
Survey and interpretation of data collected on the employment of trainees who completed an ESF joint-funded training or employment programme in French-speaking Belgium in 2015

Summary of key findings

Introduction

As part of the **'Wallonie-Bruxelles 2020.EU' Operational Programme**, the European Social Fund (ESF) commissioned the research bureau Sonecom, along with the support of the University of Liège Centre for research and sociological interventions (Centre de Recherche et d'Interventions Sociologiques, CRIS), to collect and analyse data on the **subsequent employment path of trainees** who completed an ESF joint-funded training or employment programme in French-speaking Belgium in **2015**. This is a key year as it is considered the implementation year of the Operational Programme 2014–2020 (2014 being, for most operators, a transition year). In order to have a chronological and comparative view, a similar study of the trainees who completed a programme in 2016 is currently being carried out. A survey of trainees who finished a training programme in 2018 will also be carried out.

Among the **priority areas of focus** of the Operational Programme 2014–2020, this study looked specifically at trainees who came under focus areas 2 ('knowledge and skills'), 3 ('inclusive society and employment') and 4 ('sustainable employment of young people').¹

A **representative sample of 813 trainees** coming under these areas of focus was interviewed by telephone between December 2018 and March 2019, using a questionnaire lasting an average of 20 minutes.

To analyse the data collected, the theoretical framework of Amartya Sen's **Capability Approach** (CA) was used. This approach provides interesting perspectives for addressing the effectiveness of public policies by taking into consideration not just the resources available to the target groups and the subjective and objective functionings/results, but also people's freedom of choice and the conversion factors for transforming resources.

This theoretical framework was used to classify the survey's variables into relevant conceptual categories, then to **describe the results** within these categories for each of the variables studied, both across the total sample and according to the areas of focus and zones of the 2014–2020 Operational Programme.

Changes in employment were studied in depth, via an analysis of the situation of former trainees at several moments in time T, and the development of transition indicators and an employment path typology.

¹ Among these areas of focus, the following measures were considered: 2.1, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.1 and 4.2. Anyone interested may refer to the Operational Programme for a precise description of the areas of focus and the measures studied.

Focus was given to the **Youth Employment Initiative** (YEI, IEJ in French), not just via the study of the particularities of this group as regards resources, conversion factors and freedom of choice, but also as regards social integration and employment on a subjective and objective level.

Lastly, using the CA, **three research questions** were formulated to help structure the data collection and analysis: 1. the question of equality of access to the resources jointly funded by the ESF; 2. the question of the influence of conversion factors (personal, social and environmental) on employment functionings; and 3. the question of the influence of freedom of choice on employment functionings.

Description of the overall findings

The **resources** of the programmes jointly funded by the ESF (duration, content, presence of a placement, certification and post-programme support), as well as the individual resources of the trainees (household budget) varied greatly depending on the focus areas and zones of the Operational Programme.

Concerning people's **freedom of choice**, in the decision-making process, the trainees generally had self-determined motivation to enter the scheme, in other words 'intrinsic' motivation determined by the trainees themselves and not by external factors. This self-determined motivation could be professional (to have new opportunities, find work or acquire skills) or personal (to pursue a personal project or satisfy a desire for knowledge in general). In fact, hetero-determined motivation – in other words, motivation decided by external factors (by obligation/necessity or to escape something) – was almost non-existent among the trainees.²

There was significant variation among the trainees concerning the question of job opportunities that actually arose after the programme, as well as the possibility of choosing between those opportunities.

As regards **subjective functionings**, the programme undertaken matched the trainees' expectations fairly well or very well in 78% of cases. However, as regards the perceived benefit of the employment programme, the results varied greatly among the trainees.

The first job after the programme generally had a strong link with the expectations of the trainees (72% of trainees in this case). However, the link between the first job and the programme undertaken varied greatly among the trainees; the results were fairly polarised.

The number of epistemic or useful benefits, socio-emotional benefits and identity benefits of the programme mentioned by the trainees varied depending on the areas of focus and the zones.

Most of the trainees who benefitted from support after the programme perceived this support as highly beneficial to their career (55% of trainees in this case).

² The classification used to analyse the data relating to the motivation to start training is inspired by the taxonomy of Philippe Carré. The author makes a distinction between intrinsic motivation (satisfied by the very fact of being in training) and extrinsic motivation (objectives external to the training that the latter makes it possible to obtain) on the one hand, and on the other, the motivation to learn (acquire skills) and the motivation to participate (be part of a group).

