working; and organisational development.



- The Higher Education Authority (HEA) commissioned the *Review of the Fund for Students with Disabilities*, one of two funds assisted by the ESF through the Third Level Access activity. The review was published in October 2017. The review found that demand for the Fund has grown rapidly in recent years. Between 2008 and 2016, the number of students supported by the Fund each year grew from 3,800 to almost 10,500. Recommendations included to reform the allocation model, to extend eligibility to part-time students and to increase the level of funding available.



- The Le Chéile Mentoring and Youth Justice Support Services, one of the projects assisted by the ESF through the Young Persons Probation activity commissioned *Reducing Youth Crime in Ireland: An Evaluation of Le Chéile Mentoring*. The evaluation was published in March 2017. It was based on the impact of the activity over the period 2013 to 2015. Among the findings of the report were that there is a return of €4.35 for every €1.00 invested in the service, there was a 28% reduction in reoffending during the mentoring period, reductions in alcohol and drug use, improved self-confidence and communication skills, greater involvement in education, work and training, and improved relationships.



- A Focused Policy Assessment of JobsPlus, conducted by DEASP, was published in August 2017. The assessment reviewed the operation of the scheme from its commencement in July 2013 until the end of 2016. The report found that more than 12,000 people who were long-term unemployed gained employment through the scheme and over 8,000 employers benefitted from JobsPlus grants. The report also found that JobsPlus has proven effective at getting people who were long-term unemployed off the Live Register: 87% of those that participated remained off the Live Register between 30 and 36 months after their commencement date on the scheme. Among the report's recommendations was that, given the changing nature of the Live Register, it may be appropriate to adjust the incentive to focus on those who are unemployed for three years or longer.



Other relevant evaluations which are ongoing or planned in 2018 include –

- SOLAS has commissioned an independent analysis of Youthreach provision through Youthreach Centres and Community Training Centres, with a view to informing policy and practice regarding provision for early school leavers. The study incorporates multiple perspectives: participants, teachers/instructors, coordinators and managers and aims to capture the voice of young people who have disengaged from school. The evaluation will conclude in 2018.
- The SICAP Evaluation research programme, which is overseen by a steering group with representation from the DRCD and Local Government, Pobal, the ESRI and an independent academic, is to conclude in 2018.
- SOLAS are to commission an independent evaluation of the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) during 2018.

The Evaluation Plan also provides that the ESF MA, through its Technical Assistance budget, will seek to support the evaluation activities of relevant bodies where those activities are, in the view of the MA, particularly relevant to the efficient and effective implementation of the OP. It is in that capacity that the MA co-financed, with the Department of Rural and Community Development, the Kickboxing, Kindness & Going the Extra Mile: Good Practice for Working with NEETs under SICAP research.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION ACTIVITY

As its major information activity for 2017 and to mark the 60th Anniversary of the ESF, the ESF Managing Authority (ESF MA) hosted a one day conference entitled '*The European Social Fund: Celebrating 60 Years of Investing in People*' which was held in Dublin Castle, on 28 November, 2017.

The objectives of the conference, which was attended by some 200 people, were to highlight the role and support provided by the ESF in Ireland and to showcase the achievements accomplished by activities supported by the ESF in Ireland. There was a wide range of speakers on the day, including policy makers and practitioners, industry representatives, social partners and programme implementers. Of particular interest were the personal stories of past participants on ESF supported activities.



Pictured L-R: Mr Aidan O'Brien, Head of EU Funds, Department of Justice & Equality, Ms Caitríona MacAonghusa, EPIC Programme Coordinator, Business in the Community Ireland, Ms Sarah Benson, CEO, Ruhama & Ms Maria Staunton, Innovation Hub Manager, GMIT

In order to promote the PEIL 2014-2020 and highlight the available opportunities and the Programme's achievements so far, the ESF MA managed an information stand at a number of events throughout 2017. The ESF MA distributed ESF branded merchandise and its information leaflet at these events. Events included:

- The **Springboard+** 2017 Roadshow was held in Dublin on 19 August 2017. The event showcased providers and the new courses approved under the 2017 call. Springboard+ is an upskilling initiative in higher education offering free courses at certificate, degree and masters level leading to qualifications in areas where there are employment opportunities in the economy. Springboard+ is co-funded under Priority 1 of the PEIL.
- The **National Ploughing Championships** (19-21 September, Screegan, Co. Offaly). The ESF MA, in conjunction with the Member State, had a stand in the European Commission Representation in Ireland's marquee at the event. General attendance at the National Ploughing Championships is approximately 80,000 per day and therefore the event provided an excellent opportunity to publicise the PEIL Operational Programme to the general public.



