

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 2016

Summary of key findings

Introduction

As part of the "**Wallonia-Brussels 2020.EU**" **Operational Programme**, the European Social Fund (ESF) commissioned the the research bureau Sonecom design office, with the support of CRIS (Uliège), to collect and analyse data on the **future of trainees** who completed in **2016** a training or employment programme co-financed by the ESF in French-speaking Belgium.

This study is part of the theoretical and methodological **continuity** of the study of trainees who completed a programme in 2015 (the first cohort of trainees as part of the 2014-2020 programme) carried out by Sonecom.

A similar study is being carried out on trainees who have completed an action in 2018.

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

More than 200 operators organised training or employment activities in 2016. However, five operators have organized actions for nearly **two-thirds of the trainees** in this 2016 cohort. This is the

- Institut wallon de formation en alternance et des indépendantes et petites et moyennes entreprises (IFAPME, 20.5%),
- Forem (19.0%),
- Bruxelles Formation (14.1%),
- Centre de coordination et de gestion - Enseignement de Promotion sociale (9.5%),
- Mission Régionale pour l'Emploi de Liège (2.2%).

A **representative sample of 798 trainees** coming under these areas of focus was interviewed by telephone between June and August 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

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.

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.

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 overall results

The **resources** of the programmes jointly funded by the ESF (duration, content, presence of an internship and duration of the internship, certification and follow-up after the action) as well as the individual resources of the trainees (household budget) vary greatly depending on the focus areas. Unlike the results of the previous cohort, the duration of the action and the follow-up of the trainee do not vary significantly depending on zones of the Operational Programme.

Concerning people's **freedom of choice**, in the decision-making process, the trainees generally have self-determined motivations to enter the scheme, in other words 'intrinsic' motivation determined by the trainees themselves and not by external factors. This self-determined motivation can 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) – are almost non-existent among the trainees (non-existent for 70%).²

There is a great variation between focus areas and zones of the Operational Programme concerning the question of job opportunities that actually arise after the programme and the possibility of choosing between those opportunities.

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 **subjective functionings**, the programme undertaken matched the trainees' expectations fairly well or very well in 80% of cases. This proportion is higher among trainees who have undertaken a programme under Axis 2 (84%) than those from Axis 3 and 4 (78% and 76% respectively). The difference in results by zones is not significant. Similarly, the perceived benefit of the employment programme does not vary significantly, either by areas or zones.

The first job after the programme has generally a strong link with the expectations of the trainees (77% of trainees in this case).

The link between the first job and the programme undertaken is quite important in 41% of cases, and differences in these results is not significant across the areas and zones.

The number of epistemic or useful benefits and identity benefits of the programme mentioned by the trainees vary depending on the areas of focus and the zones. However, the difference is not significant in terms of socio-emotional benefits.

Most of the trainees who benefitted from support after the programme perceive this support as highly beneficial to their career (53% of trainees in this case).

As regards the view of their future career, the vast majority of trainees are relatively (or even very) optimistic (85% of trainees).

Regarding **objective functioning**, for the rate of employment, there is a continuous rise in these rates after the programme with, however, a slight drop in the most recent period (i.e. between 24 and 34 months after the programme). The variation in these rates is more pronounced depending on the zone of the Operational Programme and this in favour of the transition's zone. The positive exit rates show a similar trend, with major differences according to zones. 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 vary greatly according to the areas of focus and zones. Across all the trainees, most have experienced at least one period of long-term work since the end of the programme (43% of trainees).

As concerns the first job after the programme, most of the trainees (54%) obtain it after the programme and not during or immediately after it. These jobs are largely 'atypical' contracts; there are relatively few permanent contracts "CDI" (only 24%).

