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IMPACT
ASSESSMENT



Impact assessment

of the actions carried out by Cáritas Española, Cruz Roja Española, Fundación ONCE and Fundación Secretariado Gitano within the framework of the ESF 2016-2023

25
years

Twenty-five years working with the European Social Fund for Equality in Employment in Spain:

Paths of inclusion

Executive Summary.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Evaluation

What is the programme implemented by the organisations within the framework of the European Social Fund?

This report **evaluates the results and impact of the actions carried out by Cáritas Española (Confederation of the social and charitable action organisations of the Catholic Church in Spain), Cruz Roja Española (Spanish Red Cross), Fundación ONCE (ONCE Foundation for Cooperation and Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities) and Fundación Secretariado Gitano** (intercultural social non-profit organisation providing services for the development of the Roma community in Spain and in Europe - FSG) within the framework of the Operational Programme for Social Inclusion and Social Economy (**POISES**) **2014–2020**, co-funded by the European Social Fund (ESF)¹. It also analyses the relevance of actions in the 2021-27 period of the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and in the future.

The main objective of the programme is to improve employment opportunities for people

in vulnerable situations and thereby contribute to building more egalitarian societies and a more inclusive labour market. The actions are mainly aimed at people with disabilities, migrants, the Roma population, workers over the age of 45 and people with various vulnerability factors, including, among others, problems of homelessness or drug addiction.

which are currently being implemented through the Programme for Social Inclusion, Child Guarantee and the Fight against Poverty (2021-2027). The four organisations essentially share objectives and methodology of intervention based on individualised pathways, although they specialise in different vulnerable groups and adapt their actions accordingly.



The programme aims to activate, train and provide access to employment for the people who are the furthest removed from the labour market through individualised pathways that reduce disadvantages and connect them with companies.



Since 2000, the four organisations have supported more than 1.3 million people (1,322,523), helped almost half a million (468,996) find employment and trained 429,650 participants.

The actions began 25 years ago, within the framework of the Operational Programme to Combat Discrimination (POLCD), which ran for two programming periods, 2000-2006 and 2007-2013. They continued with the Operational Programme for Social Inclusion and the Social Economy (POISES 2014-2020) and the Operational Programme for Youth Employment (POEJ 2014-2020)

To achieve these results, more than one billion euro (€1,172,886,841) have been invested during these years, of which the ESF has contributed EUR 837 million (71%), the Spanish public administrations EUR 82 million (7%) and EUR 252 million (22%) from private organisations, mainly from the entities themselves that develop the programme.

¹ The terms “the programme”, “the programmes” “the actions” or “the intervention” are used interchangeably to refer to the operations carried out by the four organisations within the framework of POISES.

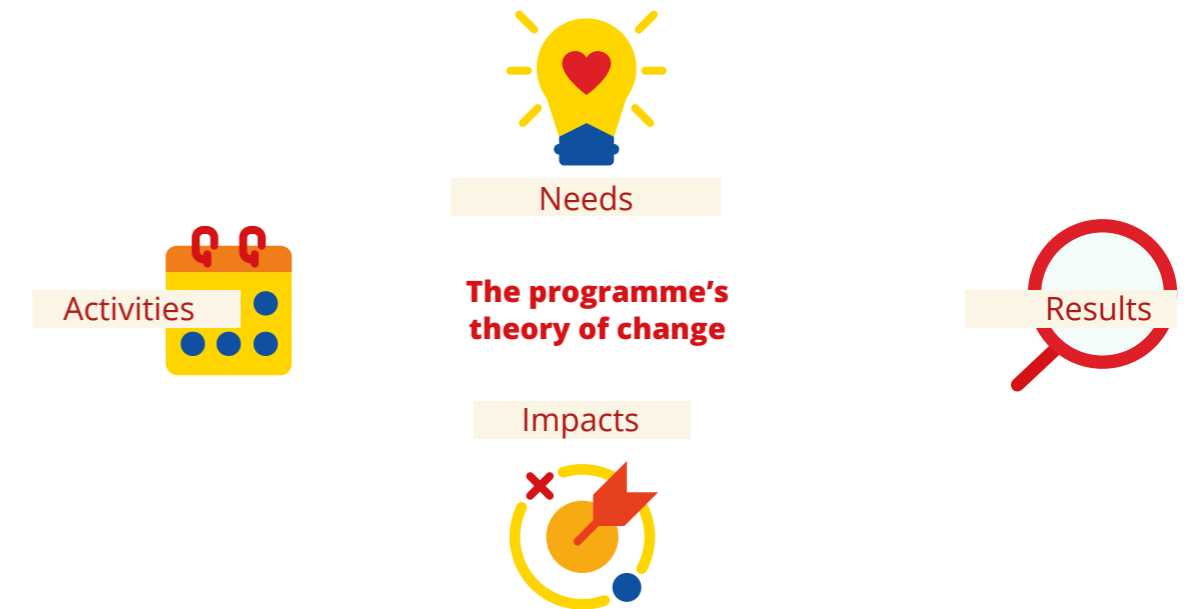
How have entities achieved the results described above?

