

European Competence Centre for Social Innovation
ESF+ Community of Practice on Employment, Education and Skills

The 2024 Work Programme



Rationale

The external challenges and opportunities imposed by the twin transitions and demographic changes continue to shape the need for strengthening capacities and developing innovative approaches in employment and education policy.

The rationale for this year is to keep the focus on the three broad areas identified as most relevant for Community of Practice on Employment, Education and Skills (CoP EES) members in 2023 (see [Work Plan for 2023](#)), and continue working on subtopics that are the most relevant for the current work of CoP EES members. These subtopics are derived from members' feedback and the periodic mapping of the existing policy literature.

Objectives

The work programme for 2024 aims to support CoP EES members in finding structural, institutional solutions to the **challenges brought about by the digital and green transitions, globalisation and demographic changes and contribute to the objectives of the [European Year of Skills](#)**.

In 2024, CoP EES activities will focus on three main topics, while introducing some new subtopics:

(1) Transition management through modernising employment services.

In increasingly volatile labour markets, individuals experience multiple, frequent transitions (into or out of work, and between jobs) during their lifetime and need support in navigating the fast-changing job market, and in updating and gaining skills. The CoP EES explores how the ESF+ supports the development and broadening of traditional employment services to respond to this challenge.

In 2024, we plan to focus especially on how public employment services (PES) (and other public agencies) can cooperate with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in order to improve outreach and services that support labour market transitions that people make. In addition, we explore programmes that aim to reduce long-term unemployment.

(2) Targeting of ESF support to vulnerable youth. How to ensure that the ESF+ resources for youth are directed to those who need them most?

The scarring effects of economic crises are deepest for youths lacking work experience, skills and networks. The effectiveness of ESF+ resources invested in supporting youths critically depends on targeting: are measures directed to those that really need support and do they reach all of them? While the ESF+ provides sufficient resources to cover all those in need of support, Member States (MSs) need to ensure that implementing organisations have the right incentives and capacity to reach out and sustain the motivation of the most vulnerable youths. Subtopics may include the design of outcome indicators and monitoring systems, techniques of involving local NGOs, etc.

This year we plan to publish policy briefs related to this subtopic and explore good practices of cooperation between NGOs and PES with a focus on services for vulnerable youth.

(3) Improving the resilience of education and training systems in order to support reskilling and upskilling.

External challenges imply rapid and unexpected changes in the volume and content of training needs, straining the flexibility and adaptive capacity of Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Adult Education (AE) systems. On a small scale, the ESF+ offers innovative approaches to training and training design in this respect, but with limited impact on changing 'mainstream' education and training. Exploring and exchanging good practices could also have implications for the effective financing and quality assurance of VET and AE systems.

This year we plan to prepare one or two studies that map current practices in this area. One of these studies may review current practices of supporting the validation of existing skills (including soft skills) of particular vulnerable groups (e.g., refugees, migrants, Roma). The other study may focus on the Role of NGOs in delivering VET and the contributions of the ESF, considering organisational structures and innovative approaches.

The above three topics are intended to define the (relatively broad) areas where CoP EES members are likely to face challenges. During the 2024 programme, we aim to work on a few more narrowly defined subtopics within these areas that are of particular interest to CoP EES members. The subtopics have been selected on the basis of the mapping reports (see the section on activities and outputs) and feedback from CoP EES members in an online survey in May

2023 and during the Social Innovation Forum in October 2023. We will consult co-chairs and chairs during the year and fine-tune the details accordingly.

The CoP EES aims to build on existing knowledge accumulated in the previous cycle of the CoP EES as well as outside it, and to facilitate sharing information and cooperation with other existing networks of expertise, such as the Network of European PES that are working on related topics.

CoP EES participants: key target groups

The primary target group of the CoP EES includes managers and experts of MAs at the national and regional level, as well as of line ministries, intermediate bodies, and implementing organisations working in relevant policy areas.

The CoP EES also aims to engage the wider expert community, including experienced practitioners and independent experts in training and employment services, mainly by reaching out to existing expert networks. Social partners and their international networks are also included as a secondary target group. Some of the outputs of the CoP EES will also be relevant for academic researchers as well.