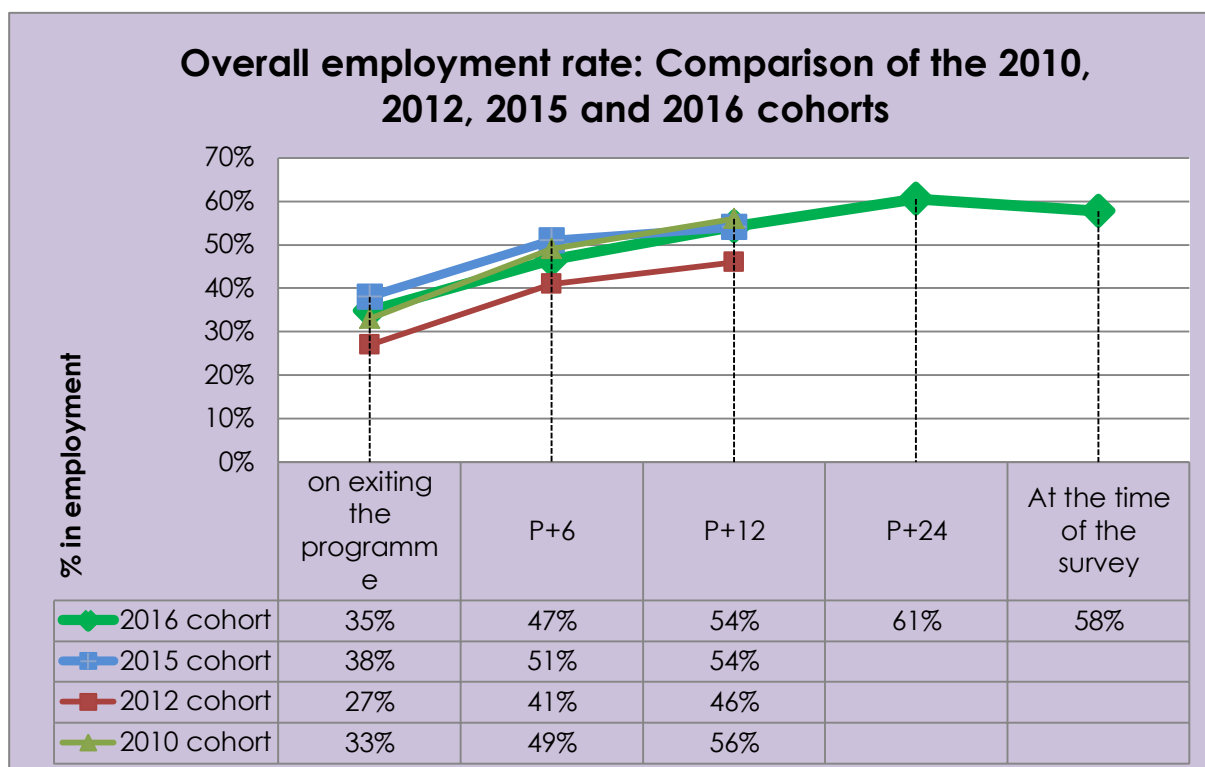
A valuation of one or more employment aids was observed in 29% of cases. A link between the first job and the programme undertaken is more frequently observed among trainees of Axis 2 (63.7%) than among those from Axis 4 (45.7%) and 3 (56.9%).

As regards the issue of remaining unemployed, almost one third (32.5%) of the trainees have experienced at least one period of long-term unemployment (12 months or more) since the end of the programme, with a very significant difference between areas of focus and zones of the Operational Programme.