The programme's theory of change allows us to answer this question using cause-and-effect logic, explaining how, in a context of needs, organisations develop a series of activities or responses, leading to specific results in people and institutions, that in turn generate impacts on society.

INDICATOR	POLCD 2000-2006	POLCD 2007-2013	POISES and POEJ 2014-2020	TOTAL
Participants	350.719	369.869	601.935	1.322.523
People trained	122.628	171.701	135.321	429.650
Jobs achieved	136.298	113.787	218.911	468.996



Source: Compiled by the authors using data provided by the four social organisations. Note: Programme implementation periods are extended by two or three years, depending on whether the n+2 or n+3 rule applies.





Needs

People in vulnerable situations face multiple barriers to their social and labour market integration that have to do with the labour market itself (segmentation, precariousness, discrimination, demand for greater skills and so forth), educational deficits, poverty and social exclusion, and many also suffer discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, nationality, disability, and age. Public employment policies provide very limited responses to the needs of these groups.



Activities

To address these needs, **individualised social and labour integration pathways** are implemented, comprising a wide range of personalised activities ranging from recruitment, reception, guidance and support, adapted training, mediation, monitoring and other forms of social support. At the same time, close collaboration is developed with companies, identifying their human resources needs, forming partnerships, supporting accessibility and adaptation of jobs and carrying out employment awareness-raising and monitoring actions.



Results

The aim is to ensure that people know their rights, improve both their personal and professional skills and find decent employment. It also aims to make companies more inclusive spaces, offering jobs where people can develop their professional careers and, in turn, find the human resources they need for their sustainability. In addition, it seeks to strengthen public employment policies aimed at vulnerable groups through the specialisation of third sector entities in the activation of these groups.



Impact

This is expected to contribute to a more egalitarian and cohesive society, a more inclusive and productive labour market and more effective public policies, so that the programme adds value by responding to a social need while also generating an economic return.

What is the aim of the evaluation and how has it been carried out?

The activity developed by the four organisations within the framework of POISES, 2014-2020 (de facto 2016-2023) is evaluated, measuring results, cost-benefit analysis and return on investment.



Purpose

The evaluation includes the joint activity carried out by the four organisation within the framework of POISES, 2014-2020, implemented de facto between 2016 and 2023.



Objectives

The aim is to measure the results achieved by the participants, quantify the economic impact of the actions implemented, assess the satisfaction of the various stakeholders and the programme's contribution across different dimensions.



Methodology

A systemic perspective has been followed, viewing the programme not as the sum of isolated actions, but as part of an interacting ecosystem of policies, institutional actors and social dynamics.

Multiple methods and sources have been used, integrating literature reviews, official statistics, analysis of records from the databases of participants from the four organisations, surveys from administrations and companies and interviews with public administration officials, programme organisations, company representatives and vulnerable individuals themselves.


