

Annual Implementation Report 2020

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



Citizens' Summary

INTRODUCTION

Background

Ireland's Operational Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) involves investment of €1.037 billion over the period 2014-2020, comprising €484.5 million from the European Social Fund (ESF), an equal amount from the Exchequer and just over €68 million from the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI). The Programme focuses on activation of the unemployed, improving social and labour market inclusion, enhancing education attainment, and tackling youth employment.

This Citizens' Summary accompanies the PEIL Annual Implementation Report (AIR) for 2020 which was submitted to the European Commission in accordance with the relevant Regulations on the 31st May 2021.

It is the sixth Citizens' Summary produced under PEIL and summarise the activities under the PEIL during 2020.

Structure of the Operational Programme

The PEIL OP has 4 Priorities, each addressing one of the thematic objectives set out in Article 3 the ESF Regulation No. 1304/2013, as well as a Technical Assistance priority, as follows:

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

In 2020, there were 20 specific activities within these four priorities, while the Technical Assistance priority deals with the operation and administration of the overall programme and has an allocation of €20 million, or less than 2% of the overall funding.

The PEIL OP was amended following the approval of the Programme Monitoring Committee, by Commission Implementing Decision of 9th December, 2020 to:

- (a) apply a co-financing rate of 100% to expenditure declared in ESF payment applications during the accounting year starting 1 July 2020 and ending 30 June 2021 for all priority axes in the PEIL OP, pursuant to Article 25a(1) of Regulation (EU) 1303/2013, as introduced by the Regulation (EU) 2020/558 under the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative Plus; and
- (b) transfer €60m of the ESF resources available for programming for the year 2020 to the ERDF to support the cost of supplying essential Personal Protective Equipment for the Irish healthcare system for use in the fight against COVID 19 pursuant to Article 25a(2) of Regulation (EU) 1303/2013, as introduced by the Regulation (EU) 2020/558 under the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative Plus.

The Programme Monitoring Committee also gave approval to consequently reduce the financial allocations for measures, specific objectives, investment priorities and priority axes of the OP and adapt the output and financial indicators' targets, to the new financial allocations arising on foot of the actions at (a) and (b).

The transfer to the ERDF was taken from Priority 1, resulting in the Priority allocation being reduced by €120m, from €394m to €274m, i.e. a drop of 30.46%. The overall OP allocation was reduced to €1,037m with the EU contribution being reduced from €612.6m to €552.6m. The indicator targets for Priority 1 were consequently amended to reflect the new financial allocation.

The application of a 100% co-financing rate to expenditure declared in ESF payment applications during the 2020-2021 accounting year for all priority axes in the PEIL OP does not have any impact on the delivery of the activities for participants. However, availing of the 100% co-financing does result in the overall allocation being fully drawn down on the basis of expenditure on Payment Applications to the end of 2019 or earlier. Accordingly a number of smaller activities are being removed entirely from the OP (Springboard, ICT Skills, Ability, Integration and Employment of Migrants, Gender Equality and YESS). In addition, no activity will now be claimed for the calendar year 2020. Therefore, no participants will be reported for the activities being removed and no participants can be reported for 2020 as no expenditure will be declared for 2020 under the existing 4 PEIL Priorities. In addition, no expenditure will be declared for the following activities and years: Intra EU Mobility (2018-19); Tus Nua (2018-19); Third Level Access (2019); Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (2019), JobsPlus (2019) and CTCs (2019).

Priority 1: Promoting the attainment of sustainable and quality employment through relevant upskilling measures and supporting labour mobility

€274 million, or 26% of the total investment under the Programme, is assigned to Priority 1, which tackles unemployment and enhance labour mobility, via the following activities –

- *ETB Training for the Unemployed*: provides a range of vocational training courses to meet the needs of unemployed people and job-seekers.
- *Springboard*: provides part-time higher education opportunities in areas where there are identified skills shortages and where sustainable employment opportunities may arise as the economy recovers.
- *ICT Skills Conversion*: provide graduates from other skills areas with the opportunity to upskill or reskill through 1 year full- time Conversion Programmes in core computing/programming skills.
- *Intra-EU Mobility*: supports EURES Ireland, which promotes labour mobility across the EU.

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

€298 million, or 29% of the total investment under the Programme, is assigned to Priority 2 to activities to support active inclusion measures, to promote equal opportunities and to combat discrimination, via -

- *Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP)*: tackles poverty and social exclusion in local communities.
- *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*: engage with young offenders in local communities.
- *Disability Project (Ability Programme)*: a pre-activation programme for young people with disabilities.
- *Integration and Employment of Migrants*: promotes active inclusion and enhanced employment possibilities for vulnerable legally resident migrants.
- *Tús Nua Project*: promotes independent living and positive reintegration into the community for women leaving prison and other female offenders.
- *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

€241 million, or 23% of the total investment under the Programme, is assigned to Priority 3 to promote lifelong learning through the following activities –

- *Third-Level Access:* supports disadvantaged students and students with disabilities pursue third level education.
- *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 million, or 20% of the total investment under the Programme, is assigned to the YEI 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 was provided 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.

The following activities are funded under the YEI (it should be noted that in relation to some of these schemes, not all of their 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. [completed in 2017]
- *Community Training Centres (CTCs):* provides early school leavers further education and training opportunities.
- *Defence Forces Employment Support Scheme:* a 10 week training programme of military and educational orientated training.
- *Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS):* work experience programme with integrated learning and development plan.

National Context – Key Recent Developments

The total number of people in employment (unadjusted) at the end of 2020 stood at 2,306,200, according to the CSO's Standard LFS Methodology (ILO). However, the CSO's COVID-19 Adjusted Estimates Dec. 2020 (end Q4 2020) produced a figure of 1,970,609. The LFS figure represented a decrease of -2.3% over the same point in 2019; the COVID-19 Adjusted figure showed a decrease of 29.64% (329,755) in 2020. Chart No. 1 and Table No. 1 below shows both the CSO's standard figures for Q4 2020 and also the adjusted figures due to Covid-19 produced by them.

Chart No. 1 Labour force - employed and unemployed between 2014 and 2020 ('000)

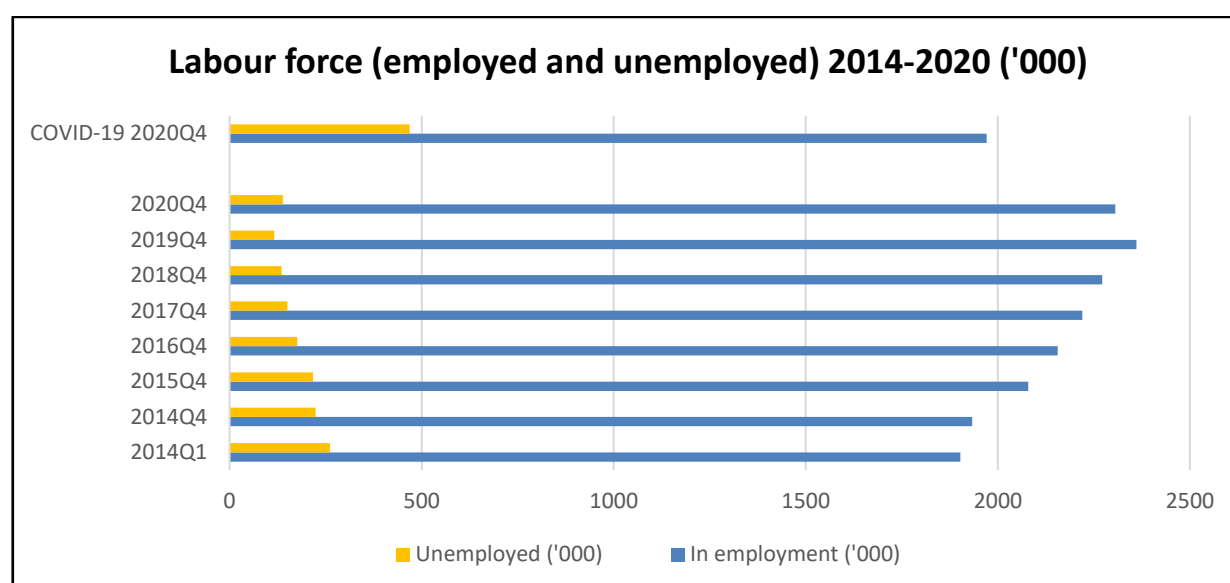


Table No. 1 – Labour force (employed and unemployed) between 2014 and 2020

Labour force	2014Q1	2014Q4	2015Q4	2016Q4	2017Q4	2018Q4	2019Q4	2020Q4	COVID-19 2020Q4
In employment	1902.7	1933.3	2079.2	2155.8	2220	2271.7	2361.2	2306.2	1970.61
Unemployed	260.8	223.3	217.2	176.3	150.3	134.9	115.9	138.9	468.655
Employment rate (%)						69.10%	70.20%	67.80%	57.50%
Unemployed (%)						5.40%	4.50%	6%	19.40%

Source: CSO website

The column on the right of Table No. 1 shows the same data as the previous column, adjusted to take into account the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic (as estimated by the CSO). The previous column shows the data for 2020 using the ILO methods required for use by the CSO.

