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The European Social Fund on the labor market in Poland — the example of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship

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Abstract: Structural policy, also referred to as regional structural policy, aims at preserving both social and economic consistency in the development of EU member states with economic and social sustainable development as its main objective. The aim of the presented paper is the analysis of using the European Social Fund on the labor market via the example of Poland, especially the Lower Silesian Voivodeship. Undoubtedly, the status of the use of the ESF means in Poland, that it allows to start the research which aims at providing answers to vital questions bothering nearly all institutions and persons directly or indirectly engaged in distribution of EU funds. What is the scope of European Social Fund intervention? What is the impact of the EFS on local and regional labor markets? How is the effectiveness of spending such funds measured? The author of the paper attempts to answer some of these questions. It seems that the answers should become the basis and starting point for a wider analysis, which would enable one to apply suitable solutions controlling the process of implementing EU aid in the coming programming period, which is after 2020.

Europejski Fundusz Społeczny na rynku pracy w Polsce — przykład województwa dolnośląskiego

Abstrakt: Polityka strukturalna, zwana także regionalną polityką strukturalną, ma na celu zachowanie spójności społecznej i gospodarczej w rozwoju krajów członkowskich UE, których głównym celem jest zrównoważony rozwój gospodarczy i społeczny. Celem prezentowanej pracy jest analiza

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wykorzystania Europejskiego Funduszu Społecznego (EFS) na rynku pracy na przykładzie Polski, zwłaszcza województwa dolnośląskiego. Niewątpliwie poziom wykorzystania środków EFS w Polsce pozwala na rozpoczęcie badań, których celem jest udzielenie odpowiedzi na istotne pytania niepokojące niemal wszystkie instytucje i osoby bezpośrednio lub pośrednio zaangażowane w dystrybucję środków unijnych. Jaki jest zakres interwencji Europejskiego Funduszu Społecznego? Jaki jest wpływ EFS na lokalne i regionalne rynki pracy? Jak mierzy się efektywność wydatków funduszy? Autorka artykułu próbuje odpowiedzieć na niektóre z tych pytań. Wydaje się, że odpowiedzi powinny stać się podstawą i punktem wyjścia szerszej analizy, która umożliwiłaby zastosowanie odpowiednich rozwiązań kontrolujących proces wdrażania pomocy UE w nadchodzącym okresie programowania, czyli po 2020 roku.

Introduction

All structural funds and especially the European Social Fund (ESF) are one of the EU's key financial tools. They are an important instrument in creating European structural policy. The policy aims for sustainable development of all Member States, in both social and economic fields. The European Social Fund has been created in order to facilitate employment increase through adjusting people's skills and qualifications to the needs of the labor market, and through increasing their mobility within individual Member States and inside the whole EU.¹

Thanks to Poland's accession to the European Union (EU) the economic situation of the country is still improving. The possibility of co-financing from EU funds to equalize the economic level of the country and its inhabitants was also beneficial. One of the EU programs that Poland has benefited from was the European Social Fund, whose funds are intended to improve the situation of the socially excluded, unemployed, discriminated etc., and thus to improve society in the country.

ESF funding for 2007–2013 and 2014–2020 supported investment in human resources.

Beneficiaries could benefit from the Human Capital Operational Program in 2007–2013 and the Operational Program Knowledge, Education Development for 2014–2020 as well as regional operational programs in each province.

Thanks to the numerous activities and consulting and training projects of each Program, it was possible to improve the development of human resources, increase employment and adapt human resources to the needs of the labor market, as a result of which the country's community is improving economic competitiveness in the EU.

The aim of this article was to examine to what extent ESF funds had an impact on the labor market in Poland.

¹ A. Zamiar, "The evaluation of institutions implementing structural funds in Poland", *Economic and Environmental Studies* 10, 2010, no. 1, pp. 113–24, here: p. 113, www.ees.uni.opole.pl (accessed: 14.09.2019).

Especially it was examine how ESF influence on the Lower Silesia labor market.

It is worth emphasizing that the Lower Silesian Voivodeship is one of the country's best developed economic regions, and at the same time is an important research and academic center of supra-regional importance. The level of development of the new technology industry is particularly high. The region also has many development potentials of supra-regional and often national significance.

Lower Silesia is one of the fastest growing regions in Poland, however, this development is not progressing evenly. Strong internal diversity of the region is visible.

It is important to strengthen human capital in the labor market. The support instrument in this case will be support from the European Social Fund.

It has been hypothesized that the funds from the ESF contributed to maintaining a low level of unemployment in Poland and especially in the region of Lower Silesia.

1. Structural policy and European Social Fund

The main aim of the structural policy, also called regional structural policy, is “maintaining social and economic cohesion in the regional development of EU Member States” while “the main objective of this policy is to decrease the gaps between less and more developed regions”.²

The European Union's regional and structural policy (cohesion policy) also aims to reduce interregional development disparities for example on the labor market.

The cohesion policy aims to support activities that lead to the equalization of social and economic conditions in all regions of the European Union. In addition, the European Union aims to minimize disparities at the level of regional development and eliminate backwardness in regions, including rural areas.

The regional policy/cohesion policy of the European Union is above all aid in the form of subsidies for the regions of the European Union. Regional/cohesion policy is about achieving three main goals: convergence, increasing the competitiveness of regions and jobs, and European territorial cooperation.

Today's cohesion policy for 2014–2020 is subordinated to achieving the aims of the “Europe 2020” strategy. It concentrates on intelligent and sustainable development fostering social inclusion in the EU and countering the globalization of crisis phenomena.

The EU's enlargement policy aims to unite European countries around a common political and economic project. Based on the Union's values and subject to strict conditions, enlargement has proved to be one of the most effective tools

² *Encyklopedia Unii Europejskiej*, ed. K.A. Wojtaszczyk, Warszawa 2004, p. 299.

to support political, economic and social reforms as well as to consolidate peace, stability and democracy throughout the continent. Enlargement policy also highlights the EU's global presence.

The enlargement of the EU has led to wider social and economic disparities between regions within the Union, which poses new challenges to the cohesion policy. There is a need for effective tools for narrowing economic, social and regional inequalities within the Union. At the same time, the programs supported by structural funds should more effectively support the Union in the strengthening of its competitiveness.³

The European Social Fund (ESF) is funding projects across the EU in order to get more people into better jobs through activities such as training, re-skilling, counseling and quality careers advice.

The European Social Fund is most often associated with the possibility of financing activities such as training, workshops and also providing employment support, etc.

Nevertheless, it should be remembered that indeed, the ESF was established to improve the quality and accessibility of jobs and increase employment opportunities in the European Union.