A rigorous econometric analysis has been carried out to calculate the cost-benefit ratio and quantify the economic contribution and return on investment of the programme with a mixed approach, which combines a counterfactual design in which the propensity score matching method is applied.

Results

What has been the scope of the programme managed by these four organisations in the 2014-2020 period?



The programme has reached a total of

 448.830 people

 55% of whom are women

supporting vulnerable people throughout Spain, including in rural areas.

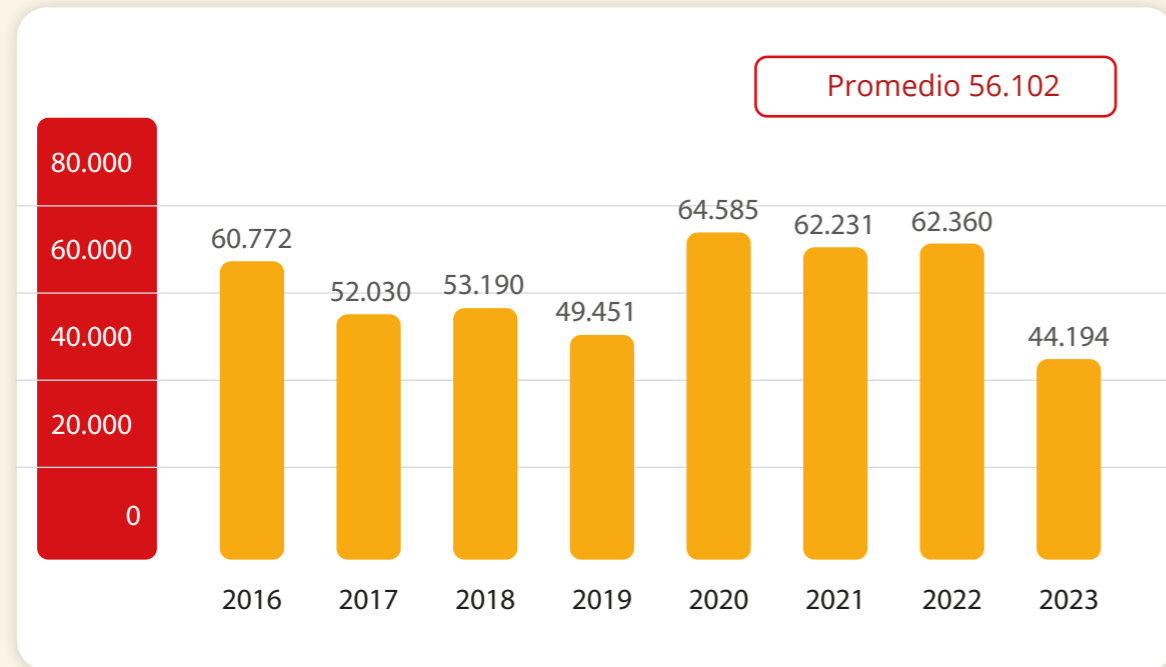


Between 2016 and 2023, **the programme reached a total of 448,830 participants, representing an average of 56,102 participations per year.**

It is noteworthy that during the period of the pandemic, the number of participants did not decrease but rather increased. These individuals have participated 603,616 times, representing an average of 1.34 participations per person (1.38 participations in the case of men compared to 1.32 in women)². Most of these people were unemployed (73%) or inactive (23%).

² The term "participations" refers to the total number of times a person takes part in programme activities. The same person can participate in multiple activities or events within the programme, which is recorded as multiple participations for the purposes of the data. It is important not to confuse the term "participations" with that of "support", since a person can receive different types of support during the course of their participation, for example, guidance, training and job placement.