Seasonally adjusted labour force figures

Using the ILO methods, the number of persons (seasonally adjusted) in full time employment increased slightly from 1,865.7 at the end of Q4 2019 to 1,868.5 at the end of Q4 2020, (masking the fluctuations during the year) while the part time employment decreased from 495.8 (Q4 2019) to 437.8 by the end of Q4 2020. The figure for the labour force decreased from a total of 2,466.6 in Q4 2019 to 2,438.1 by the end of Q4 2020. The participation rate also declined from 62.7% in Q4 2019 to 61.3% at the end of Q4 2020 (equal to a decline in the labour force of 28,500). See Table no. 2 below.

Table No. 2 Labour force over 15 (employed and unemployed) Q1 2014 to Q4 2020
[Seasonally adjusted]

	2014Q1	2014Q4	2015Q4	2016Q4	2017Q4	2018Q4	2019Q4	2020Q4
In '000								
In employment	1,902.7	1,933.3	2,079.2	2,155.8	2,220.0	2,273.8	2,352.5	2,297.7
Full-time employment	1,449.4	1,485.7	1,591.3	1,688.8	1,765.7	1,815.6	1,865.7	1,868.5
Part-time employment	451.3	445.7	486	467.8	458.6	464.7	495.8	437.8
Unemployed	260.8	223.3	217.2	176.3	150.3	134.6	116.0	146.5
Unemployed %	12.1%	10.4%	9.5%	7.6%	6.4%	5.6%	4.7%	6%
Participation rate %	60.2%	59.9%	61.9%	62.0%	62.2%	62.2%	62.7%	61.3%
In labour force	2,162.2	2,157.3	2,296.6	2,333.2	2,374.8	2,408.5	2,466.6	2,438.1

Source: CSO website

Sectoral employment changes

Employment did increase in some sectors of the economy during the challenging year that was 2020. See **Table No. 3** below. These areas included Information and communication (+12,000 at Q4), Industry (+11,900 at Q4), Financial, insurance and real estate activities (increased by +15,600 in Q2, but fell to 9,400 by Q4) and Education (+7,800 in Q2, But back to 4,800 end of Q4). The areas showing the largest decrease in 2020 were Accommodation and food service activities (-46,000 Q4), Administrative and support services (-30,000 Q4), Other NACE activities (-18,200 Q4), Construction (-10,000 Q4). While the Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles, sector had reduced by -19,000 in Q2, it had recovered to show an increase of 6,200 by the end of Q4 (a positive increase of +25,600 overall).

Table no. 3 Economic sectors (changes at Quarter 2 and Quarter 4 2020)

Changes from Q4 2019					
Economic Sectors (% changes in Q2 and Q4 2020)	Q42019	Q2 2020	Q4 2020	Q 2	Q 4
Accommodation and food service activities	179.4	127	133.3	-52,400	-46,100
Administrative and support service activities	113.2	90.3	82.9	-22,900	-30,300
Other NACE activities	119.1	97.6	100.9	-21,500	-18,200
Construction	148.4	127.6	137.6	-20,800	-10,000
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles, etc.	305.1	286.1	311.3	-19,000	6,200
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	105.4	99.6	104.5	-5,800	-900
Information and Communication	128	137.1	140	9,100	12,000
Industry	287.5	293.4	299.4	5,900	11,900
Financial, insurance and real estate activities	116.1	131.7	125.5	15,600	9,400
Education	188.5	196.3	193.3	7,800	4,800

(Source CSO LMS Q4 2020).

Employment (by age groups)

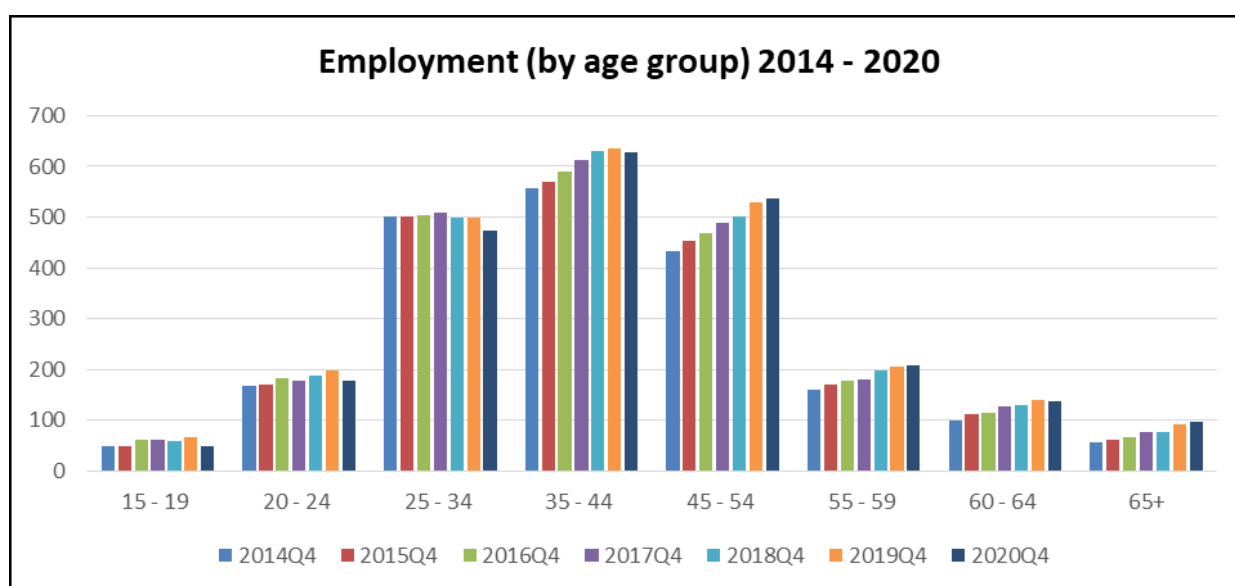
Between the years 2014 and 2019, the numbers in employment grew steadily for most age categories, with the exception of those in the 25 to 34 age group. See Table No. 4 below. However, this changed in 2020 with the pandemic (and two economic and social lockdowns during 2020). The changes ('000) in employment for all age groups between Q4 2019 and Q4 2020 period can be seen in the last column of the Table no. 4. Those most affected are aged between 15 and 34, especially those in the 25 to 34 age category. Conversely, employment grew for those in the 45 to 59 age categories. See also Chart no. 2 below.

Table No. 4 Employment (by age groups) between Q4 2014 and Q4 2020

								000
Age Group	2014Q4	2015Q4	2016Q4	2017Q4	2018Q4	2019Q4	2020Q4	Change (2019 v 2020)
15 - 19	48.9	48.1	62.2	60.8	59.5	66.8	49.7	-17.1
20 - 24	168.6	169.3	182.4	176.7	188	197.3	176.9	-20.4
Total 15-24 (Youths)	217.5	217.4	244.6	237.5	247.5	264.1	226.6	-37.5
25 - 34	502	502	503.2	508.1	499.9	498.2	473.7	-24.5
35 - 44	555.9	569.4	589.4	612.6	629.4	634.2	627.2	-7
45 - 54	433.2	453.7	468.4	489.4	501.9	528.1	537.2	9.1
55 - 59	160.4	169.9	176.7	180.8	197.2	204.9	209	4.1
60 - 64	99.4	110.9	114.3	125.7	128.8	139.5	136.8	-2.7
65+	56.8	62.2	66.9	76.6	76.6	92.2	95.7	3.5
Total	2025.2	2085	2163.5	2230.7	2281.3	2361.2	2306.2	-55

Source: CSO website

Chart No. 2 In employment (by age groups) from Q4 2013 to Q4 2020



Unemployment

The numbers unemployed increased by 28,300 (+25.6%) over the year to the end of Q4 2020 to reach 138,900, according to the standard LFS (and ILO criteria). In line with this, as shown previously in Table no. 2, the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate increased from 4.7% at the end of Q4 2019 to 6% by Q4, 2020. The number of persons classified as long-term unemployed decreased by 1,900 (-4.9%), bringing the total for long-term unemployment to 36,800 by the end of Q4, 2020. However, short-term unemployment numbers increased by 32,900 (+49.3%) during 2020 to reach 99,700. Between Q4, 2019 and Q4, 2020 the long-term unemployment rate decreased from 1.6% to 1.5% and the long-term unemployment represented 26.5% of total unemployment in Q4 2020.

Table No. 5 Numbers Unemployed (000s) 2014 to 2020 (LFS)

	2014Q1	2014Q4	2015Q4	2016Q4	2017Q4	2018Q4	2019Q4	2020Q4
Males less than 1 year	58.8	50	48.2	37.7	42.3	37.2	35.4	51.8
Males 1 year and over	104.7	85.7	74.6	54.3	38	30.7	22.9	23.3
Total males	163.5	135.5	122.8	92	80.3	67.9	58.3	75.1
Females less than 1 year	57.2	50.4	44.8	39.5	37.8	39	31.4	47.9
Females 1 year and over	58.1	43.9	32.5	31.2	22	19.5	15.8	13.5
Total females	115.3	94.3	77.3	70.7	59.8	58.5	47.2	61.4

Source: CSO website.

Male unemployment increased by 15,000 (+24.0%) to 77,200 over the year to Q4 2020, while female unemployment increased by 13,400 (+27.6%) to 61,700 over the same period. Short-term male unemployment increased by 16,400 while short-term female unemployment increased by 16,500 over the same period. Long-term male unemployment increase to 23,300, while the number of females fell from 15,800 in Q4, 2019, to 13,500 in Q4, 2020. (See Table no. 5 above and Chart No. 3 below).