The ESF supports such areas as e.g. promoting an active labor market policy aimed at preventing and preventing unemployment. In addition, it supports counteracting the phenomenon of social exclusion, lifelong learning or professional promotion of employees employed in the economy sector. The ESF also affects the development of entrepreneurship and increased access to and participation of women in the labor market.

It is important to underline that the ESF is the oldest existing and operating structural fund, thanks to which the Member States are able to perform a joint social policy.

In line with the fund's priorities, the ESF aims to:

- strive for a high level of employment and high-quality jobs, improving access to the labor market and supporting geographical and occupational mobility of workers, as well as helping them adapt to industrial changes;
- encouraging a high level of education and training for all and facilitating the transition of young people from education to employment;
- combating poverty, strengthening social inclusion and promoting equality between women and men, non-discrimination and equal opportunities.

The ESF supports many ideas and priorities, which are connected with the social aspect of EU Member States' actions.⁴

³ <https://tem.fi/en/eu-regional-and-structural-policy> (accessed: 14.09.2019).

⁴ A. Zamiar, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

Each year the ESF helps millions of Europeans improve their lives by learning new skills and finding better jobs.⁵

The ESF is funding tens of thousands of local, regional and national employment-related projects throughout Europe: from small projects run by neighborhood charities or non-profit organizations to help local disabled people find suitable work, to nationwide projects that promote vocational training among the whole population.

There is a great variety in the nature, size and aims of ESF projects, and they address a wide variety of target groups. There are projects aimed at education systems, teachers and schoolchildren; at young and older job-seekers; and at potential entrepreneurs from all backgrounds. People are the focus of the ESF.⁶

The ESF also prepares Europe's workforce to cope with the changing needs of the international economy. Training programs help people make the most of new opportunities for example in a greener economy. The ESF supports changes to curricula and better teaching to make sure everyone can fulfill their potential.⁷

For people at risk of losing their jobs, the long-term unemployed or those who have never had a job or a lack of confidence can add to the significant difficulty. In such cases, projects that include training in work and life skills or guidance through the first steps at work can give the help that makes the important difference.⁸

By connecting all elements of lifelong learning, from training and advice to counseling and coaching in informal skills, ESF actions greatly expand the employment prospects of participants.

It is worth emphasizing that, celebrating the 60th anniversary of the European Social Fund at the beginning of 2017, the Commission announced that in the 2007–2013 period alone it helped almost 10 million Europeans find a job. Commissioner Marianne Thyssen at the time spoke of the ESF as a fund that is characterized by “60 years of success” and stressed that it represents direct investment in human capital. This opportunity also initiated reflections and perspectives on the financing of human capital in the EU after 2020.

The European Social Fund (ESF) provides a significant resource to build human capital and social cohesion. In the current programming period (2014–2020) there is an emphasis on transnationality within the ESF. This is expressed through

⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/home.jsp> (accessed: 14.09.2019).

⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=35&langId=en> (accessed: 14.09.2019).

⁷ European Commission — Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, *The European Social Fund at work. Getting people into jobs*, Brussels 2014, p. 1, <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/6229c4d8-a8d2-414f-ab94-c49e95769a2c/language-en> (accessed: 14.09.2019).

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

a Common Framework, which encourages the launching of Co-ordinated Calls for Proposals, complemented by a flexible approach to transnational cooperation.⁹

For the 2014–2020 period, the ESF will focus on four of the cohesion policy’s thematic objectives:¹⁰

- promoting employment and supporting labor mobility;
- promoting social inclusion and combating poverty;
- investing in education, skills and lifelong learning;
- enhancing institutional capacity and an efficient public administration.

In addition, 20% of ESF investments will be devoted to activities improving social inclusion and combating poverty. This is known as thematic concentration.

The role of the ESF was reinforced for the 2014–2020 period through the introduction of a legally binding minimum share of 23.1% of total cohesion funding.¹¹

In the period 2014–2020, the EU allocated over EUR 80 billion to the European Social Fund, i.e., almost a quarter of its expenditure on regional development policy. Approximately EUR 13.2 billion has been allocated to Poland from this pool. This is much more than in 2007–2013, when we had just over EUR 11 billion at our disposal.

It’s important to emphasize that Poland is targeting ESF support at disadvantaged jobseekers and social groups with the aim of giving them the opportunities and skills to find work or to improve their competences. Making education more relevant and improving public services are other important objectives that are supported from the ESF.¹²

ESF employment projects take an individual and demand-based approach, focusing on those who have difficulty finding a job for a variety of reasons. Individual coaching and counseling as well as emphasis on skills and qualifications that are in demand are one of the measures taken to improve job opportunities for jobseekers and help them on the labor market. In addition, ESF funding supports entrepreneurship and self-employment, in particular among young people who are entering the labor market for the first time. In general, the ESF supports initiatives aimed at improving skills as well as qualifications and qualifications to meet the needs of growing sectors of the economy in Poland.

The ESF Regulation includes for example the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), which is funded from three sources: ESF national allocations (EUR 3.2 billion), a specific EU budget (EUR 3.2 billion) and national co-financing of the ESF

⁹ European Union — Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, “Addressing youth unemployment through outreach, activation and service integration. ESF Youth Employment Thematic Network”, *Technical Dossier* 2018, no. 9, p. 4.

¹⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding/social-fund/ (accessed: 14.09.2019).

¹¹ S. Schulz, *European Social Fund*, European Parliament, Brussels 2019, p. 3, www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en (accessed: 14.09.2019).

¹² <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=393&langId=en> (accessed: 14.09.2019).

part. It props up young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) in regions experiencing youth unemployment rates above 25%.¹³

Throughout Europe and in Poland the ESF is helping people get better jobs, supporting jobs and ensuring excellent living standards and job opportunities for all EU citizens. It is doing this by investing in Europe's human capital — its young people, its workers, disadvantaged groups and all those seeking a job. Tens of thousands of ESF projects are active in Europe's cities, towns or in neighborhoods and rural communities. All of these projects are opening doors to better qualifications or skills, to work and to a more inclusive society for all Europeans.¹⁴

2. Polish regional policy

Regional policy is a kind of strategic investment policy targeting regions and cities in order to improve their economic growth and boost people's quality of life. It's also an expression of solidarity, focusing support on less-developed regions.¹⁵

Regional policy expresses also solidarity between EU countries. It helps less-developed regions to implement their economic potential.

European Union regional policy funding has financed tens of thousands of projects over the years, benefiting all EU countries in terms of economic growth and jobs.