As regards the view of their future career, the vast majority of trainees were relatively (or even very) optimistic (84% of trainees).

As regards **objective functionings**, for the rate of employment, there was a continuous rise in these rates after the programme with, however, a slight drop in the most recent period (between 30 and 42 months after the programme). These rates varied greatly depending on the areas of focus and zones of the Operational Programme. The positive exit rates showed a similar trend, with major differences according to areas of focus. As regards rates of access to short- or long-term employment since the end of the programme, access to one or more jobs lasting more than three months varied greatly according to the areas of focus and zones. Across all the trainees, most had experienced at least one period of long-term work since the end of the programme (68% of trainees).

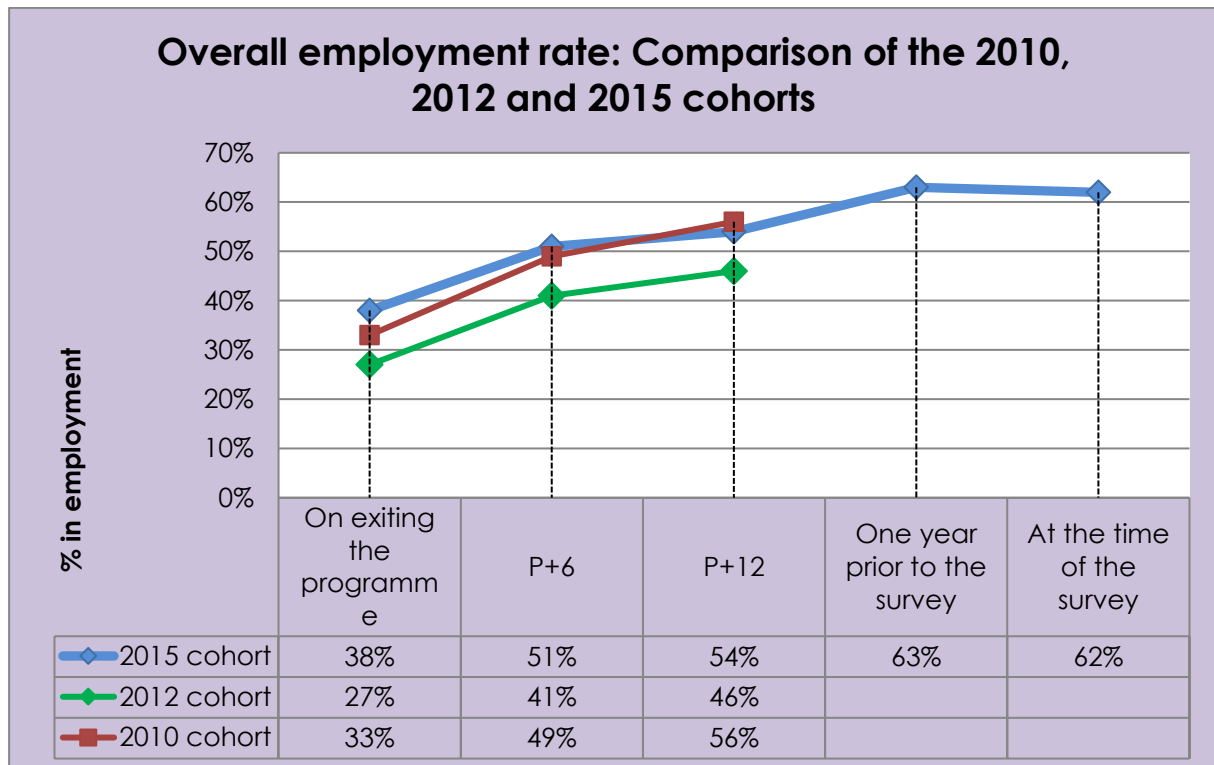
As concerns the first job after the programme, most of the trainees obtained it after the programme and not during or immediately after it. These jobs were mostly 'atypical' contracts; there were relatively few permanent contracts ("CDI") (just 22%). For almost half of the trainees, the first job had no link with the programme undertaken and/or their initial training (43% and 48% respectively).

As regards the issue of remaining unemployed, more than a quarter (29%) of the trainees had experienced at least one period of long-term unemployment since the end of the programme, with a very significant difference according to the areas of focus.