Chart No. 3 Duration of unemployment (male/female) Q1, 2014 to Q4, 2020



Youth unemployment

The unemployment rate for 15-24 year olds (youth unemployment rate) increased from 9.6% to 13.8% over the year to Q4 2020. See Table No. 6 below. The participation rate has also fallen over the same period from 46.6% at the end of Q4, 2019 to 41.7% at the end of Q4, 2020.

Table No. 6 15 to 24 years unemployment rate 2014 to 2020

	Employment rate % (15-64)				Unemployment rate % (15-74)				Participation rate %		
	Q4 18	Q4 19	Q4 20		Q4 18	Q4 19	Q4 20		Q4 18	Q4 19	Q4 20
15-19	18.7	20.7	15.4		18.9	14.5	19.4		23.1	24.2	19.1
20-24	64.2	65	57.6		9.6	7.8	12.1		71	70.5	65.5
Total 15-24 (Youths)	40.5	42.2	35.9		12	9.6	13.8		46	46.6	41.7

Source: CSO (LFS Q4, 2020)

Chart No. 4 15-24 years - unemployment rate 2014 to 2020



The CSO's *Educational Attainment Thematic Report 2020* reported that employment rates increased with education levels. See Table no. 7. The data shows that the level of employment increases with the educational attainment level held. In relation to the unemployment rate, the opposite is generally the case.

Table No. 7. Educational attainment and employment rate (male/female) 2018 -2020

% of persons							
Highest level of education attained	NFQ ¹	2018		2019		2020	
		male	female	male	female	male	female
Primary or below	None/1/2	44	26	51	26	44	24
Lower Secondary	3	73	41	71	41	69	42
Higher Secondary	4/5	81	61	82	63	78	55
Post Leaving Certificate	4/5/6	83	68	87	67	83	62
Third Level, of which:	6/7/8/9/10	90	82	91	82	88	80
Higher Certificate or equivalent	6	91	67	83	71	79	68
Ordinary Degree or equivalent	7	88	76	87	78	82	75
Honours bachelor degree or equivalent	8	90	83	91	82	90	79
Postgraduate qualification	9/10	91	86	94	85	90	85
Total employment rate		82	69	83	69	81	67

¹ National Framework of Qualifications

Source: CSO's *Educational Attainment Thematic Report 2020*

As shown in Table 7, in Q2, 2020 the employment rate for females with third level qualifications (80%) was more than three times those with only primary or below (24%). The rates for males with third level qualifications was 88% compared to 44% for males with a primary or below. All of these rates are lower than those recorded in Q2, 2019.

Table No. 8 – Employment rates (M/F) by educational attainment 2017 and 2020

Educational attainment and unemployment rate (%)					
	NFQ ¹	Q2 2017	Q2 2018	Q2 2019	Q2 2020
Primary or below	None/1/2	14	14	6	9
Lower Secondary	3	10	7	7	4
Higher Secondary	4/5	7	5	5	5
Post Leaving Certificate	4/5/6	7	6	5	5
Third Level, of which:	6/7/8/9/10	3	4	3	3
Higher Certificate or equivalent	6	7	5	5	3
Ordinary Degree or equivalent	7	4	4	4	4
equivalent	8	3	4	3	2
Postgraduate qualification	9/10	3	3	2	3
Total unemployment rate		6	5	4	4

¹ National Framework of Qualifications

Source: CSO's *Educational Attainment Thematic Report 2020*

As can be seen in Table No. 8, the unemployment rates decreased as the level of

education attained increased. In Q2 2020, those with a primary education or below were more than twice as likely to be unemployed (9%) compared to those with a third level qualification (4%). In fact, all levels of education above primary level were almost half the unemployment rate for those with only primary or below.

Table No. 9 Early school leavers (18 -24) labour market status (2014 to 2020)

Early school leavers and other persons aged 18-24 labour market status, Q2 2010 - Q2 2020								
	% of persons							
	2010	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Employed								
Early School Leavers	41	31	29	43	34	28	27	23
Others (18-24)	52	49	52	57	56	56	56	47
All (18-24)	51	48	51	57	55	55	54	45
Unemployed								
Early School Leavers	37	33	40	23	24	18	25	12
Others (18-24)	18	15	12	12	9	9	8	8
All (18-24)	20	16	13	12	10	9	9	8
Inactive								
Early School Leavers	22	36	31	34	43	54	47	65
Others (18-24)	30	36	36	31	35	35	36	45
All (18-24)	29	36	36	31	35	36	36	47

Source: CSO Educational Attainment Thematic Report (2020)

As shown in Table no. 9, the unemployment rate for for early school leavers (aged between 18 and 24) was higher than the rate for others in the same age category. In Q2 2020 the unemployment rate for early school leavers was 12% compared to 8% for other 18 to 24 year olds. In addition, 65% of early school leavers were classified as inactive compared to 45% for others in the same age group. Only 23% of early school leavers were employed in Q2 2020, compared with 47% for others in the same age group.

The CSO stated that all these unemployment rates would be higher if the COVID-19 Adjusted Measure of Unemployment was applied to them.

Government Policies/Initiatives during 2020

The **National Skills Bulletin 2020** (published in October 2020) was produced by SOLAS on behalf of the National Skills Council. It looks at 97 occupational groups and a range of labour market indicators. The Bulletin noted that employment in **2019** increased by 80,000 while the unemployment level decreased by 18,200, those in part-time employment/underemployed remained almost unchanged at 108,400, while the long-term unemployment rate fell to 1.6%. It also noted that the NEET rate increased by 0.3% (from 8.8% to 9.1%) by the end of 2019. An indication of the skills shortages in 2019 was the increase in the number of new employment permits issued from 11,300 in 2018 to over 14,000, with the ICT and health sectors accounting for the highest share.

In relation to the impact of Covid-19 on the economy, the Bulletin noted that the areas most affected (at October 2020) were hospitality, retail, construction, childcare, travel, transport, and leisure services.

The National Training Fund (NTF) continued to fund the workplace and employer-led training through apprenticeship and the Skillnet Ireland programme. Skillnet Ireland launched a new Strategy Statement 2021-2025 with the aim supporting up to 100,000 workers annually and increasing business participation up to 30,000 annually, increase its annual investment to €100m and three strategic themes (workforce design, people development and strategic innovation).

An **Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025** was launched on the 19th April 2021. The aim of the Plan is to deliver “an apprenticeship system that is flexible and responsive, providing a strong value proposition for employers and potential apprentices, is attractive and easy to engage with, and delivers high standards and sought after qualifications.” The five main objectives of the Plan include: a high quality and innovative approach (work-based learning, supporting and demonstrating innovation to empower apprentices and employers to meet current and emerging skills needs); employer driven responses (apprenticeship will be valued by employers across all sectors as a key mechanism for building a highly skilled workforce, contributing to productivity and sustainable growth); apprenticeship for all (the profile of apprenticeships to closely reflect that of the general population); a valued option (recognised as a work based learning opportunity, providing sought after qualifications across the tertiary education and training sector) and a single coherent system (a single apprenticeship system underpinned by a clear governance framework with strong stakeholder input).

A **National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2021** was published on the 4th July 2020. The aim of the Plan is to “ensure that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland’s population”. The five main goals of the Plan are as follows:

- *To mainstream the delivery of equity of access in HEIs.*
- *To assess the impact of current initiatives to support equity of access to higher education.*
- *To gather accurate data and evidence on access and participation and to base policy on what that data tells us.*
- *To build coherent pathways from further education and to foster other entry routes to higher education.*
- *To develop regional and community partnership strategies for increasing access to higher education with a particular focus on mentoring.*

A Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education July 2000 was published on the 3rd July 2020 (the first White Paper on Adult Education). The aims of the Paper are to provide a template for the development of the Adult Education sector as part of an overall Government commitment to establishing a comprehensive system of lifelong learning for all. These will include the role of Adult Education; to build on previous consultation focusing on the needs of the learners; identify the priority areas for public investment, in the context of an overall commitment to lifelong learning; identify priority groups and programme areas and set targets for implementation; provide for a learner-centred framework incorporating infrastructural elements such as guidance and counselling, quality assurance and the training of trainers, and ensuring a coherent range of pathways for adults between education and training and other relevant supports; and propose a comprehensive structural framework at national and local level for the support and development of Adult Education.

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; three are relevant to this Programme and the positive progress made in relation to Ireland's targets is set out below in Table No. 10.

Table No. 10. Employment and education indicators

Indicator	Position in 2010	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Target 2020
Employment							
% 20-64 year olds in employment	64.7%	71.2%	72.9%	73.7%	75.1%	73.4%	69-71%
Education							
Early school leavers	11.4%	6.9%	6.1%	5.0%	5.1%	Not available	8%
Tertiary attainment of 30-34-year-olds	50.1%	52.3%	53.3%	56.3%	55.4%		60%

Source: Eurostat

The employment target and the early school-leavers target have been exceeded (since 2016). Third level education attainment of 30-34 year olds reached 55.4% in 2019 - the latest data - (males 51% and females 60%), which while exceeding the EU-27 average of 40.3%, falls short of the 60% target.