Involving the broader expert community helps reduce the risk of reinventing the wheel and increases the impact of the CoP EES on policy improvement.

CoP EES priorities based on key lessons from 2023:

- **Focus on practice-oriented activities:** peer reviews and study visits stand as key activities. These activities provide invaluable learning opportunities and foster networking by facilitating the exchange of insights and best practices among Member States.
- **Collaborate with the other thematic CoPs:** promote an active culture of cooperation and exchange through joint events, sharing information and expertise.
- **Develop knowledge-sharing tools and formats:** continue developing effective formats that maximise sharing and interaction;
- **Engage members:** rely on continuous feedback from CoP EES members and continue to ensure that our outputs are relevant and useful for them.

Overview of planned events in chronological order

Name of Activity	Format	Date	Outputs	Topics / Options
Webinar	Online	March 18	Summary report	Towards zero long-term unemployment in the EU: Job guarantees and other innovative approaches
Peer Review	Online	April 30	Recommendation paper	Cooperation with NGOs in provision of social and employment services
Study Visit I	In person	June 18-19	Summary report	Nobody is unemployable: the French Approach to Zero Long-Term Unemployment
Study Visit II	In person	Nov 6-7	Background note, Summary report	“Partnerships’ Ecosystem developed by Actiris” following from the Peer Review

SI Forum	In person	Oct 1-2	Summary Report	<p>Workshops:</p> <p>Changing patterns of collaborations: NGOs as training providers and career counsellors for disadvantaged groups.</p> <p>Finding Out What Really Works in Social Innovation: Why We Need Impact Evaluation and How to Get Reliable Evidence?</p> <p>Approaching and Understanding Diversity: Strategies for Social Services to Engage Diverse Audiences</p>
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Other activities and outputs per type of activity

Name of Activity	Format	Date	Outputs	Topics / Options
Studies				
Study I	Document	Feb	Study	Towards zero long-term unemployment in the EU: Job guarantees and other innovative approaches
Study II	Document	Dec	Study	The role of NGOs in vocational training and the contributions of the ESF
Summary Report				
Summary report	Document	Mar	Summary Report on the study visit to Finland	Key features and transferability of Finnish programme for youth outreach
Policy briefs				
Policy Brief	Document	Tbd	Policy Brief	Cooperation with NGO's

Detailed outline for planned activities and outputs

STUDY VISITS

Study Visit I Nobody is unemployable: the French Approach to Zero Long-Term Unemployment

This is a follow-up event from the Webinar on LTU programmes organized in March 2024 and based on the Mapping report on LTU programmes.

Study Visit II Cooperation with NGOs

This is a follow-up event from the Peer Review on cooperation with NGOs in provision of social and employment services to be organized in the second half of 2024.

ONLINE EVENTS

Webinar:

Towards Zero Long-Term Unemployment in the EU: Job Guarantees and Other Innovative Approaches

With a budget of EUR 23 million, the European Commission will support the testing, transfer and expansion of innovative territorial measures to combat long-term unemployment. A call for projects is scheduled for publication in 2024. In an effort to bolster the promotion of the call and facilitate the formation of transnational consortia, CoP EES plans to organize a webinar, tentatively scheduled for March. This webinar will unveil the findings of a mapping exercise conducted in the last quarter of 2023, examining diverse national and regional approaches toward achieving “zero long-term unemployment.” Furthermore, it will offer an opportunity for participants to delve into breakout sessions focusing on specific initiatives.

Peer Review : Cooperation with NGOs

The Social Innovation Forum 2023 workshop confirmed a keen interest of COP members in how to improve cooperation between NGOs and PES. Two aspects that emerged as especially relevant concern stable, sustainable funding and management issues. The Peer Review would focus on one or both of these aspects, depending on the host countries that we can engage for the PR. A possible presenter may be Actiris, about their cooperation with Duo for a job and other NGOs in delivering services to vulnerable groups. We will identify other relevant practices by reviewing the notes from the workshop and also while revising the mapping reports. If possible we will focus on practices that include *Post placement support for youth* and/or *Mental health support for vulnerable youth*, which have also been identified as relevant issues.