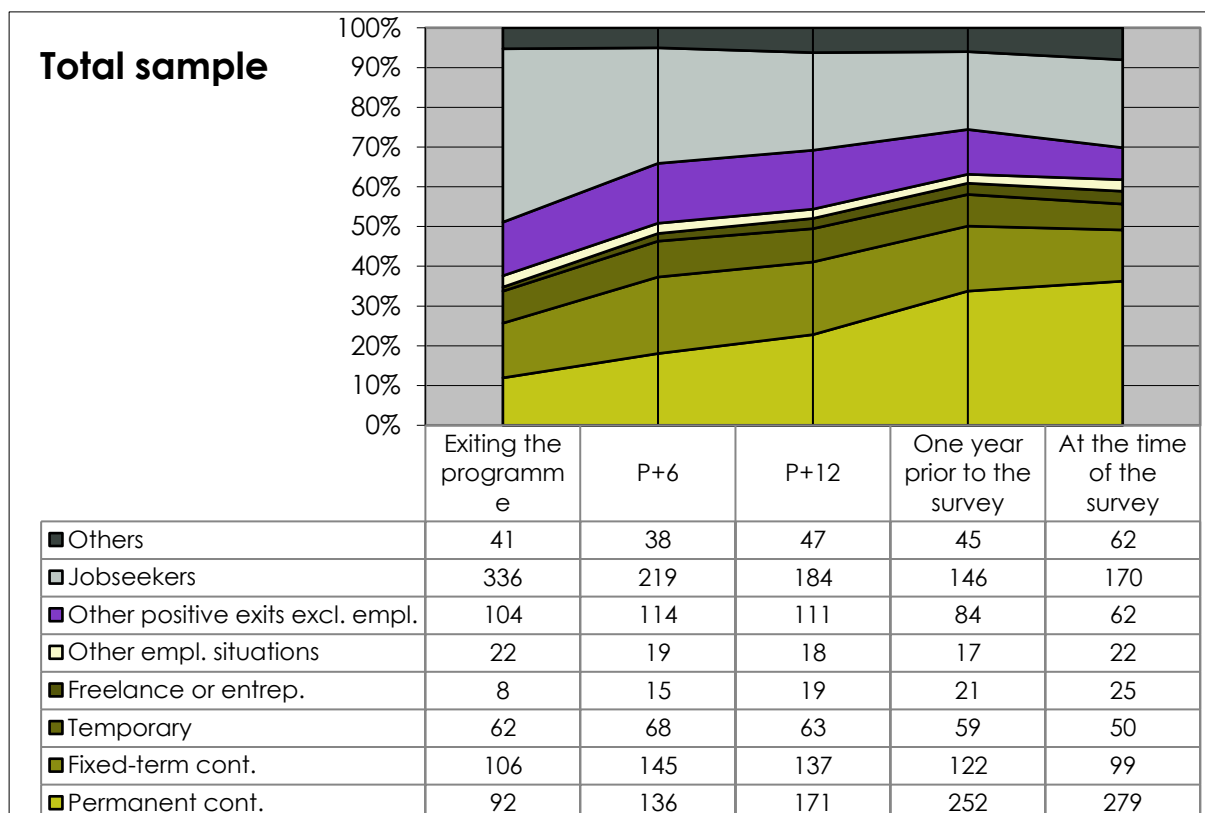
Today, the majority of the beneficiaries of a programme jointly funded by the ESF are employed (54%). More than half of these contracts are permanent contracts ("CDI") (56%).

Trends in employment

To expand and refine the **specific study of changes in social integration and employment**, the rates of access to employment at several points in time after the end of the programme were compared with the results of previous trainee cohorts. As shown in the graph below, the rates of employment were generally higher for trainees who completed a training programme in 2015 than for trainees who had completed an ESF joint-funded programme in 2010 or 2012.



Moreover, different situations relating to social integration and employment were identified at several points in time after exiting the programme. In the graph below, changes in the social and professional integration of the sample studied (2015 cohort) were identified according to whether the trainees had a permanent contract ("CDI"), fixed-term contract ("CDD") or temporary contract, freelance/entrepreneur status, another employment situation (i.e. neither a permanent or fixed-term contract), a positive exit from employment (return to education, voluntary work or travel abroad), job-seeker status, or other out-of-work status.



Reflections concerning the transition and quality of the transition were carried out by creating indicators.