Regional policy has a strong impact in many fields and on many different levels. It is important to emphasize that regional policy is also referred to in broader terms as cohesion policy, as its overall goal is to strengthen what is known as social, economic and territorial cohesion in regions which qualify for support.¹⁶

Considering regional policy it is important to emphasize the role of the Structural Funds (ERDF, ESF), which are designed to invest in economic and social restructuring across the EU. Thanks to these it is possible to reduce gaps between European regions, for example in terms of infrastructure and employment.

Regional policy is the EU's main investment policy for regional and urban development and growth.

Projects supported by regional policy have created millions of new jobs, and developed thousands of kilometers of strategic transport etc. Thanks to these, EU countries can achieve the Europe 2020 objectives for sustainable economic growth and job creation.

¹³ S. Schulz, op. cit., p. 3.

¹⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=393&langId=en> (accessed: 14.09.2019).

¹⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/what/investment-policy/ (accessed: 14.09.2019).

¹⁶ European Commission — Directorate-General for Communication Citizens information, *The European Union explained: Regional Policy*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg 2014, p. 5.

Poland's regional policy conducted within the framework of a common cohesion policy and targeting common objectives is financially supported by EU funds and financial means from the Cohesion Fund.

Regional policy should be seen as coordinated activities of all entities (including for example the government, local governments at all levels and socio-economic partners) for the development of individual regions.¹⁷

Poland has introduced a development management system that allows efficient management of the country's development policy. This policy allows defining the country's development goals and planning how they will be implemented. Such planning is significant because it allows us to determine where we are going and how we can rationally manage the available resources.

The Council of Ministers adopted a resolution on the adoption of the "National Strategy for Regional Development 2030", submitted by the Minister of Investment and Development. The "National Strategy for Regional Development 2030" (NSRD 2030) is the basic strategic document of the state's regional policy.¹⁸

Taking into account the current conditions and development challenges that result from demographic processes, globalization and the new EU financial perspective, the NSRD identifies the objectives of regional policy and actions to be achieved by entities like the government, local government and other entities participating in the implementation of this policy.

The NSRD 2030 presents:

- how to adapt to the changes that are happening around us so that Poland is a conscious and profitable participant in the globalization process;
- how to use the advantages of the region — including human and natural resources, location and institutional advantages — for its development;
- mechanisms of cooperation between: the government, regional and local self-government, which enable directing national and regional financial streams toward the implementation of grass-roots visions and development plans.

NSRD 2030 emphasizes the sustainable development of the whole country, i.e., reducing disparities in the level of socio-economic development of various areas, mainly urban and rural. The strategy provides for more effective identification of development needs of all areas of the country, as well as more effective identification of resources at their disposal, identification of challenges and development barriers.

This approach will translate into a better adjustment of intervention tools (e.g. programs) to the development possibilities and potentials of individual areas of the country.

¹⁷ The term region in this document usually refers to the voivodeship — Ustawa z dnia 5 czerwca 1998 r. o samorządzie województwa lub regionu NUTS 2 (Dz.U. z 2019 r. poz. 512).

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.pl/web/inwestycje-rozwoj/krajowa-strategia-rozwoju-regionalnego> (accessed: 14.09.2019).

Most of the current instruments for implementing regional policy have their source in cohesion policy. Thus, it includes in the program and legal dimension the solutions provided for in EU taxonomy. Regional policy intervention is implemented primarily through operational programs, especially ROPs, managed by voivodeship governments, a centrally managed operational program dedicated to Eastern Poland and Interreg programs, including at the external EU land borders. Other national operational programs financed from EU funds, in principle, implement sectoral policy, taking into account the territorial context. These instruments are supported by the Common Agricultural Policy and the Common Fisheries Policy.¹⁹

3. The aims of projects cofunding from the European Social Fund on the Polish labor market

Today, the ESF intervenes in the following main labor market transition phases: from school to work, from long-term unemployment and unemployment to work, and from work to work. ESF policies thereby aim at overcoming the hindrance individuals face during their change process. The upcoming changes in the world of work, however, call for policy adjustments, especially in the area of work, workers' rights and social protection.²⁰

While gender equality is a core value of the European Union (EU), enshrined in the Fundamental Treaties, part of the EU policy agenda — including the European Social Fund and other Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) — gender inequalities in the labor market still predominate lower participation in the labor market, segregation of women in a limited number of sectors, in precarious jobs, pay gap partly unexplained, incomplete careers, sexism and violence, unequal share of caring responsibilities, etc. Despite the fact that women's higher educational attainment and although opportunities for women in the EU labor market have been growing, the workforce remains strongly divided along gender lines.²¹

“The annual budgetary procedures applied for MFF 2014–2020 will integrate, as appropriate, gender responsive elements, taking into account the ways in which the overall financial framework of the Union contributes to increased gender equality (and ensures gender mainstreaming)” as provided in a joint declaration by

¹⁹ Ministerstwo Inwestycji i Rozwoju, *Krajowa Strategia Rozwoju Regionalnego 2030*, Warszawa 2019, p. 102.

²⁰ A. Scopetta, “Future of Work: Labour Market Transitions in the Spotlight”, *EFS Transnational Platform. Employment Thematic Network*, European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, Vienna 2019, pp. 6–7.

²¹ European Commission, *Report on Equality between Women and Men in the EU*, Brussels 2018.

the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission on the EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2014–2020.²²

Considering that gender equality is a key value and mission of the ESF²³ and that the ESIFs are the Union’s main financial tool supporting the Europe 2020 strategy and the most important financial instrument in support of gender equality, this is striking.²⁴

Looking more specifically at the ESF, on top of its mission to promote gender equality, the fund shall support equality between men and women in all areas, including access to employment, career progression, reconciliation of work and private life (article 3), provide data and indicators broken down by gender (article 5), involve gender equality partners (article 6) and promote equality between women and men in the entire policy cycle (article 7).²⁵

Currently, the main objective pursued by Member States within the ESF program is to increase women’s participation in the labor market. Enhancing women’s access to employment is an objective in all Member States but Sweden.²⁶

One of the key policy priorities is youth employment, tackled through both the ESF’s own resources and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI). The budget of the YEI has been increased in 2017 to EUR 8.9 billion, covering the full 2014–2020 programming period.²⁷

A number of projects in Poland are financed by the ESF either to support female integration on the labor market or change the organizational culture. The development of a model of short breaks for families with caring responsibilities in Poland is interesting as it goes beyond the typical issue of childcare. The challenge for such a project is to have such breaks recognized in law and promoted all over Poland.²⁸

The measures are rolled out on a region-by-region basis, and although they are guided by the same legal act, review of a selection of regional Labor offices’ websites suggests that there are still regional differences.