Ireland's 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/basic deprivation). This is based on reducing the population in 'combined poverty' based on three indicators – consistent poverty or at-risk-of-poverty or basic deprivation. It is similar to the EU composite measure, 'at risk of poverty or exclusion'. There has been a decrease in basic deprivation or 'combined poverty' with the rate falling from 27.8% in 2017 to 23.5% in 2018 (1.14m people). The 2018 figure represents a decrease of 270,000 people on the 2010 baseline figure. It should be noted that this rate increased to 1.74 million people from 2010 to 2013, which means the current rate represents a decrease of some 600,000 people from 2013. While the 2018 data (latest) achieves the 2020 Target, the Covid19 pandemic will have a negative effect on this position.

Table No. 11. Combined poverty rates

	2010 (baseline)	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2020 Target
Combined poverty ('000)	1,412	1,732	1,719	1,539	1,381	1,332	1,140	1,212
Combined poverty (%)	31.0%	37.7%	37.3%	33.2%	29.0%	27.8%	23.5%	

Source: DSP/Social Inclusion Division data for 2018; the Social Inclusion Monitor for 2018 (latest)).

Progress to Date

The financial progress made in terms of payment applications made to the Commission at Priority Level is shown in **Table no. 12** below. These payment applications account for 62% of the total EU contribution and have resulted in receipts from the Commission of almost €344m to date. No claims will be made in relation to the 2020 financial year (and no claims at all for some activities); however most of the activities were delivered. The MA is availing of the COVID response initiatives, i.e. (a) 100% co-financing and (b) transfer of €120m (gross) to ERDF.

Table No. 12 Interim Payment Applications position in 2020/2021

Priority	Revised Allocation	Revised EU Contribution	PAs made to Date Gross	EU Contribution in PAs made to Date	EU Contribution to Claim
1	€274,040,738	€137,020,369	138,505,934	€69,252,967	67,767,402
2	€297,615,568	€148,807,784	100,489,997	€57,375,208	91,432,576
3	€241,084,508	€120,542,254	196,319,363	€110,697,202	9,845,052
4	€204,436,257	€136,290,838	152,132,277	€104,827,482	31,463,356
5	€20,000,000	€10,000,000	1,578,669	€1,578,669	8,421,331
Total	€1,037,177,071	€552,661,245	589,026,240	€343,731,528	€208,929,717

The updated progress in terms of participants on ESF activities during the years 2014 to 2019 is shown in Table 13.

Table No. 13 Participants on PEIL Activities - update¹

PEIL 2014-2020	AIP No.	All participants 2014-2019
ETB Training for the Unemployed	ESF 1.1	54,927
Intra EU mobility	ESF 1.5	21
Priority 1 Total		54,948
Social Inclusion and Activation Programme (SICAP)	ESF 2.1	51,725
Youthreach	ESF 2.2	6,277
Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs)	ESF 2.3	8,124
Young Persons Probation (YPP) projects	ESF 2.4	574
Tus Nua project	ESF 2.8	72
Priority 2 Total		66,772
Third Level Access	ESF 3.1	52,245
BTEI	ESF 3.2	76,079
Adult Literacy	ESF 3.3	120,094
Priority 3 Total		248,418
Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) Scheme	ESF 4.1	338
JobsPlus Incentive Scheme	ESF 4.2	977
Youthreach	ESF 4.5	8,005

¹ Figures may be subject to amendment as declarations still being received.

Community Training Centres (CTCs)	ESF 4.8	4,050
Defence Forces Employment Support Scheme	ESF 4.9	108
Priority 4 Total		13,478
Overall Total		383,616

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY UPDATES

Priority 1

ETB Training for the Unemployed

The courses provided under this activity include:

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

ESF co-funding ceased at the end of 2019, but the activity continued in 2020.

The issues and challenges faced by ETB activities in 2020 were as would be expected, lockdowns prevented face to face learning while during the periods where restrictions were eased, social distancing meant that reduced learner/tutor and learner/instructor ratios led to increased unit costs of delivery in many cases. Due to the commitment of ETB staff, the introduction of Covid-19 related initiatives and a focus on digital capabilities and online learning, the activities did continue with, in some cases, very strong showings even when compared to pre-pandemic years.

Starter numbers in 2020 as a % of 2019 starter numbers were as follows:

SST	92.7%
T/Ship	53.8%
Bridging	38.75%

The relatively strong showing of SST can be attributed to a strong demand for shorter more focused courses during the pandemic and this may also be a factor in the less favourable numbers in Traineeships which are a longer course.

Springboard and ICT Conversion Courses



Springboard commenced as an initiative to help unemployed and previously self-employed people remain as close as possible to the labour market by accessing free 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 that are 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. Since 2015, Springboard courses and ICT conversion courses have been run as a joint initiative under the banner brand Springboard+. Courses may lead to full awards but there may also be minor awards or special purposes awards. All courses provide job-readiness training and most offer the opportunity for work placement, project-based learning or industry site visits where appropriate. The eligibility criteria was extended to those in employment wishing to upskill or reskill (2017) and was further extended to include all people irrespective of their employment status (2018). Returners and those in receipt of certain allowances, including Jobseekers Benefit, continued to be able to access courses free of charge. Level 6 courses remained free to all participants and for employed participants on courses NFQ level 7 – 9, 90% of the course fee was funded by the Government and the ESF, with participants required to contribute just 10% of the fee.

Springboard and ICT Skills were two of the Activities where no funding requests were submitted to the Commission following the application for 100% funding for 2020 and the Commission Decision of December 2020.

With some minor teething difficulties, all Springboard+ 2019/2020 courses that commenced prior to the 1st Lockdown in March 2020 were moved online and continued to be delivered by the Course Providers. There was little or no disruption to the delivery of Springboard+ 2020/2021 courses.

The number of queries received by both the HEA and Springboard+ Helpline in relation to eligibility and course availability under the 2020 programme rose sharply in comparison to previous years. There was also a significant increase in demand for places resulting in the highest ever number of enrolments. The number of participants who commenced Springboard courses in 2020 was 11,318 and a further 1,248 on ICT Skills bringing the total number on Springboard+ to 12,566. No disruption to the delivery of Springboard+ courses was expected for the coming year.

Intra-EU Mobility



This activity promotes the use of EURES, the European Job Mobility Portal and the range of services provided by EURES Ireland as part of the network designed to facilitate the free movement of workers within the EU. EURES advisers are in daily contact with jobseekers and employers across Europe.

EURES assists employers in recruiting for specialised or hard-to-fill vacancies by offering them a unique opportunity to participate in sector specific recruitment events.

The ESF co-funding for EURES ceased at the end of 2017, but the activity continued on up to and including 2020.

EURES is an integral part of the Department of Social Protection which is largely responsible for the delivery of social security services. As a consequence of the COVID-19 outbreak, a number of EURES staff were reassigned to front line roles as part of the Department's total focus on ensuring that it continued to meet the massive demands in dealing with the huge surge in business activity on foot of the Covid-19 crisis.

The main focus of EURES is the free movement of workers. As a result of restrictions and national lockdowns throughout Europe, EURES services were critically restricted throughout the majority of 2020 - from early March to year end. EURES activities took place as normal throughout January and February 2020 as well as the first week in March. It is envisaged that as restrictions lift and economies reopen throughout Europe that EURES services will return to pre-Covid-19 levels relatively quickly.

Priority 2

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP)



The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018 – 2022, which is the successor to the 2015 – 2017 programme, was launched on 20th April 2018. It aims to tackle poverty and social exclusion at a local level and is managed locally by 33 Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) with support from Local Authorities. Programme Actions are delivered by Programme Implementers (PIs) across 51 Lots. PIs work with Local Community Groups to create more sustainable communities and with disadvantaged individuals providing help through lifelong learning supports, employment supports and personal development supports.

ESF co-funding ceased at the end of 2019 (The ESF MA availed of the COVID response initiative by the Commission), but the activity continued in 2020.

COVID 19 resulted in a number of challenges for Local Development Companies (LDCs) who are SICAP's Programme Implementers. They went from a working environment that is about people and engaging with people on a one-to-one and face-to-face basis, to having to deliver supports remotely (via phone, WhatsApp, email, Zoom) and put in place alternatives. LDCs had to work from home, which involved technical challenges such as sourcing appropriate IT equipment for staff. In addition, maintaining contact and engagement with teenagers via social media and phone calls over extended periods of time has been challenging, in particular those generally referred to as hard to reach.

Cancellation or Postponement of Supports

Face to face training courses and programmes were cancelled or postponed. Some training courses were suitable for delivery online, other courses could not be offered online due to the nature of the course, such as Motor Technology, Safe Pass and Personal Development Training. The challenges around setting up online training activities included the provision of suitable equipment and connectivity for staff, participants with no access to IT equipment, poor broadband (particularly in rural areas) and low capacity regarding IT usage. Additional costs incurred to develop protocols for staff to work remotely, return to the workplace and risk assessment on premises and COVID 19 training for staff, adaption costs for premises i.e. sign, Perspex screens barriers, sanitiser, PPE, etc. SICAP provided key capacity building, increased grant funding and delivering ongoing advice and support to the LDCs. LDCs needed to continue adjusting their plans throughout the year.

Supports to disadvantaged Children and Families, such as breakfast and homework clubs, education programmes were suspended or cancelled due to school closures. Some LDCs adjusted their actions to assist schools and families with distance learning, in particular gaps in technology, and develop food parcels and activity packs for disadvantaged families. South West Mayo Development Company who provided supports to Island residents had to cancel all planned training programmes as no non-island residents were permitted to travel to the islands.