A transition output indicator was calculated to learn about the outcome of the transition process, which could be positive or negative. This indicator shows fairly low negative transition rates, which cover cases in which the employment situation of the trainee at the time of the survey was less good than the situation at the time of completing the programme (only 10% of trainees in this case).

Two indicators concerning the quality of the transition, one on the subjective quality and the other on the objective quality, were developed.

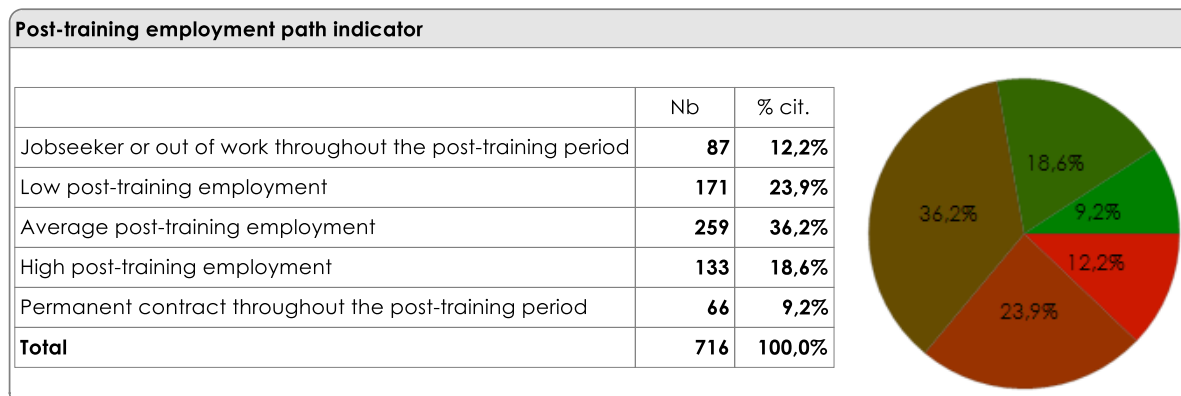
The indicator for the subjective quality of the transition was developed using the variables relating to the chosen or unchosen nature of the programme, the security of the transition (match between the programme and the trainee's expectations and the perceived benefits of the programme) and the acquisition of new skills. The subjective quality of the transition was good in most cases.

The indicator for the objective quality of the transition was calculated using the variables relating to the support during the transition (support or otherwise after the programme) and on the quality of the resources of the public programme (work placement, training duration, qualification). The objective quality of the transition was average in most cases.

The analysis was completed with an **employment path** indicator and an outline of the typology of the eight employment paths that appeared most often among the former trainees of the 2015 cohort.

The post-training employment path indicator takes into account the types of status occupied (permanent contract, temporary employment or jobseekers) after the programme and the duration for which these were occupied.³

The key findings of this employment path indicator are shown below.



More than one in four trainees had experienced high post-training employment or a permanent contract throughout the period following the programme. Conversely, however, more than one in three trainees had experienced low post-training employment, a jobseeker situation or out-of-work status since the end of the programme.

Focus on the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) group

The European Union (EU) strategy is to establish the conditions for intelligent, sustainable and inclusive growth. As part of this, the ESF plays a major role in reducing the consequences of economic crisis, particularly high unemployment and poverty rates. The current ESF Operational Programme places particular focus on young people through the **Youth Employment Initiative**. The YEI, which started having an impact as of 2015, primarily aims to reduce the negative effects of dropping out of education and to consider the issue of NEETs^{4,5}.

Trainees in the YEI seemed to benefit from **resources particularly oriented towards getting into work**. These were focused on preparing for work in a specific professional field (in 65% of cases) and often proposed a placement (73%) that was generally fairly

³ In concrete terms, the following weightings were given to each of the 5 points in time T after the programme: +3 to permanent contract (CDI) situations, +2 to situations of employment excluding permanent contracts (CDI), +1 to positive exit situations excluding employment, and 0 to jobseekers and out-of-work situations. These were totalled and the results were categorised as follows: 0 (jobseekers or out-of-work throughout the post-training period), from 1 to 5 (low post-training employment), 6 to 10 (average post-training employment), 11 to 14 (high post-training employment) and 15 (permanent contract (CDI) throughout the post-training period).

⁴ NEETs refers to young people who are not in education, employment or training.