In 2007–2013, only one ESF financed OP was implemented in Poland — the OP ‘Human Capital’. With the EU allocation of EUR 9.7 bn., it was the largest ESF program in the EU in 2007–2013. In the 2014–2020 programming period,

²² European Parliament, *The use of funds for gender equality in selected Member States, study for the FEMM Committee*, Brussels 2016, p. 10.

²³ Article 2 of ESF Regulation no. 1304/2013.

²⁴ European Union — Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, “Female (Un)employment and Work-Life Balance. A discussion paper from the Employment Thematic Network”, *Technical Dossier* 2018, no. 8, p. 6.

²⁵ Draft General Budget of the European Commission for the financial year 2017, COM (2016)300, June 2016:15.

²⁶ European Union — Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, “Female (Un)employment and Work-Life Balance”... , p. 17.

²⁷ European Commission — Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, *European Union Joint Employment Report 2019. Social Europe*, Brussels 2019, p. 57.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

ESF 2014–2020 resources in Poland are implemented through the ESF mono-fund national OP ‘Knowledge Education Development’ and 16 regional multi-fund (i.e., ERDF and ESF) OPs, in which the ESF accounts for EUR 8.7 bn. ROPs support such areas as regional labor markets, active job search, education, skills and competences, social inclusion and technical assistance.²⁹

Thanks to the ESF in 2015–2017 in Poland about 41.1% of participants was supported (source: These figures have been extracted from the Annual Implementation Reports (AIR). The data are the sum of long-term unemployed participants in the themes of educational and vocational training, Social Inclusion and Sustainable & Quality Employment. These are respectively thematic objectives 10, 9 and 8).

On the labor market in Poland are many projects co-financed from the ESF. A good example of this is the following project which shows how the ESF supports the labor market:³⁰

Project: Respite Care For Carers Of People With Disabilities.³¹ The aim of this project was to develop and implement a model of a short break service to improve the quality of life of families caring for people with disabilities. To date, this form of support is still poorly propagated in Poland. The support was aimed at and provided specifically to the disabled and their carers. In this project 135 people participated (disabled and carers) in the program, with the institutions concerned (foundations, associations, public social support institutions). At the beginning of this project 9 of these 15 institutions were the developed solution was tested. There were also 9 coordinators and 45 assistants trained for the tasks.

In 2019, an evaluation of this test period was carried out. The final objective would be to have legislation adopted to make such short break services accessible for carers throughout Poland. The concept of short breaks in this project was also tested and the rights of carers of persons with disabilities to a work-life balance was new, and was highlighted for the first time directly through the project’s activities.

4. European Social Fund on the labor market in The Lower Silesian Voivodeship

The Lower Silesian Voivodeship is one of the economically most developed regions in the country (2nd place in Poland in terms of GDP per capita), and at the same time it is an important research and academic center of supra-regional importance. The level of development of the new technology industry is particularly high. The region has also many development potentials of supra-regional importance and often nationwide. The most important of these include intensifying its relations

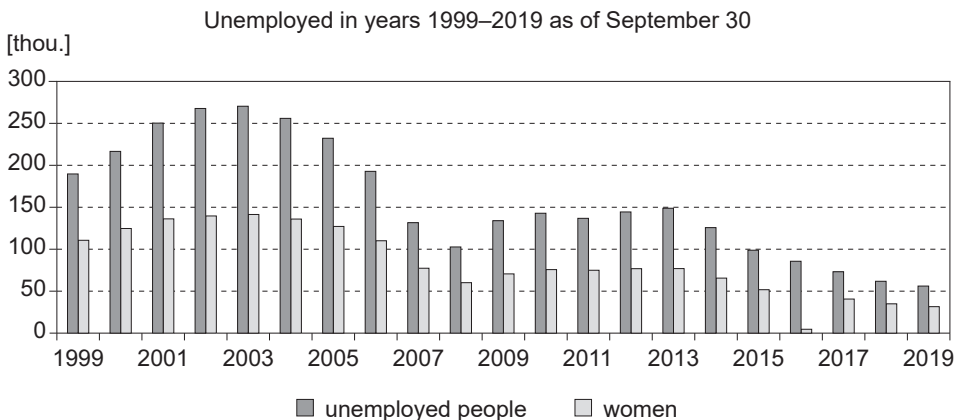
²⁹ F. Levarlet, D. Hrelja, *State of play and future challenges of the European Social Fund in promoting social cohesion in Europe’s cities and regions*, European Union — Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy and EU Budget, European Committee of Regions, Brussels 2018, p. 27.

³⁰ European Commission, *Cohesion Policy and Poland*, Brussels 2014, p. 3, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/information/cohesion-policy-achievement-and-future-investment/factsheet/poland_en.pdf (accessed: 14.09.2019).

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

with foreign countries (investment, tourism, commercial, scientific — research and cultural activities), developing scientific and research potential and closer links with the entrepreneurial sphere and thus increasing the level of the technological and innovative economy. The region's potential is water transport on the Odra River and promotion of the region as a tourist and economically attractive area (Lower Silesia as one of Poland's "business cards"). An unfavorable developmental feature of the voivodeship is a growing degree of intra-regional diversity. At the same time clear suburbanization trends are visible, observed among others in poviats near Wrocław.³²

The situation on the labor market in the Dolnośląskie Voivodeship is moderate. At the end of September this year the number of registered unemployed in labor offices in the Dolnośląskie Voivodeship was 56.1 thousand persons and was lower by 9.2% (i.e., 5.7 thousand people) than in September 2018, and by 1.7% (i.e., by 947 people) lower compared to August this year. Women constituted 56.2% of the total registered unemployed (56.5% a year before). The unemployment rate in the country was 5.1%, in the Dolnośląskie voivodeship 4.6%, which in the rankings with other voivodeships allows it to occupy 6th place (the highest position was occupied by the Wielkopolskie voivodeship with an unemployment rate of 2.8%).³³



Graph 1. Unemployment over the years 1999–2019 as at September 30, 2019

Source: study based on: *Information on the labor market situation in the Lower Silesian Voivodeship in September 2019*, http://www.dwup.pl/www/news/3/c/473/Informacja-o-sytuacji-na-ryнку-pracy-w-woj_-Dolnoslaskim-we-wrzesniu-2019-roku_ (accessed: 23.11.2019).

³² Zarząd Województwa Dolnośląskiego, *Regionalny Program Operacyjny Województwa Dolnośląskiego na lata 2014–2020*, Wrocław 2019, p. 15.