NGOs may support public agencies (PES or municipalities) in serving vulnerable groups in several ways: increase outreach, broaden the range of specialised services, inspire innovation, or help to overcome limited institutional capacities. In this workshop we focus especially on non-profit organisations that provide specialised services to a specific target group, such as youths, people with disabilities, refugees or ethnic minorities.

Cooperation with NGOs may take different forms ranging from adhoc exchange of information to formal partnership agreements. Creating a stable, formal framework for cooperation can help improve the effectiveness of service provision and also makes it easier to use ESF funding.

While the growing attention on outreach and activation of the inactive and long-term unemployed population and vulnerable groups (such as youth with mental health issues) has increased the need for involving NGOs in many EU countries, PES and municipalities have often found it challenging to create the management frameworks for effective cooperation with NGOs.

The [2019 guidebook](#) for ESF MAs on supporting partnership expressly encourages the inclusion of social partners and NGOs in ESF projects, especially where these concern social inclusion, gender equality and equal opportunities. [Capacity building](#) of social partners and civil society is a dedicated area of shared management ESF+ funds, and it is considered central to the successful implementation of ESF+ policies.

STUDIES

Study 1: Towards Zero Long-Term Unemployment in the EU: Job Guarantees and Other Innovative Approaches

This report maps and analyses “Zero Long-Term Unemployment” (Zero LTU) and Job guarantee initiatives across Europe. It explores existing research, peers into long-term unemployment statistics and provides a conceptual framework for comparison. Besides a literature review, it builds methodologically mainly on an online-survey carried out in autumn 2023 among ESF+ Social Innovation+ Initiative Communities of Practice (CoP) members and interviews with key individuals involved in Zero-LTU and job guarantee initiatives.

The report details five ongoing initiatives in Europe including Austria’s *Marienthal Job Guarantee Pilot* (MAGMA), France’s *Territoires zéro chômeur de longue durée* (TZCLD) as well as the Belgium adaption of the French model, *Germany’s Solidarity Basic Income* (SBI) project and the Netherlands’ *Basisbaan*. These initiatives share common features such as addressing long-term unemployment through local and regional approaches, building on voluntary participation, offering fair remuneration and flexible working hours.

Study II: The Role of NGOs in vocational training and the Contributions of the ESF. Over the past two decades, there has been a notable rise of NGOs role in delivering VET programs, both for young and adult participants, leading ISCED11 3 or 4 qualifications. The ESF has facilitated these developments and contributed to the funding of such programs offered in the Third Sector across Member States. Various patterns of collaboration between governmental and non-governmental providers have emerged in this regard. The objective of this study is to shed light on related developments and to conduct a comparative analysis across selected countries. Approaches studied should include those helping early school leavers to enter an apprenticeship, those providing Second Chance Education pathways for adults and those helping migrants, refugees in particular, to combine vocational training with second language acquisition. Emphasis will be given to studying emerging innovative practices and the ESF facilitating role in these. The results should inform the selection of future ESF projects as well as overall ESF program planning.

Study III (to be reconsidered in 2025): Review of existing practices to support the validation of existing skills (including soft skills) of particular vulnerable groups (e.g. refugees, migrants, Roma). An outline on that topic has been produced and the implementation of the study will be reconsidered for 2025.

POLICY BRIEFS

Policy Brief: Cooperation with NGO's

The policy brief will discuss the potential benefits of cooperation between PES/ other public agencies and NGOs that provide services for vulnerable groups and some examples of how to develop a framework to support such cooperation based on the related Peer review and Study Visit. It would be most relevant for MAs and Implementing Organisations.

Engaging CoP members

Apart from the outputs, we also have some plans for involving our members:

- develop a plan for engaging our members to get more involved and set up working groups (or other formats, whatever is most feasible for them).
- develop a plan for reaching experienced and autonomous experts who could gain from / contribute to the CoP EES.