Completing paperwork, such as registration forms and the personal action plan with clients, due to the level and nature of questions, was not conducive to developing personal relationships (reduced social contact seen as an ongoing difficulty). Reduced group sizes will be required as a result of social distancing guidelines, increased costs associated with face-to-face activity, hiring rooms for training, workshops etc. as larger rooms will be needed, difficulty accessing appropriate premises which complies with the physical distancing requirements.

There were no referrals from some other Agencies and Departments from DSP, the HSE and the ETB, resulting in less clients coming forward. In some cases, LDCs were also unable to refer their clients for education and training supports to the ETB, due to training being postponed or cancelled. Many in business worried that they may not be able to start up again once things get back to 'normal' due to a lack of financial support. DSP started to refer new Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA)/Short Term Enterprise Allowance (STEA) applications but numbers were low. Concern about how clients will conduct market research and explore the viability of their business ideas.

There was a re-focussing of SICAP supports and some examples included the work carried out with the groups shifted slightly toward work with Networks; some moved from capacity building to more basic needs such as food poverty, digital exclusion and wellbeing; the priorities of individuals and groups changed to income and food provision; an increase in supports directed towards vulnerable groups such as older people and disadvantaged children and families and remote locations.

Employment related actions were severely impacted, there was a lack of employment opportunities to advertise and fill, as well as less clients seeking self-employment supports. DSP Enterprise Support grant ceased during lockdown. There was a suspension of recruitment for labour activation schemes. Business start-ups were postponed with some cancelled.

Among the future support challenges identified by the LDCs that will need to be addressed included the regression amongst some clients in terms of their mental health, addiction relapse and a breakdown of family relationships; transport for clients will be an issue in rural areas, as car sharing is no longer an option and public

transport is operating at a reduced capacity.

The operational changes introduced by DRCD and LDCs in response to the COVID-19 pandemic included LDCs used staff rotas and outdoor meetings, when feasible, to maintain 'in person' supports; some of the benefits of face-to-face delivery were lost in the digital setting, such as informal conversations and relationship building; and new activities and projects were developed to meet the immediate needs of local communities and individuals.

Update on 2020 Activities

During 2020, the KPI 1 and KPI 2 targets were revised downwards due to the impact of COVID-19 on LDCs' ability to engage and support individuals and LCGs on a one-to-one basis. In 2020, a total of 2,687 LCGs and 26,178 individuals were supported by SICAP, exceeding the revised KPI targets by 21% and 11% respectively. The revised targets were met or exceeded in all Lots.

Despite the challenging context, the level of supports to individuals recorded in 2020 was comparable with previous years. On average, individuals received three interventions in 2020, but the total number of interventions was significantly lower between March and May 2020. The challenges experienced by individuals supported by SICAP were exacerbated, including food insecurity, financial concerns, the digital divide and social isolation. In response, some changes were made to the types of supports provided in 2020 (e.g. to navigate social welfare schemes) and as well as listening to and providing reassurance to individuals throughout the year. There was an increase in total grant funding awarded to individuals to cover lifelong learning fees, while LDCs (in collaboration with partners) invested time and resources into transitioning courses into digital formats.

It was noted that despite the programme's objective to reduce long-term intergenerational unemployment, there has been a decrease in the ratio of long-term unemployed people to short-term unemployed people on the caseload since 2018. While this was likely exacerbated by the changing economic context in 2020, the trend began before the outbreak of the pandemic and warrants close attention to ensure that those furthest from the labour market continue to be reached and supported by SICAP during the recovery period.

While SICAP played a key role in responding to the emerging needs of families during the pandemic by providing essential supports (e.g. delivery of food and activity packs, parenting supports while children were home schooling) to disadvantaged families during the year, programme activities with families and children decreased by 35% as compared to 2019.

A reduction was recorded in the progression rates for individuals across each of the

lifelong learning (LLL), employment and self-employment outputs. In 2020, one third (33%) of the clients undertook a LLL activity, which is considerably lower than in previous years. Only 4% of the clients progressed to employment. There was also a reduction in the progression rate to self-employment with 5% of the clients starting their own business as compared to 8% in 2019. Similar to previous years, individuals' progression rates varied by their gender and economic status (e.g. women were more likely than men to participate in a course while men were more likely to get a job than women).

Youthreach



Youthreach is the national response to the needs of unqualified early school leavers in Ireland. The programme is designed to offer two years integrated education, training and work experience

for young people 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.

Youthreach was programmed under Priority 4 (the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI)) of the PEIL OP from 2014 to 2017, and re-allocated under Priority 2 with effect from 1st January 2018.

ESF co-funding ceased at the end of 2019 (The ESF MA availed of the COVID response initiative by the Commission), but the activity continued in 2020.

The issues and challenges faced by ETBs in relation to all its activities were as would be expected, lockdowns prevented face to face learning while during the periods where restrictions were eased, social distancing meant that reduced learner/tutor and learner/instructor ratios led to increased unit costs of delivery in many cases. Due to the commitment of ETB staff, the introduction of Covid-19 related initiatives and a focus on digital capabilities and online learning, the activities did continue with, in some cases, very strong showings even when compared to pre-pandemic years.

Starter numbers in 2020 as a % of 2019 starter numbers for Youthreach were 86%. The Youthreach programme performed comparatively better than other ETB Activities and would obviously involve a digitally aware cohort. Another reason why Youthreach would have performed stronger is that it is ran on an academic year basis starting in September at which time things had been opened up for a while following the first lockdown.

Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDP)

The primary objective of the Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs) is to engage with young people at risk of/or involved in criminal and/or anti-social behaviour and provide them with targeted supports designed to enable these young people to stop their offending and become positive contributors to society. Young people are mainly referred to projects through the local Gardaí (Police).

Projects mainly work with young people aged 12 to 17, but also seek to reduce the future incidence of criminal and anti-social behaviour by providing family support services, undertaking preventative work with younger children at risk and continuing to work with young people who 'age-out' on attaining 18 years, as required and on a case-by-case basis.

ESF co-funding ceased at the end of 2019 (The ESF MA availed of the COVID response initiative by the Commission), but the activity continued in 2020.

GYDPs faced significant issues/problems and challenges due to lockdowns and public health restrictions. However, Community Based Organisations (CBOs) made every effort to ensure activities continued insofar as was possible. CBOs were funded as normal for pay and non-pay costs. Depending on individual CBO decisions in light of Government guidelines, the majority of Youth Justice Workers were working from home. They kept in contact with participants by phone or online meetings, where possible. Some of them arranged to meet up with the participant's face-to-face, on an individual basis, while adhering to social distancing rules. Due to travel restrictions it was difficult to obtain written parental/guardian consent for new participant referrals. Many Projects' planned activities and interventions unfortunately had to be cancelled or postponed.

Many participants do not have mobile phones / laptops / internet access, so maintaining contact with them posed a challenge.

Young Persons' Probation (YPP) Projects



There are 18 Young Person Probation (YPP) Community Based Organisation funded by the Probation Service in order to develop and deliver services to young offenders in their

communities. The management and monitoring of the YPP projects is undertaken directly by the Probation Service. The YPP projects provide a range of services to young offenders in local communities, including training & education, and offender management programmes. Participants come from marginalised backgrounds and socio economic deprived areas, and require the highest levels of support and

interventions. It is considered that the clients are presenting with increasingly complex issues, including mental health issues.

Four of the YPP projects are included in the European Social Fund programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning. These are:

- Le Chéile which is a nationwide mentoring service;
- Céim ar Chéim and Southill projects based in Limerick City; and
- Dóchas don Óige project based in Galway.

ESF co-funding ceased at the end of 2019 (The ESF MA availed of the COVID response initiative by the Commission), but the activity continued in 2020.

The four YPP projects continued to provide services and programmes to participants during 2020. The introduction of COVID restrictions during 2020 presented significant challenges for the 4 YPP projects, their staff and participants. Nevertheless, the organisations adapted and continued to provide crucial and innovative supports to vulnerable persons throughout the period of the lockdowns and public health restrictions.

The YPP projects also had to adapt to delivering programmes, including education modules remotely. The lack of IT devices for young persons, and the young person's personal circumstances, initially made remote learning difficult. However, with support and funding from various state bodies, staff and participants were provided with devices that supported the delivery of remote learning. Other issues included a decline in participants' motivational levels and increased instances of mental health issues.

Disability Project - Ability Programme



The Ability Programme is a pre-activation programme for young people with disabilities (YPWD). It aims to bring those young people, aged 15-29, who are not work-ready closer to the labour market using a range of person-centred supports.

The programme addresses the diversity existing within the target group of YPWD by providing supports to organisations working with participants across the disability spectrum. Some organisations specifically cater to physical or intellectual disabilities, others are dedicated to working with young people with mental health issues, and other organisations work with all of the above. Over the course of the Programme, which was launched in 2018, it is expected that some 2,600 YPWD will be assisted.

The Ability Programme was one of the Activities where no funding requests were submitted to the Commission following the application for 100% funding for 2020 and the Commission Decision of December 2020.