⁵ Programme Opérationnel 2014-2020 « Wallonie-Bruxelles 2020.EU », rapport annuel de mise en œuvre 2014-2020, résumé à l'intention des citoyennes et citoyens, p. 14 ('Wallonie-Bruxelles 2020.EU' Operational Programme 2014-2020, annual implementation report 2014-2020, summary for the attention of citizens, p. 14.)

long in duration (more than three months in 63% of cases). A large majority of the programmes undertaken by the YEI trainees (62%) resulted in a certification.

As regards **conversion factors**, the majority of these YEI trainees had few qualifications (83% had at the most a secondary-school-level qualification and had not been out of education for very long (57.5% had left education less than one month before the start of the programme). A vast majority of the programmes undertaken by these trainees took place in a transition zone. In relation to social connectedness, most of the YEI trainees had a relative (53%) to strong (41.5%) connectedness.

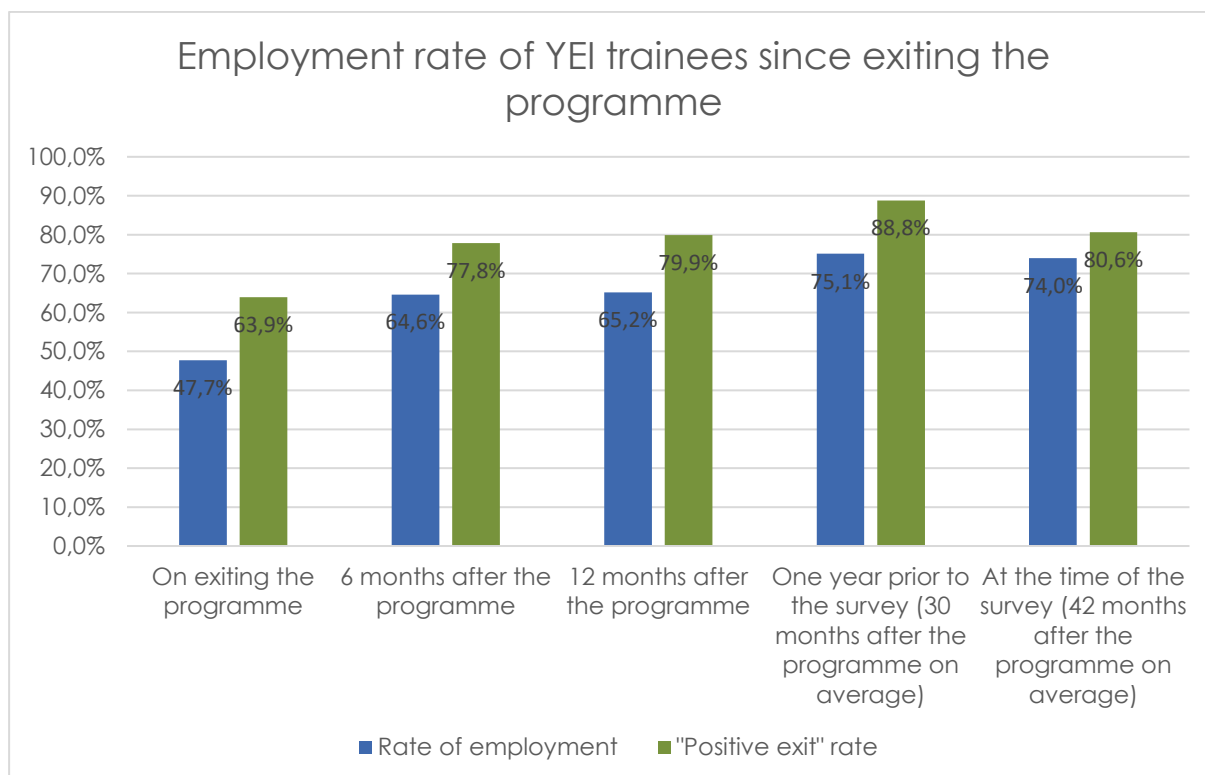
As regards **freedom of choice**, most of the YEI trainees had strong professional self-determining motivation to start training (for 79% of trainees) and personal self-determining motivation that was average (for 49% of trainees) or high (in 41% of cases). The majority of YEI trainees had experienced at least one job opportunity after the programme (73%) and many had had the possibility of choosing between several job opportunities (38%).

In terms of **subjective functionings**, 76% of the YEI trainees said that the programme matched their expectations 'fairly well' or 'very well', and 69% said that the programme had a 'good' or 'very good' impact on their employment.