In 2017, 18 of Ireland's ESF Activities took part in the Commission's 'Europe in My Region' campaign for the first time. These events included Further Education and Training Fairs, Jobs Fairs, graduation and awards ceremonies, launches and open days. For example:

- Fingal Adult Education Service and Youthreach Balbriggan jointly hosted an Open Day on Europe Day, 9th May. Members of the public were invited to meet tutors and discuss learning options.

The event celebrated 60 years of the ESF with a birthday cake and ESF decorated treats, baked by participants. The Open Day also featured a photo exhibition, displays of the centre's work and a treasure hunt for visitors.



- EURES Ireland, which is co-funded under the **EU Intra Mobility** activity (Priority 1 of the PEIL), held a Jobs Fair on 11 May 2017. The event was aimed at jobseekers looking for work locally and across Europe. There were approximately 6,000 visitors to the Jobs Fair. An Taoiseach, Mr. Leo Varadkar, T.D. then Minister for Social Protection opened the Jobs Fair.

- Southill Outreach, a **Young Persons Probation Project** co-funded under Priority 2 of the PEIL, held a photographic exhibition from 15 June to 30 June showcasing their work with young people and their families. The title of the exhibition was 'Youth of Limerick, Citizens of Europe' and was held in the Civic Offices in Limerick.



Receiving nearly 40,000 hits in 2017, the ESF website, www.esf.ie, is a central portal for information about the ESF in Ireland. The ESF MA continues to maintain a List of Operations on the website. In addition, the website includes Programme Documents, Regulations, Guidelines and information and communication material such as participant stories, the ESF newsletter, press releases and latest news. The ESF MA established its @ESF Ireland Twitter account in February 2017, using it as another medium to promote the ESF and the PEIL.

The ESF MA participated at the joint INFORM/Informal Network of Information Officers (INIO) meetings organised by the European Commission in 2017. The ESF MA also hosted the Network's mascot, 'Noah the Project Lover' during 2017.

The ESF MA collaborated with the Regional Assemblies to produce a video of Noah's visit to ESIF co-funded projects in Ireland. The ESF Information and Communications Officer presented this video to the meeting in December:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=50bWROVfPM8&t=11s>



Pictured: Noah on his first visit to the ESF Headquarters in Dublin

During 2017, the ESF MA continued to actively participate in the National ESIF Communications Committee. The ESF MA worked collaboratively with the Committee to develop a new website, www.eufunds.gov.ie, to publicise the positive impact of the ESI Funds in Ireland. The website, which was launched in 2017, includes high level information on funding and expenditure under each of the Operational Programmes, as well as personal stories of EU funding.



The MA continued to encourage proposals for the use of Technical Assistance for joint activities. In conjunction with the National Association of Youthreach Coordinators, the National Youthreach Video was produced and shown at the ESF 60 Year Conference. In addition, this video was shown at the joint INFORM/INIO meeting in December: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YCrDps4-AXw&feature=youtu.be>. The ESF MA also provided funding to a number of HEI's to include a full page advertisement on the Student Assistance Fund in the Students Union Handbook.



As part of the ESF 60 Years Conference, the ESF MA held an Art Competition for Youthreach Students entitled "What Youthreach Means to Me". All entries were showcased at the event and the three shortlisted entrants were invited to the conference. The winner, Erika Kelly from Laytown/Bettystown Youthreach was presented with her prize on the day.