³³ http://www.dwup.pl/www/news/3/c/473/Informacja-o-sytuacji-na-ryнку-pracy-w-woj_-Dolnoslaskim-we-wrzesniu-2019-roku_ (accessed: 23.11.2019).

At the end of September 2019, in the register of powiat labor offices of the Dolnośląskie Voivodeship, there were 56,093 unemployed persons, including women, who constitute 56.23% of the total number of unemployed. This was 5,713 people fewer than at the end of September 2018, which means a 9.2% change year on year.

Looking at the picture above we can see that unemployment started to fall from 2006. It was connected with Poland's accession to the European Union.

Thanks to the European Social Fund, the Dolnośląskie Voivodeship could introduce many projects that improve the labor market.

Over the years 2007–2013, the Human Capital Operational Program 2007–2013 was implemented. This program consisted of ten priorities. The Dolnośląskie Voivodeship fulfilled priority number 6: a labor market open for everyone. This priority consisted of three types of activities.

Under Activity 6.1 and Activity 6.2 — The value of the indicator is 2,754 jobs for young people. Projects in which it is recognized that support in the form of granting funds for starting a business that generates jobs is one of the most effective in the context of reducing unemployment, clearly has a significant share in the achieved value of the indicator. On the other hand, in Activity 6.2, the value achieved was mainly the result of the implementation of projects which, according to the access criterion, promoted a group of people aged 15–24.

The indicator is part of specific objective 2, which is increasing the employment rate among young people, because each created job based on the support from the ESF directly increases the employment rate of young people and influences the development of entrepreneurship in the region.

Considering the level of settled funds, it is considered that the level of indicator achieved in Priority VI is satisfactory.³⁴

The employment efficiency indicator has been introduced in projects accepted for implementation since 2011 under Sub-activity 6.1.1 and 6.1.3. The final value of the indicator was achieved at 73.76%. In the case of people aged 15–24/15–30 this indicator was achieved at 74.75%, in the case of people aged 50–64 at 63.61%, in the case of people with disabilities at 58.06%, in the case of the long-term unemployed at 67.03%, and in the case of persons not eligible for any of the above-mentioned target groups, at 88.81%.³⁵

In Sub-activity 6.1.1, the final settlement of the employment efficiency indicator was made in the first quarter of 2016. Out of 32 projects in which the employment efficiency indicator was monitored, 698 out of 1,726 people who completed participation in these projects found employment. Employment efficiency was achieved at the following level: total 40.44%, including people aged 15–24/15–30 years — 44.15%, people aged 50–64 years — 37.81%, disabled people — 37.19%,

³⁴ Dolnośląski Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy, *Korekta sprawozdania z realizacji Działania w ramach Programu Operacyjnego Kapitał Ludzki 2007–2013*, Wrocław 2016, p. 5.

³⁵ Ibidem, p. 8.

long-term unemployed — 40.73% and persons not eligible for any of the above target groups – 45.45%.³⁶

Finally, in 31 out of 32 projects, employment efficiency was achieved at a satisfactory level, where in most of these projects it exceeded the ceiling specified in the access criterion.

The state presented above confirms the evaluation study entitled “Assessment of the effectiveness, quality and sustainability of ESF interventions in Lower Silesia in terms of employment effectiveness of Priority VI, VII and VIII projects (Action 8.1) of HC OP, in the context of improving the socio-economic situation and increasing the region’s competitiveness” (report from August 2014), which shows that the highest value of the employment efficiency indicator was achieved in Priority VI, with PUP system projects implemented under Sub-activity 6.1.3 contributing to this in a special way. The factor was largely the experience of PUP employees and the institution itself in working with target groups. The indicator reached the relatively lowest values in the case of disabled people, especially women, and in the age group of 50–64. The index assumed the highest values in groups not eligible for any of the target groups.³⁷

In Sub-activity 6.1.1, projects involving the organization of workshops and training in active job search techniques and vocational activation programs, including primarily training leading to increasing, supplementing or changing professional qualifications, enjoyed the greatest interest of the Project Initiators. Less interest from Project promoters concerned projects focused on: training and consulting support of employees who obtained employment under the project; supporting initiatives to improve geographical mobility and the development and dissemination of information on job offers; opportunities to participate in training and internships, as well as other offered services and instruments of professional activation.

In Sub-activity 6.1.2, project supporters enjoyed the forms of support consisting in co-financing the employment of vocational counselors and job brokers as well as co-financing training and post-graduate studies leading to increasing the competence and quality of services of Poviats Labor Offices. Labor market-oriented research projects were relatively least implemented, as research projects were mainly implemented in system projects.

In Activity 6.2, projects that received funding assumed the comprehensiveness of all available forms of support. The introduced access criteria guaranteed the implementation of projects by entities with experience in conducting business in the substantive area covered by the project. In addition, the requirement to verify the predisposition to independently set up and conduct business activity of project participants was introduced. The preferred target groups were people aged 15–24,

³⁶ Ibidem.

³⁷ Ibidem.

above 45 years of age, women and people with disabilities. In order to promote entrepreneurship among people with disabilities, separate calls for projects targeted only at this target group were conducted as part of competitions.

In Activity 6.3, project promoters were interested in projects focused on activation measures in the context of improving the employability of rural residents. Project promoters were not interested in the type of operation, which was the development of dialog, public-social partnership and cooperation for the development of human resources at the local level, but despite this, the indicator “Number of projects supporting the development of local initiatives” was carried out at a higher level than assumed.

Under the allocation of Sub-activity 6.1.1 and Activity 6.2, 7 innovative projects were implemented, including 1 with a transnational component and 8 transnational projects, including 4 with a transnational component. As a result of activities carried out in innovative projects, new effective methods and tools for social and professional activation were developed, and solutions taking into account the cooperation of labor market entities were developed. The projects developed specific final products along with a strategy for their implementation as well as dissemination and inclusion in the main currents of employment policy. Innovative projects were implemented with the involvement in the process of creating innovative solutions of target groups, the so-called empowerment.

Available data show that in Activity 6.1 women constituted the vast majority of project participants. Almost 63% of women started participating in Activity 6.1 projects and over 63% completed their participation. Also from the evaluation study entitled “Assessment of the accuracy of selection and effectiveness of vocational activation programs implemented under Sub-activity 6.1.1 of the HC OP in relation to the professional situation of the unemployed in the Lower Silesian Voivodeship”, showed that in Sub-activity 6.1.1 the participation of women in the forms of support offered was dominant. In the training support in Sub-activity 6.1.1, the predominant participants were women, which was also confirmed by the evaluation study entitled “Assessment of training implemented in the Lower Silesian Voivodeship as part of projects for Sub-activity 6.1.1, 7.2.1, 8.1.1, 8.1.2 OP HC in the context of impact on the professional situation of their participants”.