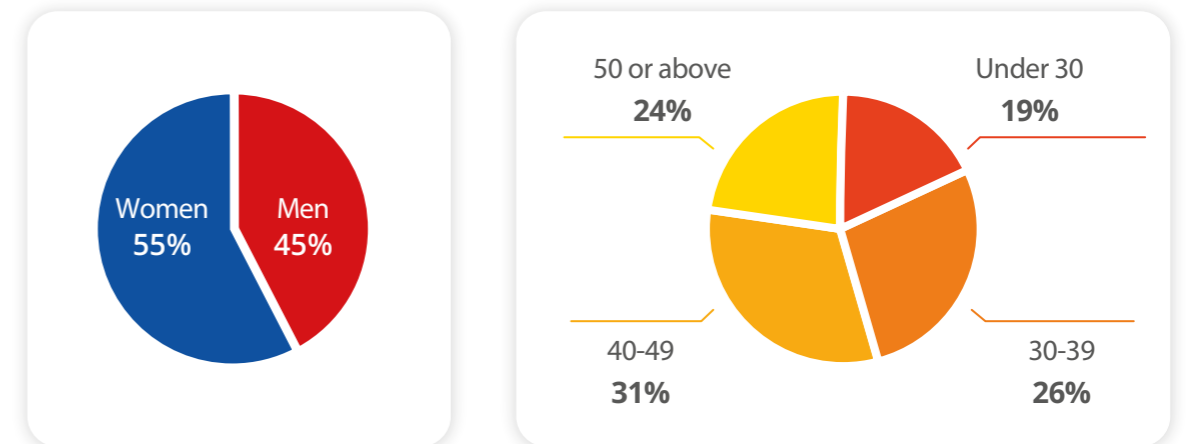
Number of participants per year, 2016 - 2023



Source: Compiled by the authors using data provided by the four social organisations.

The interventions have demonstrated their ability to adapt to the barriers and difficulties faced by the most vulnerable groups in their social and labour market integration. By sex, **the participation of women is ten points higher than that of men, representing 55% compared to 45%**, a relevant finding considering the intersection of gender and belonging to specific groups, where women face more intense obstacles and multiple forms of discrimination. As for **age, the distribution of participants is fairly balanced**, although there is a higher concentration (57.1%) in the central range of working life (30 to 49 years old).

Participants by sex and age, 2016-2023



Source: Compiled by the authors using data provided by the four social organisations.

By group, there is a high proportion of people with **disabilities** (44.1%) and of **migrant** (30.4%) or Roma (7.6%) origin, with health issues, victims of gender-based violence or experiencing homelessness (30.7%). 76.6% of the people have **low educational levels**, i.e. secondary or lower education, and 38.6% have not completed compulsory education. In short, the profile of participants is **highly vulnerable, people who, in general, are far removed from both the labour market and social protection systems.**

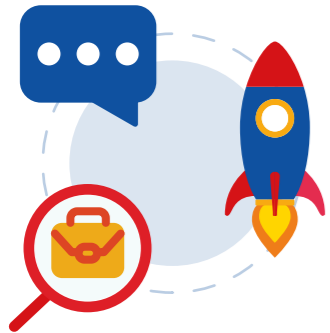


From a gender point of view, women are more likely to be found in certain vulnerable group profiles, such as participants living in single-adult households with dependent children (87.0% women), participants living in jobless households with dependent children (64.6% women) or immigrants, participants of foreign origin, minorities (including marginalised communities such as the Roma), with 63.9% women. On the contrary, there is a lower participation of women among persons with disabilities (43.3% women) and in rural areas (43.6% women).

Thanks to the organisations' regional presence, the interventions have successfully reached the whole country, operating in all 17 autonomous communities and the two autonomous cities with a significant presence in less developed regions. The percentage of participants located in rural areas reached 9.3%. While this figure is lower than the proportion of rural areas in total employment in Spain (13.8% on average for the period 2016-2023), it represents a significant achievement, considering the geographical dispersion and access difficulties inherent in rural areas.

The evaluation concludes that this is a unique and exceptional programme both in Spain and Europe. No other programmes of comparable size managed by social initiative organisations have been found that target vulnerable groups, reach such a large number of people and operate with similar continuity and coverage.

What results has the programme achieved for individuals?