Progress reports were received from 27 Ability-funded organisations in 2020 and by 31st December 2020 the funding period was 83% complete. A total of 1,851 young people with disabilities (YPWD) supported by the fund represented 71% of the overall programme target. All Ability-funded projects continued to run their range of activities, training and supports, primarily remotely, with over half of grantees providing in-person support where feasible and in accordance with public health guidelines. A total of seven grantees exceeded their overall target number of participants to be supported by the programme, over half (15) of grantees reached or exceeded 80% of their programme target and another 23 grantees have achieved over 60% of their overall target number of participants to be supported.

However, the following issues were noted:

- 16 grantees highlighted concerns regarding the deterioration of participants' mental health over the course of the period. Of these, four grantees specifically mentioned serious mental health concerns and/or participants in crisis.
- At least eight grantees specifically stated that their project was one of the few services continuously available to participants throughout the past year.
- Family support continues to feature strongly in reported activity as the COVID-19 crisis is ongoing. Nine grantees outlined a particularly intensive level of interventions provided to participants' families.
- The recruitment of participants has been hindered by the pandemic, reasons for this include the closure or reduction of referral agencies' services and a longer time lag between initial referral and the registration and engagement of the participant.
- Grantees continue to highlight that while ICT has enabled the continuity of support and training provision throughout 2020, remote client interaction certainly has its limitations. 14 grantees reported that digital engagement does not suit at least some of their client groups and 10 grantees reported an overall decrease in participant engagement.
- Initiatives are being undertaken to maintain and/or build employer relations. However, the level of engagement is generally lower due to ongoing limitations on business and employment opportunities. For at least half of grantees (14), work placements or jobs secured by participants with the support of Ability were postponed or cancelled.

- The sectors worst hit by the pandemic are those which had demonstrated particularly good potential as sources of employment and work experience opportunities for Ability participants.
- 21 grantees stated that the pandemic will impede their project's achievement of targets relating to the number of participants supported overall and/or progression of participants into paid jobs, work experience or voluntary roles.
- 10 grantees included their concerns for participants as the programme enters its final six months in this report such as: limited work experience, job opportunities or other, similar services into which participants can transition.

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. It targets EEA Nationals who are resident in Ireland and Third Country Nationals with permission to enter employment in Ireland. Following the first open call for proposals in 2016, €3.3 million of funding was made available under the Activity for a second open call for projects to commence in 2019. The five successful projects (with a four year term) were Business in the Community; New Communities Partnership; County Kilkenny Partnership; Cultúr Celebrating Diversity; and Seetec.

Integration and Employment of Migrants was one of the Activities where no funding requests were submitted to the Commission following the application for 100% funding for 2020 and the Commission Decision of December 2020.

See below under Gender Equality (ESF 2.9) for 2020 update.

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 supports participants in their transition and reintegration into the wider community. The participants in the project would have complex support needs.

ESF co-funding ceased at the end of 2017, but the activity continued on up to and including 2020.

Tús Nua continued to provide services and programmes to Probation Service clients and participants during 2020. The introduction of COVID restrictions during 2020 presented significant challenges for the Tús Nua project, the staff and participants. Nevertheless, the organisations adapted and continued to provide crucial and innovative supports to vulnerable persons throughout the period of the lockdowns and public health restrictions. Tús Nua continued to provide residential accommodation and programmes to female participants throughout Covid-19 restrictions, but noted that participants encountered issues such as isolation and lack of access to services.

Other issues that arose included a decline in participants' motivational levels, increased instances of domestic abuse experienced by female participants, and increased instances of mental health issues. There was also an increase in the absence of members of the travelling community due to challenges they faced with self-isolating during the pandemic and the reported increase of the virus in their community.

Gender Equality

The Gender Equality Activity supports a cohort of those women who are currently detached from the labour market, in order to assist their return to the labour market. Strand A – Women Returning to the Workforce (WRW) targets 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. Strand B – Women's Entrepreneurship (WE) targets 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.

Gender Equality was of the Activities where no funding requests were submitted to the Commission following the application for 100% funding for 2020 and the Commission Decision of December 2020.

All of the Gender Equality and IEM projects which were active in 2020 continued their activities, switching to online delivery. 11 of the 13 projects moved 100% of their activities online, one moved 95% online while a further project has moved 70% online. In relation to the delivery of content face-to-face, 11 of the 13 projects will continue to deliver some or all of their projects online when circumstances allow face-to-face delivery again. Two projects said that they would not continue online, one of which cited language issues (IEM project).

It was noted that some participants were unable to continue with the project due to the move to online delivery; 9 of the 13 projects confirmed that some participants were unable to continue on the project due to IT issues, ranging from 5% to 70%, averaging 20% to 35%. Four of the projects confirmed that their participants had no issues. The two projects with the highest incidence of IT issues among their participants were IEM projects (50% and 70% experiencing IT issues). Some projects experienced difficulties in recruiting new participants due to issues around access to required technology, 7 out of 13 indicated that they had experienced difficulty, 5 projects had no issues, and 1 project had postponed recruitment due to IT issues.

The primary reason for participants being unable to participate included no access to a PC, Laptop or Tablet; or no access/or insufficient internet connection or the cost associated with these. Those projects that had no issues recruiting participants had worked with their participants (including lending laptops to participants who did not have access to them) in order for their participants to be able to take part. Access to reliable wi-fi was mentioned as a particular concern for one (rural) project.

In relation to the provision of support to projects and participants such as (a) hardware (PC/Laptop/Tablet) or (b) financial supports for participants, six of the thirteen projects favoured both options; four projects suggested financial supports only. One project used MAED (“Mitigating against Educational Disadvantage”) to source laptops to lend to participants). Another project recommended support and training for project staff to deliver on-line activities.

Priority 3

Third Level Access



This activity supports the Student Assistance Fund (SAF) and the Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD). The SAF aims to support students facing ongoing or temporary financial hardship which would otherwise negatively impact their completion of their higher education course. The SAF can be claimed for expenses such as books, rent, food, medical costs, class materials, light and heat bills, essential travel and childcare.

The FSD supports students with disabilities 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. Funding can be used to provide supports and accommodations for assistive technology, equipment and software, non-medical helpers, academic or learning support, deaf supports and transport.

ESF co-funding ceased at the end of 2018, but the activity continued up to and including 2020.

Back to Education Initiative (BTEI)



The overall aim of the Back to Education Part-Time Programme (BTEI) is to increase the participation of young people and adults with less than second level education in a range of part-time accredited learning opportunities leading to awards on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) to facilitate their access, transfer and progression to other education or employment pathways.

The BTEI offers part-time provision of up to 400 hours per year, leading to certification at Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) levels 1-6. The BTEI's primary target groups are those that experience strong barriers to participation and are more difficult to engage in the formal learning process. The initiative is designed to complement other Further Education provision funded by SOLAS such as Adult Literacy, Youthreach, VTOS and Post Leaving Certificate Courses.

ESF co-funding ceased at the end of 2019 (The ESF MA availed of the COVID response initiative by the Commission), but the activity continued in 2020.

The issues and challenges faced by ETBs in relation to all its activities were as would be expected, lockdowns prevented face to face learning while during the periods where restrictions were eased, social distancing meant that reduced learner/tutor and learner/instructor ratios led to increased unit costs of delivery in many cases.

Due to the commitment of ETB staff, the introduction of Covid-19 related initiatives and a focus on digital capabilities and online learning, the activities did continue with, in some cases, very strong showings even when compared to pre-pandemic years. Starter numbers in 2020 as a % of 2019 starter numbers for BTEI were 67.97%.

On the Further Education side BTEI have performed well when it is considered that potential participants may be less digitally literate and less capable of engaging with online learning.

Adult Literacy

The objectives of this activity are to increase access to literacy, numeracy and language tuition for adults whose skills are inadequate for participation in modern society and

the social and economic life of their communities. It targets those adults with primary education or less and whose literacy and numeracy skills do not match Level 3 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Key target groups in this area of investment include the unemployed, particularly the long-term unemployed, disadvantaged groups, those under-35's and those formerly employed in declining sectors such as the construction sector, as well as employed adults in need of improved basic literacy, language and numeracy skills.

The importance of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills for every citizen is evidently growing, yet half of the adult population (56 percent) in Ireland have no ICT skills or can only fulfil the simplest set of tasks in a technology-rich environment. Low levels of literacy and numeracy also exist within the workforce, which can impede the introduction and dissemination of new productivity improving technologies, digitalisation and work-organisation practices.

ESF co-funding ceased at the end of 2019 (The ESF MA availed of the COVID response initiative by the Commission), but the activity continued in 2020.

The issues and challenges faced by ETBs in relation to all its activities were as would be expected, lockdowns prevented face to face learning while during the periods where restrictions were eased, social distancing meant that reduced learner/tutor and learner/instructor ratios led to increased unit costs of delivery in many cases. Due to the commitment of ETB staff, the introduction of Covid-19 related initiatives and a focus on digital capabilities and online learning, the activities did continue with, in some cases, very strong showings even when compared to pre-pandemic years. Starter numbers in 2020 as a % of 2019 starter numbers for the Adult Literacy Activity were 63.24%.

On the Further Education side Adult Literacy has performed well when it is considered that potential participants may be less digitally literate and less capable of engaging with online learning.

Priority 4

Back to Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme



**An Roinn Gnóthaí Fostaíochta
agus Coimirce Sóisialaí**
Department of Employment Affairs
and Social Protection

The Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) supports participants to engage in self-employment by allowing them to retain a reducing proportion of their

qualifying social welfare payment over two years (equivalent to 100% in year 1 and

75% in year 2). The YEI is supporting participants who are NEETs (Not in Employment Education and Training) as defined by the nationally agreed definition and under 25 at the point of commencement on the BTWEA scheme.