Activity 6.2, based on the number of people who started participating in projects, noticed a significant advantage of women in the total number of project participants, i.e. more than 62% of participants were women. In contrast, among the participants who completed their participation in the projects, almost 65% were women. The most numerous group by status were inactive people (over 51%), with a significant majority of women. The next group due to status were employed (almost 28%), where women also dominated. In the case of the unemployed constituting over 21% of the total, women also slightly prevailed. The group of people with disabilities accounted for almost 16% of the total number of project participants,

while people from rural areas accounted for less than 34% of the total number of participants. People aged 55–64 account for almost 8% of participants, where the level of women and men was practically even. In the case of people aged 15–24 representing almost 20% of project participants, the dominance of women was observed.

In Activity 6.3, based on the number of people who started and finished participating in projects, it is stated that the participants in the projects were mostly women, i.e., about 69% of women started and ended their participation in projects. The most numerous group due to the status of people on the labor market were the unemployed (almost 70%) with a predominance of women, followed by the inactive (over 17%) with a significant majority of women and then employed (almost 13%) also with a significant majority of women. The group of people with disabilities accounted for over 2% of the total number of project participants. Participants are mainly people from rural areas (almost 88%), where women predominated.³⁸

The Project entitled “European labor market forum of Lower Silesia” — was carried out in the period from 1.05.2011 to 30.06.2013. The main objective of the project was to develop a model of public and social action for active labor market policy in the Lower Silesian Voivodeship in cooperation with a German partner. The project involved the exchange of experiences with a German partner through the organization of an international public-social forum and creating a base of good practices for Lower Silesia. It was of an informative nature and entities operating for the Development of Human Resources and entities operating for public-social partnership at the regional and local level were invited to participate in creating the model.³⁹

The project created a base of good practices and organized consultative meetings for the creation of public-social partnerships. Other activities were dissemination, promotion and information activities. The Dolnośląskie Voivodeship also fulfilled priority number 8: Regional Economy Personnel — Activity 8.1. Development of employees and enterprises in the region.

The product indicator “the number of companies that received support in the field of training projects” amounted to 15,747 enterprises. Another product indicator was “the number of working adults who have completed their participation in training projects, including the number of people over the age of 50”. It was achieved by 70,745 people who completed participation in training projects, including 10,057 people over 50 years of age.

The next indicator was “the number of low-skilled employees who have completed their projects”. During the programming period, 25,504 people with low qualifications were supported.⁴⁰

³⁸ Ibidem, pp. 11–12.

³⁹ Ibidem, p. 16.

⁴⁰ Dolnośląski Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy, *Sprawozdanie z realizacji Działania w ramach Programu Operacyjnego Kapitał Ludzki 2007–2013*, Wrocław 2016, p. 2.

Table 1. Information on the implementation of the employment efficiency indicator under Activity 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 in the 2007–2013 programming period

| No | Target group | Number of people who have finished participating in the Measure | | | Number of people who found work or continue to be employed | | | Achieved value of the employment efficiency indicator under the Measure (%) | | |
|--|--|---|--------|-----------|--|--------|-----------|---|------------------|------------------|
| | | W | M | In all | W | M | In all | W | M | In all |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 = 3 + 4 | 6 | 7 | 8 = 6 + 7 | 9 = (6/3) * 100 | 10 = (7/4) * 100 | 11 = (8/5) * 100 |
| PRIORITY VI | | | | | | | | | | |
| Activity 6.1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | Total employment efficiency indicator | 21,231 | 16,185 | 37,416 | 15,252 | 12,346 | 27,598 | 71.84 | 76.28 | 73.76 |
| 2 | including persons not eligible for any of the following target groups (points 3–6) | 3,093 | 2,868 | 5,961 | 2,734 | 2,560 | 5,294 | 88.39 | 89.26 | 88.81 |
| 3 | including persons aged 15–24/15–30 years** | 10,719 | 7,490 | 18,209 | 7,886 | 5,726 | 13,612 | 73.57 | 76.45 | 74.75 |
| 4 | including people aged 50–64 | 4,064 | 3,897 | 7,961 | 2,479 | 2,585 | 5,064 | 61.00 | 66.33 | 63.61 |
| 5 | including disabled people | 2,191 | 1,409 | 3,600 | 1,239 | 851 | 2,090 | 56.55 | 60.40 | 58.06 |
| 6 | including the long-term unemployed | 8,111 | 5,678 | 13,789 | 5,301 | 3,942 | 9,243 | 65.36 | 69.43 | 67.03 |
| Other employment efficiency indicators specified in the application for co-financing under the Priority/Activity | | | | | | | | | | |
| not applicable | not applicable | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |

* applies to activities including outplacement

** data in row 3 concerns people aged 15–24 and applies to projects for which the application for co-financing was submitted by the end of 2012, while data refer to people aged 15–30 and refers to projects for which the application for funding has been submitted from the beginning of 2013

Source: Lower Silesian Voivodeship Labor Office, *Annex 9 to the Report on the implementation of Activity 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 under the Human Capital Operational Program 2007–2013 (Załącznik nr 9. Informacja o wykonaniu wskaźnika efektywności zatrudnieniowej w ramach Działania 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, Sprawozdanie z realizacji Działania w ramach Programu Operacyjnego Kapitał Ludzki 2007–2013)*, Wrocław 2016.

From the beginning of the implementation of OP HC, 74,386 people started participating in projects implemented under Activity 8.1. Analyzing the participation in training broken down by the gender of the project's participants, it follows that women not only outnumbered men among the participants of implemented projects, but also had a higher level of education, because 61.34% of men participating in the training had primary, lower and lower secondary education, and upper secondary, while in the case of post-secondary and higher education, women prevailed, at 64.80%.⁴¹

Analyzing Activity 8.1 it should be emphasized that entrepreneurs and their employees were the largest target group directly benefiting from assistance, while the least numerous group were people employed in non-governmental organizations. A total of 16,091 enterprises joined the projects.

Strategic criteria in competition I / 8.1.1 / A / 12 promoted projects of the century in which the target group of the project is one of the groups, in this case women working in micro, small and medium enterprises.