In December, the ESF MA produced the second annual newsletter for the PEIL: <http://www.esf.ie/en/ImageLibrary/Repository/Info-and-Pub/Newsletter-2017.pdf>. The newsletter highlights a variety of achievements of the ESF in Ireland during 2016 and 2017. The MA also produced an ESF calendar which included pictures of participants and events from 2017, the calendar was issued to all of our key stakeholders.

Examples of other information and communication activities

In January 2017, following an open Call for Proposals, Ms. Frances Fitzgerald, T.D., Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality and Mr. David Stanton, T.D., Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality with responsibility for Integration, Immigration and Equality announced grants totaling €13 million for 43 **Migrant Integration and Gender Equality** projects co-funded through the PEIL 2014-2020. <http://eufunding.justice.ie/en/EUFunding/Pages/PR17000001>

In May 2017, following a competitive call for course proposals, Mr. Richard Bruton, T.D., Minister for Education and Skills and Mr John Halligan, T.D., Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills launched over 6,400 new education places under **Springboard+** 2017. Springboard+ is co-funded under Priority 1 of the PEIL. <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2017-Press-Releases/PR17-05-25.html>

In August 2017, the Minister for Education and Skills and Ms. Mary Mitchell O'Connor, T.D., Minister of State for Higher Education announced an additional €3m allocation for the **Third Level Access Student Assistance Fund (SAF)** over three years to enable participation in higher education on a part-time basis for lone parents and other target groups. Third Level Access SAF is co-funded under Priority 3 of the PEIL. <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2017-Press-Releases/PR2017-08-23.html>

In October 2017, the Minister for Education and Skills and the Minister of State for Higher Education announced the publication of an external review of the **Third Level Access Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD)**. The review found that from 2007 to 2014 the number of students being supported through the Fund grew from 3,500 to over 10,000 beneficiaries. Third Level Access FSD is co-funded under Priority 3 of the PEIL. <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2017-Press-Releases/PR17-08-15.html>



HORIZONTAL PRINCIPLES

In accordance with the relevant Regulations, the following two Horizontal Principles are required to be promoted within the PEIL OP.

- Gender Equality, and
- Promotion of Equal Opportunities and Non-discrimination, which covers the nine grounds set out in the Irish equality legislation

Intermediate Bodies (and Beneficiaries where there is no IB) are required to report on the promotion of both of these principles. Intermediate Bodies (Beneficiaries where no IB in the cascade) are required to report on both of these principles. Following a recommendation at the 4th PMC meeting in May 2017, a horizontal principles working group was set up to consider how to improve reporting on the principles in respect of ESF Activities for PMC meetings. Membership of the group comprises representatives from the Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission (IHREC), the Department of Justice & Equality (DJE) and the ESF Managing Authority (MA).

The group has had three meetings to date. The first meeting took place in October 2017. Discussions at the initial meeting identified a need for increased communication between the MA and the IBs (or Beneficiary) on guidance for reporting on principles in respect of ESF Activities and linking the reporting to Public Sector Duty.

In response, the MA identified the key individuals in each IB or Beneficiary Body tasked with reporting on the principles and invited them to a focused guidance seminar with the working group. Representatives from IHREC and the Equality Division in DJE agreed to provide the individuals with guidance on how to (a) identify the needs and actions under Public Sector Duty, and (b) report this information in a manner accessible to the public.

The seminar took place on 1st May in the DES offices and was well attended, with representation from all IBs. Presentations were given by the ESF MA, Gender Equality Unit in DJE and IHREC. A case study was presented by the EU Funds Unit from DJE. Presentations were followed by facilitated small group discussions, where individuals had an opportunity to consider the principles in the context of their specific Activities.

Composite reports on each Horizontal Principle were presented at the PMC in May 2018 by AnnMarie Quarry, Gender Equality Division, Department of Justice & Equality and Abed Aldakar from IHREC.

Both reports can be found at the following link:

<http://www.esf.ie/en/Members-Area/6th-PEIL-PMC-Meeting-24-May-2018/>

Further information regarding the Operational Programme can be found on the Irish ESF website:
<http://www.esf.ie/en/Programmes/ESF-Programme-for-Employability-Inclusion-and-Learning-PEIL-2014-2020/>



The Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) is supported under PEIL 2014-2020