ESF co-funding ceased at the end of 2018, but the activity continued up to and including 2020.

At the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Government quickly mobilised and implemented a range of income and employment support measures, including the Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP), to cushion the income shock experienced by workers and their employers and for those in self-employment who experienced a significant decrease in trade. These income supports have proven to be effective in maintaining incomes and insulating people against a sudden and severe income shock.

As part of these measures, BTWEA participants whose businesses were impacted by restrictions, up to temporary closure, were permitted to continue on the BTWEA if they wished. The aim was to support these enterprises through this difficult period to boost their chances of survival post-lockdown. Retaining an income support was vital to ensuring the entrepreneurs supported through the BTWEA maintained their status as self-employed and were ready to restart their business as restrictions in their sectors eased.

The qualifying period of 9 months has been waived for individuals in receipt of the COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment who transfer to a jobseeker's payment to access the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance.

Given the restrictions of 2020 and into 2021, the BTWEA has experienced a drop off in new applications from people looking to commence a new business with the support of the scheme. It is envisaged that as restrictions lift and the economy reopens that the popularity of the BTWEA as an option for creating employment will increase from late 2021 and into 2022.

JobsPlus Incentive Scheme



**An Roinn Gnóthaí Fostaíochta
agus Coimirce Sóisialaí**
Department of Employment Affairs
and Social Protection

JobsPlus Youth is an employer incentive which encourages employers to offer employment opportunities to the long term unemployed.

The incentive is open to all eligible employers in the private, community, not for profit and voluntary sectors, including those who are self-employed who are filling new positions or vacancies arising from natural turnover. The employer must offer full-time work of at least 30 hours per week over at least 4 days. Grants are payable at

€7,500 or €10,000, depending on how long the new employee was unemployed. The grant is paid in monthly instalments for a maximum of 24 months. Employers can now recruit persons under the age of 25 who had been unemployed for 4 months in the previous 6 months. Employers are paid the JobsPlus grant at the lower €7,500 rate in respect of these employees. For YEI support, all participants must come within the NEET (Not in Employment Education and Training) definition and be under 25 years of age when entering the scheme.

ESF co-funding ceased at the end of 2018, but the activity continued up to and including 2020.

The COVID-19 emergency measures introduced in March 2020 resulted in the government introducing other support measures to assist both employers and employees during this time mainly the Pandemic Unemployment Payment and Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (formerly ERS and TWSS). As a result of the emergency measures, the total number of JobsPlus employers and employments reduced by 70% in April 2020. These JobsPlus supported employments have been paused until the employment recommences and the Department can continue the scheme funding.

In July 2020, the government announced a Jobs Stimulus package with some measures introduced for the JobsPlus scheme, as a result, the scheme guidelines were updated with effect from 01 August 2020 as follows:

The sanction for the number of employees that can be supported through JobsPlus was increased by 2,000 – from 6,000 to 8,000.

The COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment is considered a qualifying payment when assessing an individual's eligibility for JobsPlus.

Eligibility criteria has been amended for Jobseekers aged under 30, this cohort of jobseekers can now qualify for the JobsPlus scheme if they have been on the Live Register for 4 months in the previous 12 months (previously only available to those aged under 25).

Community Training Centres (CTCs) –Part of the Youthreach Initiative

There are 35 CTCs around the country offering programmes to young people 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. Programmes include basic skills training and work experience and 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, which are owned and managed by local community groups, are funded and supported by SOLAS / ETBs.

ESF co-funding ceased at the end of 2018, but the activity continued up to and including 2020.

The issues and challenges faced by ETBs in relation to all its activities were as would be expected, lockdowns prevented face to face learning while during the periods where restrictions were eased, social distancing meant that reduced learner/tutor and learner/instructor ratios led to increased unit costs of delivery in many cases. Due to the commitment of ETB staff, the introduction of Covid-19 related initiatives and a focus on digital capabilities and online learning, the activities did continue with, in some cases, very strong showings even when compared to pre-pandemic years. Starter numbers in 2020 as a % of 2019 starter numbers for the CTCs was 59.61%.

Defence Forces Employment Support Scheme



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

Completion Rates:

Year:	Location:	Participant numbers	Completion numbers	Completion Rate %
2017	Limerick	17	15	88
2017	Gormanston	16	16	100
2018	Cork	29	24	83
2018	Curragh ('DFTC')	20	20	100
2019	Gormanston	26	24	92

The next iteration of the ESS was due to commence in Renmore Barracks, Galway in June 2020. However, it was necessary to postpone due to the emergence of Covid-19 and related Government guidance, and it has not been possible to reschedule at the time of

writing. It is currently expected to be rescheduled for 2022 but a date has yet to be confirmed.

Youth Employment Support Scheme

The Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS) was introduced on 1st October 2018 and was open to applications from that date. YESS targets at young jobseekers aged between 18 and 24 who are long-term unemployed or who face barriers to employment. In 2020 there were 306 new participants added which was about half (569) the previous year due to the impact of C-19 bring the total to 951 by the end of the year. During 2020 435 participants completed YESS. There were two significant lockdowns in the first lockdown total of 165 YESS placements were temporarily suspended/paused. During the second lock down 63 placements were suspended. During temporary suspensions YESS clients retained their YESS allowance. During the second lockdown YESS policy worked with Case Officers to facilitate off site and on-line participation where possible.

YESS was one of the Activities where no funding requests were submitted to the Commission following the application for 100% funding for 2020 and the Commission Decision of December 2020. (See page 3 above for details).

Priority 5

Technical Assistance

Through the Technical Assistance priority, the MA continues to support the maintenance and ongoing development of the eCohesion IT system for reporting, monitoring, auditing and accounting for expenditure under the ESF. In 2020, there were 318 ESF active licences for the system. The ESF MA only had to purchase 248 of these licences due to a surplus of licences on the ERDF side.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the ESF MA postponed the procurement of any promotional material until it is permitted to host events.

In 2020, the ESF MA sponsored a Special Recognition Award for ESF co-funded projects as part of the AONTAS STAR Awards (Showcasing Teamwork, Awarding Recognition). The Awards were a unique opportunity for ESF to gain nationwide visibility and presence with a wide ranging audience of learners, communities, organisations and the media.

The ESF MA continued its work on updating and developing the ESF website,

www.esf.ie.

The ESF MA undertook a Public Awareness and Attitudes survey with the contract awarded to Behaviour and Attitudes.

EVALUATION ACTIVITY

The Evaluation Plan for PEIL provides 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.

Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP)

The SICAP programme developed a tailored distance travelled tool (My Journey) to measure soft skills relevant to employment, education and personal development for service beneficiaries. It aims to support service users and staff to work together to identify personal goals for the client and show progress over time. The tool was launched in January 2020.

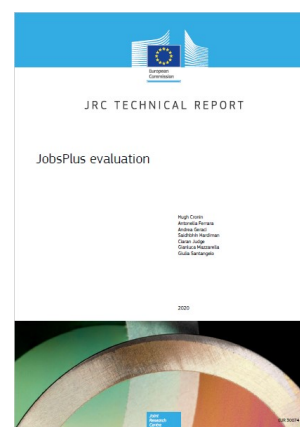


An evaluation of SICAP pre-employment supports, conducted by the ESRI, was published in September 2020. The evaluation found a positive counterfactual impact on employment for both employment and self-employment interventions. The evaluation also emphasised the importance of (1) the one-to-one supports provided by the programme to supporting clients in engaging with and remaining on courses or finding and staying in employment and (2) role played by PIs in providing a connection to local services and stakeholders.



JobsPlus

The JobsPlus evaluation is the final output of a collaboration between Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) economists and Irish Government Statistical Service (IGSS) statisticians in the Statistics and Business Intelligence Unit in the Department Social Protection (DSP), and researchers of the Centre for Research on Impact Evaluation (CRIE), part of the Competence Centre on Microeconomic Evaluation (CC-ME) of the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission.



The study compared the outcomes of people who benefitted from JobsPlus with a matched control group of people (i.e. people with similar characteristics) who did not avail of the subsidy. The results point to a positive impact of the subsidy on JobsPlus participants who, after the programme, were less likely to be in receipt of unemployment-related benefits and showed a higher probability to earn more and to work for more weeks in a year. For those that could be observed over the longest duration subsequent to their JobsPlus start (four years), the difference between the two groups in their probability of receiving unemployment benefits is between 11.1 percentage points (unemployed for at least one year) and 16.4 percentage points (unemployed for at least two years).

Other relevant evaluations which were ongoing in 2020 include –

- SOLAS appointed Indecon International Economic Consultants in 2018 to undertake an evaluation of Specific Skills Training (part of ETB Training for the Unemployed). SOLAS received a draft report of the evaluation in 2020.
- SOLAS has appointed Indecon International Economic Consultants to undertake an evaluation of further education and training provision at Levels 3 and 4 of the National Framework of Qualifications, incorporating the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI). The evaluation is ongoing.