The first job after the programme also generally matched the expectations of these young people (the link between this job and expectations was strong in 59% of cases) and they were mostly optimistic as regards their future career (92% of trainees).

As regards **objective functionings**, as the graph below shows, the rates of employment and positive exit rates were also high for the YEI group in the period following the programme.⁶ These rates increased gradually after the programme, with a slight drop in rates in the more recent period.

⁶ The rates of employment encompass all possible job statuses. The rates of positive exit encompass not just all possible job statuses, but also the return to education, vocational training, voluntary work and travel abroad.



In addition, proportionally fewer of these trainees experienced a period of unemployment (15% of trainees only).

As regards the first job after the programme, in the majority of cases this had a link with the programme (for 59% of trainees). Although the types of contract varied, concerning the work regime, the majority of the first jobs after the programme were full-time and were deliberately chosen by the trainees. There were few permanent contracts (24% of cases).

Lastly, across all YEI participants, only 15% had experienced a period of unemployment lasting 12 months or more since the end of the programme.

Responses to the research questions

Three issues were researched as part of this study: equality of access to the programmes jointly funded by the ESF, the impact of conversion factors (personal, social and environmental) on employment functionings, and the impact of freedom of choice on functionings.

Comparing the profiles of the trainees under the ESF programmes with the profiles of jobseekers in Wallonia and Brussels, ESF joint-funded programmes are not really accessible on an equal basis, particularly as regards criteria concerning age, qualifications and the period of time out of work. Young people, who were more qualified and had a shorter period of time out of work, were over-represented among the ESF trainees in relation to Walloon and Brussels jobseekers.

The conversion factors, be they personal, social or environmental, had a significant influence on subjective and objective functionings.

The most vulnerable profiles when it comes to employment were women and those over the age of 44 years old for the personal factors; single people without children and single women with children, people of foreign nationality, with disabilities, with few qualifications and/or who have been out of work for a long period of time prior to the programme as regards the social factors; and people with a low level of social connectedness and poor access to transport concerning the environmental factors.

The question concerning the importance of freedom of choice on functionings, be they subjective or objective, was more difficult to test using the variables available to the researchers. The most noticeable trend was probably the negative impact of hetero-determined motivation to enter a training programme on the trainee's subsequent employment path, be it the perceived benefits of the programme or the perceived contribution of the programme to employment, but also the effective access to employment after the training.

Initial recommendations

In order to produce sound recommendations for the ESF's intervention, we will have to wait to be able to analyse the subsequent employment of the trainees of the three cohorts of the Operational Programme 2014–2020.

Nevertheless, this analysis of the data from the 2015 cohort identifies a few initial general trends.

Firstly, a positive for the ESF Agency is that the rates of employment and positive exit rate increased significantly after the trainees had benefited from training or support programmes jointly funded by the ESF. Moreover, the overall employment rates after the programmes were slightly higher for the trainees in the 2015 cohort in relation to the trainee cohorts from the previous Operational Programme (2010, 2012).

However, it is surprising to note that the overall employment rates after the programme were clearly higher in the transition zones (Wallonia excluding Walloon Brabant) than in the more developed zones (Brussels and Walloon Brabant). This might be due to the heterogeneity covered by these zones, both at target group level and socioeconomic level. It might be interesting to look at the breakdown between these intervention zones.

Concerning the trainees targeted by the ESF joint-funded programmes, young people were overrepresented in relation to their total representation among jobseekers in the French-speaking Community – Fédération Wallonie Bruxelles, primarily due to the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI).

The results as regards employment among these YEI trainees was higher than among the other groups targeted by the ESF. This might be explained by the resources of the public programme made available to them – often oriented toward training for work in a specific field, with a work placement, qualification, etc. – but also by the characteristics of the YEI group per se. This group is often not as alienated from employment as the other groups, due to an often short period of time out of education, access to transport, a certain level of social connectedness, etc.

The ESF may wish to consider enhancing its programme with a view to rectifying as much as possible the inequalities in access to the resources funded both within the YEI measure and within the other measures. This could be done by attempting to attract as many of those who are most alienated from employment as possible. These are, in general, older people, women, non-nationals, those with few qualifications, with disabilities, and those who are isolated (all the more so for single women with children) and/or who have had a relatively long period out of work.

These recommendations will be significantly expanded on and added to with new suggestions resulting from the analysis of future cohorts of the Operational Programme 2014–2020.