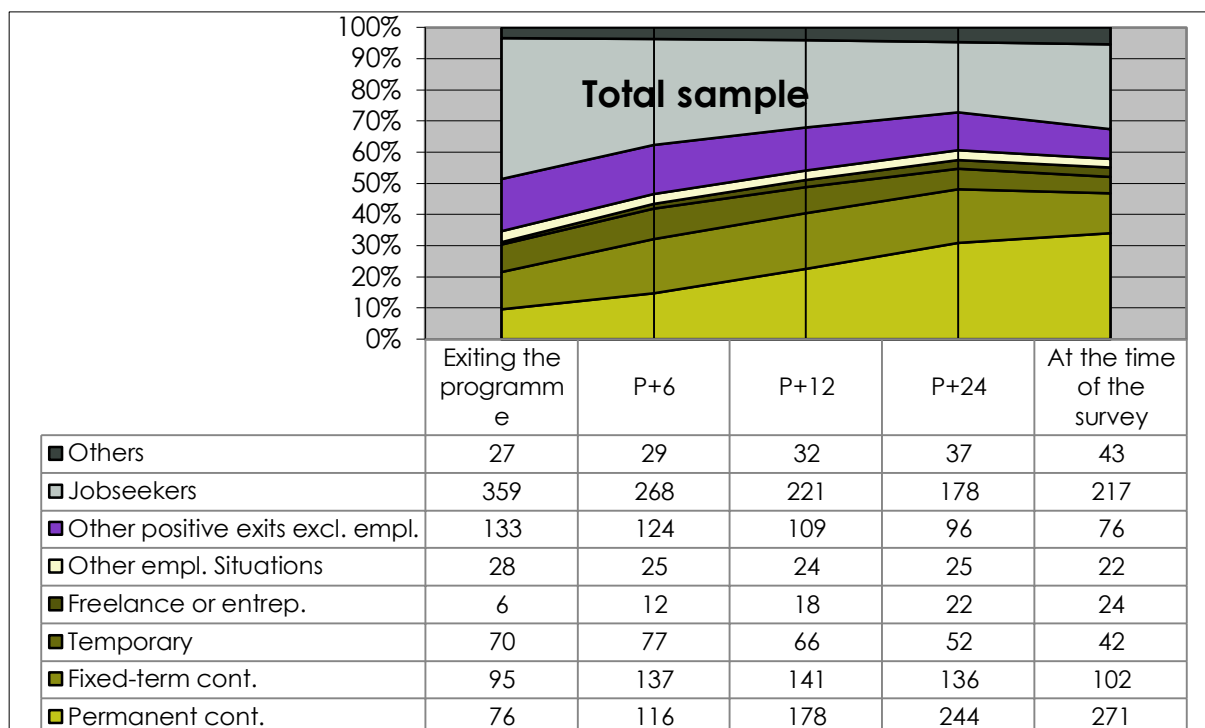
Today, the majority of the beneficiaries of a programme jointly funded by the ESF are employed (58%). More than half of these contracts are permanent contracts ("CDI") (59%).

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, up to 6 months after the programme, the rates of employment are slightly lower for trainees who completed a training programme in 2016 than for trainees who had completed an ESF joint-funded programme in 2015 but become similar up to 12 months after. On the other hand, they are generally higher than those observed for the 2012 cohort.



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 (2016 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.



As for previous cohorts, **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 regressive 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 11% 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.

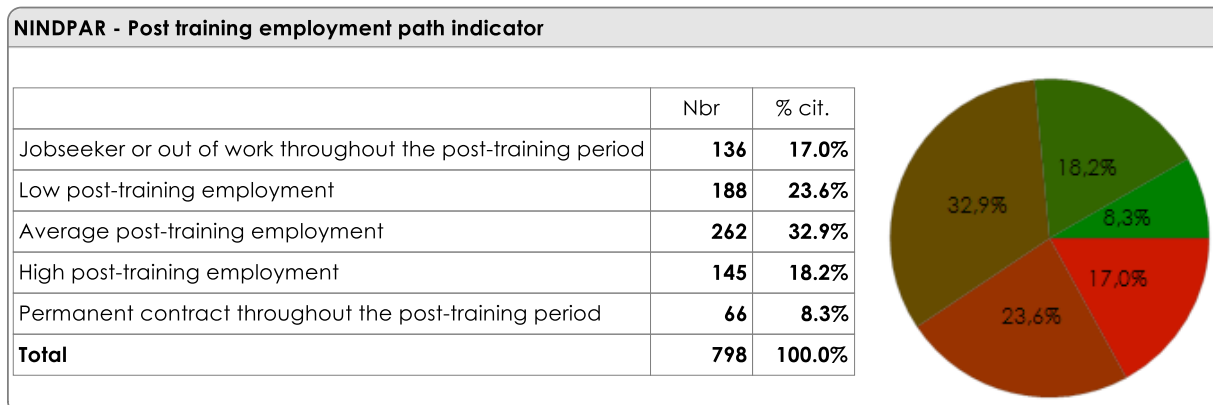
The indicator for the subjective quality of the transition was developed using the variables relating to the chosen or unchosen nature of the programme, the security of the transition (match between the programme and the trainee's expectations and the perceived benefits of the programme) and the acquisition of new skills. The subjective quality of the transition is good in most cases (87% of trainees).