In the case of innovative and transnational projects, only one contract for this type was signed in Activity 8.1 HC OP design. The innovative project with the transnational component "PI-PWP CSR as a path to innovation" assumed quality improvement activities in the field of implementing CSR strategies among 100 Lower Silesian MSMEs by developing, testing, dissemination and inclusion in the policy of the CSR business model based on socially responsible relations with stakeholders and employees strengthening the innovativeness of enterprises. The project was implemented by Agency Innovation Development S.A. From 1.02.2012 to 31.01.2015 in a national partnership with the Lower Silesian Association of Employers and the Legnicki Powiat and in a transnational partnership with GoodBrand from the United Kingdom.⁴²

In January 2015, the final product was transferred to the National Supporting Institution "ARINOVA CSR LEADER THINKING business model" with the required attachments. The beneficiary achieved all the results and products assumed in the grant application that were 100% achieved.

In the years 2014–2020 in The Lower Silesian Voivodeship is realized The Regional Operational Program for Dolnośląskie Voivodeship 2014–2020. On the labor market is focused *The Priority Axis 8 Labor market*, which use support from the European Social Fund.

⁴¹ Ibidem, p. 11.

⁴² Ibidem, p. 14.

Table 2. Information on the implementation of the employment efficiency indicator under Activity 8.1 in the 2007–2013 programming period

| No W | Target group M In all | Number of people who have finished participating in the Measure | | | Number of people who found work or continue to be employed | | | Achieved value of the employ- ment efficiency indicator under the Measure (%) | | |
|---------------|---|--|-----|--------------|---|-----|--------------|---|---------------------|------------------------|
| | | W | M | In all | W | M | In all | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 = 3 + 4 | 6 | 7 | 8 = 6 + 7 | 9 = (6/3) * 100 | 10 = (7/4) * 100 | 11 = (8/5) * 100 |
| PRIORITY VIII | | | | | | | | | | |
| Activity 8.1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | Employment effectiveness indicator* | 927 | 567 | 1,494 | 563 | 351 | 914 | 60.73 | 61.90 | 61.18 |

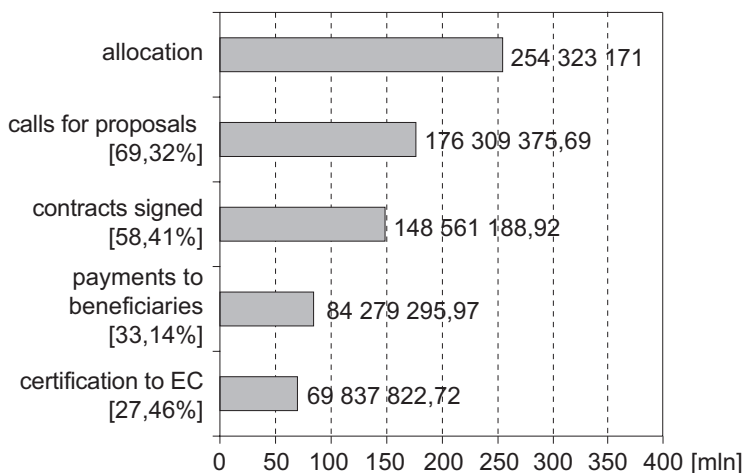
* applies to activities including outplacement

** data in row 3 concerns people aged 15–24 and applies to projects for which the application for co-financing was submitted by the end of 2012, while data refer to people aged 15–30 and refers to projects for which the application for funding has been submitted from the beginning of 2013

Source: Lower Silesian Voivodeship Labor Office, *Annex 9 to the Report on the implementation of Measure 8.1 under the Operational Program Human Capital 2007–2013 (Załącznik nr 9. Informacja o wykonaniu wskaźnika efektywności zatrudnieniowej w ramach Działania 8.1, Sprawozdanie z realizacji Działania w ramach Programu Operacyjnego Kapitał Ludzki 2007–2013)*, Wrocław 2016.

The main objective of Priority Axis 8 is to increase employment and employee mobility. Within Priority Axis 8, projects implemented by Poviats Labor Offices were directed to people outside the labor market and were aimed at providing access to employment. What's more, support for mobility and professional activation was targeted at people over 30 years of age. Beneficiaries also carried out career counseling projects, training projects, as well as business development and bridging support. In addition, to increase the activation of parents on the labor market, the creation of places of care for children up to 3 years of age was financed, or covered the costs of caring for children and dependent persons. From the European Social Fund consulting and training projects addressed to enterprises and employees were implemented, in order to improve the adaptation skills of employees to changes taking place in the economy. Another type of implemented project aimed at limiting the early exit from the labor market and extending professional activity were projects in the scope of implementation of preventive health programs.⁴³

⁴³ *Annual Implementation Report of the Regional Operational Programme for the Dolnośląskie Voivodeship 2014–2020. Reporting year 2018. Citizens' Summary*, Wrocław 2019, p. 25, <http://>



Graph. 2 Implementation of Priority Axis 8 (EUR)

Source: *Annual Implementation Report of Regional Operational Program for the Dolnośląskie Voivodeship 2014–2020. Reporting year 2018. Citizens' Summary*, Wrocław 2019, p. 25, <http://rpo.dolnyslask.pl/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/EN-Annex-II-Summary-AIR-2018-Dolnoslaskie-ROP-2014-2020-1.pdf> (accessed: 14.09.2019).

According to the Annual Implementation Report of the Regional Operational Program for the Dolnośląskie Voivodeship 2014–2020, the effects of project implementation are⁴⁴:

- 21,247 unemployed persons were supported, including 16,324 persons with low qualifications,
- 2,936 people received start-up subsidies, 2,686 jobs were created,
- 2,137 people with disabilities were supported, of whom 1,067 persons received work,
- qualifications and competences of 4,106 employees were raised,
- 30 months after receiving support, 56% of created micro-enterprises functioned,
- development services covered 1,664 micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises,
- in nurseries and toddler's clubs, 1,149 places were created for children up to 3 years old, thanks to which 86 people returned to the labor market, and 132 people found or sought work,
- health programs were prepared, in which 17,549 people applied for preventive examinations.

rpo.dolnyslask.pl/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/EN-Annex-II-Summary-AIR-2018-Dolnoslaskie-ROP-2014-2020-1.pdf (accessed: 14.09.2019).

⁴⁴ Ibidem, p. 25.

Conclusion and further scientific suggestions

After researching the available data on the labor market in Poland, especially on the Lower Silesian Voivodeship it can be concluded that the ESF instruments undoubtedly had an impact on the labor market in this area and it was a positive impact.

The ESF should promote a holistic approach involving all stakeholders to reduce gender segregation (vertical and horizontal), and change working procedures and culture.

One aspect that is still very poorly addressed in ESF intervention is the gender pay gap. While it is obviously explained partly by gender segregation, we know as well that it is also the result of discrimination. ESF interventions should address the gender pay gap.