Pobal appointed Quality Matters in 2018 to undertake an external evaluation of the Ability Programme. The programme evaluation is progressing and Quality Matters have submitted two reports to date: the baseline report and the mid-point report. The two reports were approved by the Department of Social Protection. Both reports were also reviewed by the Evaluation Steering Committee which included a focus on participant progress using the soft outcomes tool co-developed with Ability-funded staff members in grantee organisations. In Quarter 1 2020, Quality Matters worked with Ability organisations in preparation of their collection of end-point data using the tool with the sample of participants. While this had its limitations, in terms of

collecting data remotely, the baseline data collection was completed and an analysis of the data followed. The Ability evaluation is now in the final stages and Quality Matters are compiling the final evaluation report, which this is due for review in early June 2021.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

Aontas STAR Awards

The STAR Awards (Showcasing Teamwork, Awarding Recognition) celebrates the positive contribution that adult learning initiatives make to adult learners, local communities and wider society. The ESF once again sponsored a Special Recognition Award for ESF co-funded projects and attended the awards ceremony on 2 March 2020. The Awards were a unique opportunity for ESF to gain nationwide visibility and presence with a wide ranging audience of learners, communities, organisations and the media.

Eight ESF co-funded projects were shortlisted for an award, with four co-funded projects receiving awards at the final ceremony.

STAR Award Winners – ESF co-funded Projects

- Sustainable Employment (Large Organisation): **Ability@Work Cork.**
- Social Inclusion (Large Organisation): **The Bedford Row Traveller DRIVE Initiative.**
- Social Inclusion (Small & Medium Organisation): **The Dillon's Cross Project.**
- Special Recognition Award: **Healthcare Opportunities for Women.**



Impact of Covid-19 on Events

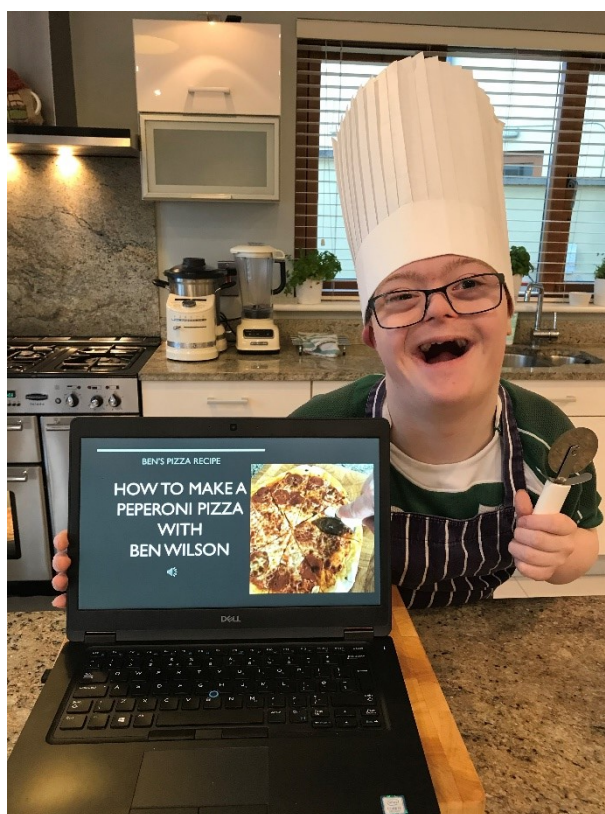
From 12 March 2020 the Government made the decision to close all educational institutions and recommended that employees work from home where possible. In follow up measures, the Government urged citizens to stay at home wherever possible. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic all physical events were postponed.

Europe in My Region 2020

The European Commission's 'Europe in My Region' campaign aims to highlight the work that projects across Europe are doing with the help of EU funding.

In February, the ESF MA wrote to ESF bodies to provide details about the 2020 campaign and to request information about any events including open days, information days, awards ceremonies or launches that could be included on the interactive map for the campaign on the Commission's website.

Due to the instruction to postpone all physical events that might lead to a spread of Covid-19, many of the ESF projects held online events and there are over 70 events on the Commission's map.



Public Consultation

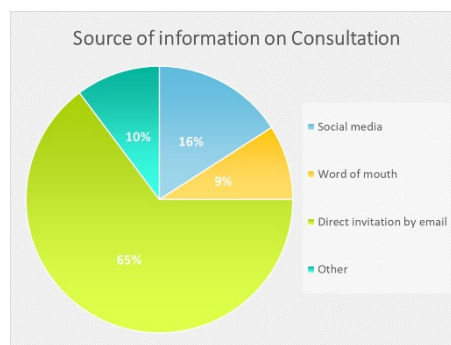
The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of Education and Skills, together with the three Regional Assemblies launched a public consultation process to inform the selection of priorities for the use of European cohesion funding for 2021-2027.

The ESF MA worked with the Northern and Western Regional assembly to develop a communications strategy for the consultation. The communication activities included the development of a dedicated consultation website (www.esif.ie) and a targeted social media campaign which included ESF participant stories.

The main aim of the consultation communication strategy was to increase public awareness, transparency and visibility of the consultation.

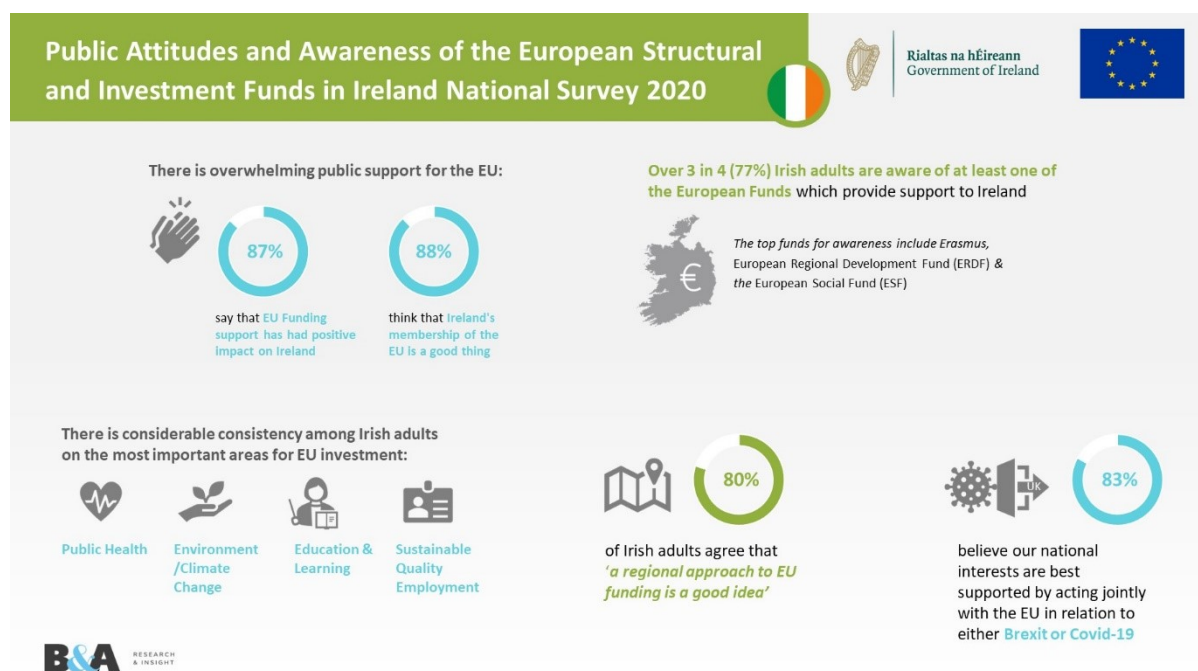
Key Results of the Strategy:

- Over 1600 people visited ESIF.ie
- 6,279 page views
- 128 attended the consultation webinar
- 109 submissions were received



Public Awareness Survey

The ESIF Communications Committee undertook a Public Awareness and Attitudes survey with the contract awarded to Behaviour and Attitudes. High level results were received in December.



Website and Social Media

The ESF MA continued its work on updating and developing the ESF website in 2020. This work included reviewing and updating existing content and ensuring the website was in line with accessibility requirements. In addition, the ESF MA continued to actively manage the @ESF_Ireland Twitter account and to promote it as widely as possible.

Website Statistics 2020:

- 14,325 new users accessed ESF.ie so far this year
- 37,296 page views

Twitter Statistics 2020:

- 1,770 Profile Visits
- 226 New Followers
- 97,539 Tweet impressions
- 1,366 Mentions

The ESF in Ireland is now on Facebook, you can follow us here:

<https://www.facebook.com/EuropeanSocialFundIreland>.

Newsletter & Social Media Campaign

The ESF MA have published its 2020 newsletter for the PEIL 2014-2020. It included stories of delivering projects during the pandemic and the experience of distance learning for participants and our projects.

The ESF MA conducted a social media campaign on Facebook to promote the newsletter. The campaign reached 108,755 users and the posts had 145,253 impressions.



HORIZONTAL PRINCIPLES

The Horizontal Principles of Gender Equality and the Promotion of Equal Opportunities and Non-Discrimination are relevant to the PEIL. Intermediate Bodies and Beneficiaries report on both HPs on an annual basis. These reports are reviewed by experts from the Gender Equality (GE) Division in the Department of Justice and Equality and from the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) for each HP respectively.

There were no reports in relation to the Horizontal Principles for the year 2020 since no expenditure will be declared for 2020 and no Activities will be co-funded for the year.

Further information regarding the Operational Programme can be found on the Irish ESF website:

<https://eufunds.ie/european-social-fund/operational-programmes/programme-for-employability-inclusion-and-learning-2014-2020/>



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