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 is average in a slight majority of cases (51% of trainees).

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 2016 cohort, as is for 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 (27%) have experienced high post-training employment or a permanent contract throughout the period following the programme. Conversely, however, 40% of trainees have 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 focus on preparing for work in a specific professional field (in 54.4% of cases) and often proposed a placement (58.3%) generally more than 3 months in 49.2% of cases. In terms of post-action follow-up (from the operator or another organization), trainees under the YEI measure are relatively less followed

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.)

than other trainees : only 17.6% of YEI trainees reported a follow-up, compared to 28.7% of other trainees.

Regarding **individual resources**, most YEI trainees (57%) report that household income at the time of the programme made it possible to close the household budget "quite easily" or "very easily" compared to 47% of other trainees. Also note that 58% of the YEI trainees were living in a household with at least one other person employed at the time of the programme (which was only 37% for the other trainees).

As regards **conversion factors**, the majority of these YEI trainees have few qualifications (80.4% have at the most a secondary-school-level qualification) and have not been out of education for very long (57.1% had left education less than a year before starting the programme). A vast majority of the programmes undertaken by these trainees took place in a transition zone (85.6%). In relation to social connectedness, there are no significant differences between the YEI trainees and the others.

As regards **freedom of choice**, there are no significant differences between the YEI trainees and the others in terms of professional or personal self-determining motivations. However, there is a small difference in hetero-determined motivations. These motivations (hetero-determined) are non-existent for 74% of YEI trainees compared to 68% for other trainees.

In view of employment **opportunities** since the end of the programme, there are no significant differences between the YEI public and the others.

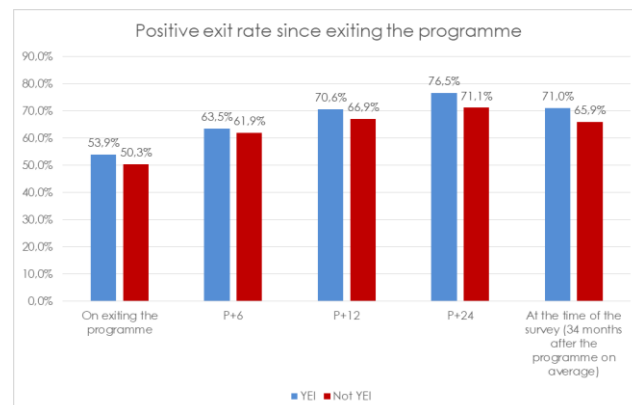
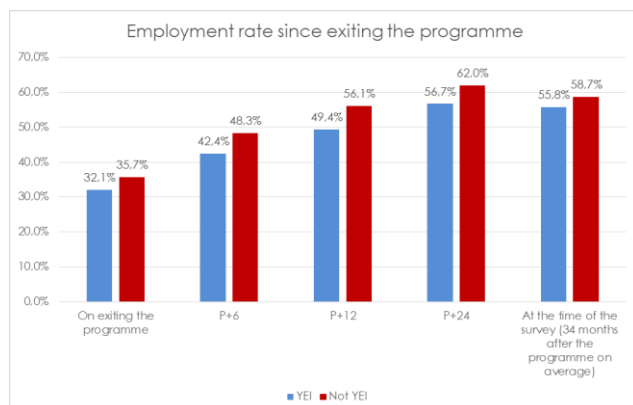
In terms of **subjective functioning**, 76% of YEI trainees said that the programme matched their expectations 'fairly well' or 'very well', and 59% said that the programme had a 'good' or 'very good' impact on their employment.