Finally, the promotion of female entrepreneurship should be an objective in itself and support both opportunity-driven and necessity-driven enterprise. It should also support entrepreneurship at all stages and not just at the start of the activity.⁴⁵

Starting implementation of gender mainstreaming within the work of ESF Managing authorities: gender analysis of each call; develop capacity building and access to expertise; provide project promoters with instruments that support real learning and enable them to address gender in their projects (examples of processes and results).⁴⁶

More coordinated policies with regard to gender equality are needed within the whole ESF programming exercise.

Another important element is already building partnership and exchange of experience between entities involved in eliminating imperfections on the labor market.

The implementation of good practices is important for building effective support and implementation of effective projects.

It is also important to build good relations between institutions supervising the implementation of projects and their implementers.

The control procedures developed by the Member State should have two main features:

- effectively detect irregularities before making payments from public funds;
- do not hinder projects implemented by beneficiaries.

The latter feature is important for the effective implementation of ESF projects, especially on the labor market.

ESF support to EU countries and regions to help people into jobs is more important than ever in the light of the economic crisis. Retraining, upgrading skills and personalized counseling have helped many people be successful in the job market: the ESF reaches over 15 million participants a year.

⁴⁵ European Commission, *Cohesion Policy and Poland...*, p. 26.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 27.

The ESF invests in people. It is people who are undoubtedly Europe's richest attribute.

Projects co-financed from the European Social Fund on the Lower Silesian labor market support many people for example:

- 21,247 unemployed persons were supported, including 16,324 persons with low qualifications,
- 2,936 people received start-up subsidies, 2,686 jobs were created,
- qualifications and competences of 4,106 employees were raised etc.

It can be stated that the implementation of ESF projects in Lower Silesia in the area of the labor market contributes to improving the employability of mainly the unemployed and economically inactive, especially those who are in a special situation on the labor market (people aged 50 and over, women, people with disabilities, long-term unemployed, people with low qualifications).

In addition, the assumption of the implementation of ESF projects is:

- improving the professional situation of people employed under short-term contracts and working under civil-law contracts and the working poor;
- creating new jobs;
- increasing employment among people caring for children up to 3 years old.

Another element of the impact of ESF projects on the labor market is the improvement of the competitiveness of enterprises and entrepreneurs in the MSME sector.

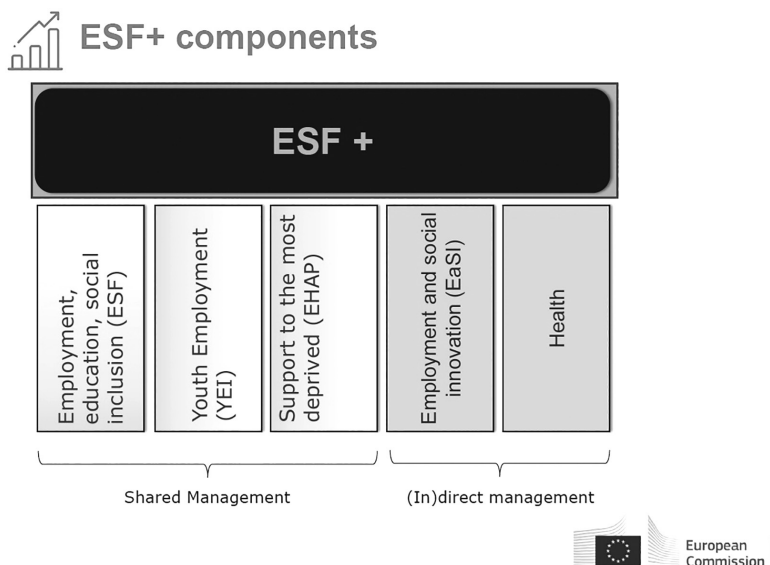
Another important aspect is the improvement of employees' adaptability to changes taking place in the economy as part of outplacement activities, improvement of access to health programs concerning diseases negatively affecting the labor market, dedicated to people at the age of professional activity, as well as the extension of professional activity on the labor market of people over 50 age.

Taking part in ESF projects many people find new jobs, get new skills or start and run their own companies. The level of unemployment falls down and many new tools on labourthe labor market were found.

Many good examples and good practices of implementing ESF projects on the labor market have been developed, which were characterized by long-term benefits for the labor market.

The European Social Fund (ESF) is to become ESF+ in 2021 through the merger of five different funds.

ESF + will have the following components:



Graph 3. ESF + COMPONENTS

Source: European Commission, *Dana Verbal, ESF+ support foreseen for the social economy and social enterprises*, Brussels 2019.

ESF + is the next step in programming in the EU's programs. The key objective of ESF+ is a shift toward performance, outputs, results and outcomes.⁴⁷

The ESF+ Regulation is the result of a merger of the existing European Social Fund (ESF), the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), the Fund for European Aid to the most Deprived (FEAD), the Employment and Social Innovation Program (EaSI) and the EU Health Program.⁴⁸

As outlined in the EPRS Global Trends 2035 report,⁴⁹ employment growth over the next decade will be driven by jobs requiring greater preparation through in-employment training and formal education.

Future challenges for the ESF in Poland and in the Lower Silesian Voivodeship are for example the integration of migrants, which in the Polish case is especially related to a large number of migrants from Ukraine (i.e., depending on sources, estimated as high as 2 million people). In this context a comprehensive migration policy needs to be developed.

⁴⁷ <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=67&langId=en&news> (accessed: 14.09.2019).

⁴⁸ European Commission, "ESF stakeholders give ESF+ a warm welcome", *ESF Transnationality News Newsletter* 2018, no 7, p. 4, <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=67&langId=en&news> (accessed: 14.09.2019).

⁴⁹ F. Levarlet, D. Hrelja, op. cit., p. 57.

Moreover, there should be increased flexibility of Operational Programs and these should be shortened to allow adaptation to an ever-changing social and political landscape.

A good idea would be to connect the various information sources and establish a database with relevant indicators for social results and issues within the administration at various levels.

What's more, good practices should be spread among Member States. Thanks to this, cooperation and participation among the stakeholders involved in ESF programming and implementation at all levels of government could be increased and improve.

To sum up, it can be stated that the ESF on the labor market is an effective tool, which improves the labor market in Poland and in the Lower Silesian Voivodeship. Focusing on current problems they could be easily solved thanks to ESF programming.

It reaches the most needy and provides effective solutions. It allows faster and more effective minimization of labor market problems and leaving long-term benefits.

The conclusions drawn from the analysis may become the basis and starting point for a broader analysis that would allow the use of appropriate solutions controlling the process of implementing EU assistance in the coming programming period, i.e. after 2020.

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