The first job after the programme also generally matched the expectations of these young people (the link between this job and expectations was fairly strong in 58% of cases and very strong in 18.4% of cases).

When deciding that the training or coaching programme was decisive in obtaining the first job, there is a tiny difference between former YEI trainees and the other groups targeted by the ESF. Among the YEI public, 45.3% declared that the programme was not at all decisive in obtaining the first job, compared to 36% among the other groups.

As regards **objective functionings**, as the graph below shows, the rates of employment for YEI trainees in the 2016 cohort are slightly lower than that of the others regardless of the period under review. On the other hand, in terms of positive exit rates⁶, the YEI group have a slightly higher positive exit rate than the others. These rates gradually increase 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 more of these trainees have not experienced a period of unemployment since the end of the programme (44.4% compared to only 38.8% among other ex-trainees). And, for those who have experienced periods of unemployment, they are generally short-lived. Indeed, of the overall YEI group, only 25% experienced a long-term period of unemployment (12 months or more) (compared to 35.5% among other ex-trainees).

As concerns the first job after the programme, if the differences are not significant between the YEI public and the other ex-trainees in terms of waiting time, work schedule, the enhancement of one or more employment aids, note that the difference is slightly significant in terms of the types of contract: more than six out of ten former YEI trainees obtained either a fixed-term contract of 3 months or more (36.2%) or a permanent contract (24.9%) against one in two ex-trainees among other public (26.7% had a fixed-term of 3 months or more, 23.4% had a permanent contract).

Answers to 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, are over-represented among the ESF trainees in relation to Walloon and Brussels jobseekers.

The conversion factors, be they personal, social or environmental, have 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 50 years old for the personal factors; single people without children, people 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 as well as people in the most developed zone concerning the environmental factors.

Regarding the question concerning the importance of freedom of choice on subjective functionings, a significant relationship is observed between the perceived contribution of action to employment and the degree of professional self-determined motivations to enter a training programme, between the declared identity contributions of programme and the personal self-determined motivations to start training and, between the representation of the future and the opportunities of employment since the end of the programme.

As regards the importance of freedom of choice on objective functioning, a significant link exists between the access to one or more jobs and the professional self-determined motivations of the trainees. Similarly, the type of contract of the first job after the programme is very significantly correlated with the valuation or not of one or more employment aids.

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 2016 cohort identifies a few initial general trends.

As with the previous cohort, 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.

However, the overall rates of employment at the end of the action or at six months after are slightly lower for the trainees of this cohort 2016 compared to the trainees of the 2015 cohort and become similar at 12 months after. Besides, if we take into account the areas, we notice higher rates of employment under axes 2 and 3 for trainees in the 2016 cohort compared to trainees in the 2015 cohort.⁷

As for the 2015 cohort, overall employment rates after the programme are clearly higher in the transition zones (Wallonia excluding Walloon Brabant) than in the more developed zones (Brussels and Walloon Brabant).

A particularity was observed in 2016 in terms of employment and positive exit rates for YEI trainees. The employment rate among these YEI trainees is slightly lower than among the other groups targeted by the ESF regardless of the period under review, while the positive exit rate is slightly higher than among the others. This finding shows that YEI trainees were the most likely to move towards other positive out-of-employment exits. The ESF could take this into account in the next programming to prioritize programmes oriented toward training for work in a specific field if immediate employment is the objective.

⁷ These elements will be further explored in the analysis of the 3 cohorts (2015, 2016 and 2018) to check if these rates vary according the trainee profiles and the types of programme.

There is also an over-representation of young people 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 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, those with few qualifications, with disabilities, and those who are isolated 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 combined analysis of the 3 cohorts of the Operational Programme 2014–2020.