More than half of the participants
(52.7%)
have achieved at least one result
in terms of activation, training or
integration. Participating in the
programme increases the
likelihood of finding employment
by 58%



Of the 448,839 people who have participated in the programme 236,670 (52.7%) have achieved at least one result in terms of activation, training or integration, a percentage that rises to 55.8% for women and falls to 49.0% for men.

Specifically, the programme has succeeded in **activating 41,847 participants**, who have gone from a situation of inactivity to seeking employment or training, thus managing to activate 37.8% of the total number of inactive people. In addition, the programme has succeeded to **place 145,947** people in jobs (33.8% of the total number of participants who were unemployed or inactive), and **train 99,316 participants to obtain a qualification**, as well as motivating 23,307 to continue training after their participation, representing 27.3% of the total number of people trained to obtain a qualification.

Key performance indicators for participants, 2016-2023.

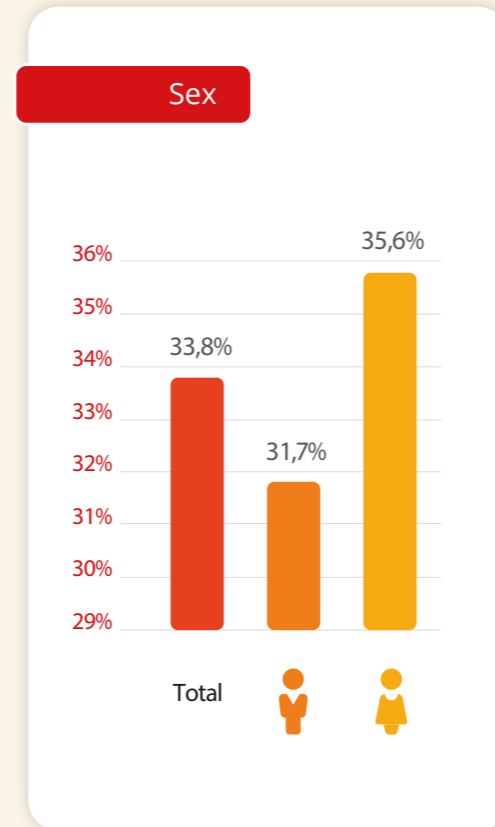
Results	Indicator	Value	About the target group	Target group	Target group description
Activation	CR01-Inactive participants engaged in job search after participation	41.847	37,8%	110.588	Inactive participants
Labour Market Integration	CR04-Participants (unemployed/inactive) who obtain employment, including self-employment, after participation	145.947	33,8%	431.176	Inactive or unemployed participants

Training	CR02-Participants who pursue education/training after participation	23.307	5,2%	448.839	Total participants
Training	CR03-Participants who obtain a qualification after participation	99.316	22,1%	448.839	Total participants
Total	Participants with at least one result	236.670	52,7%	448.839	Total participants

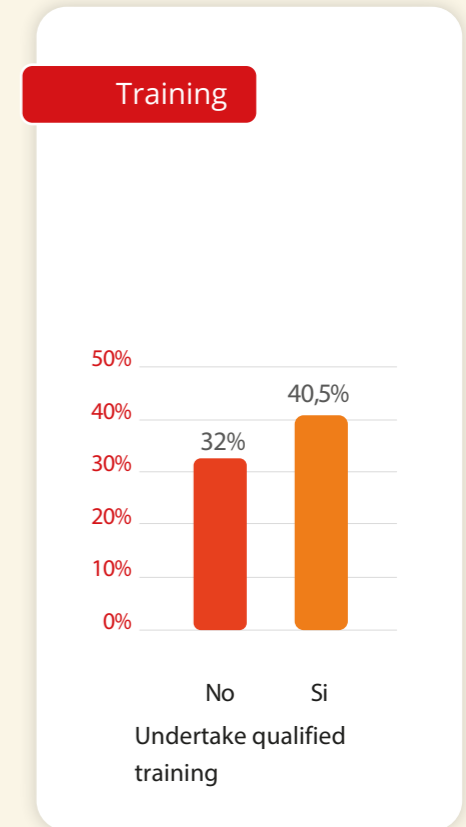
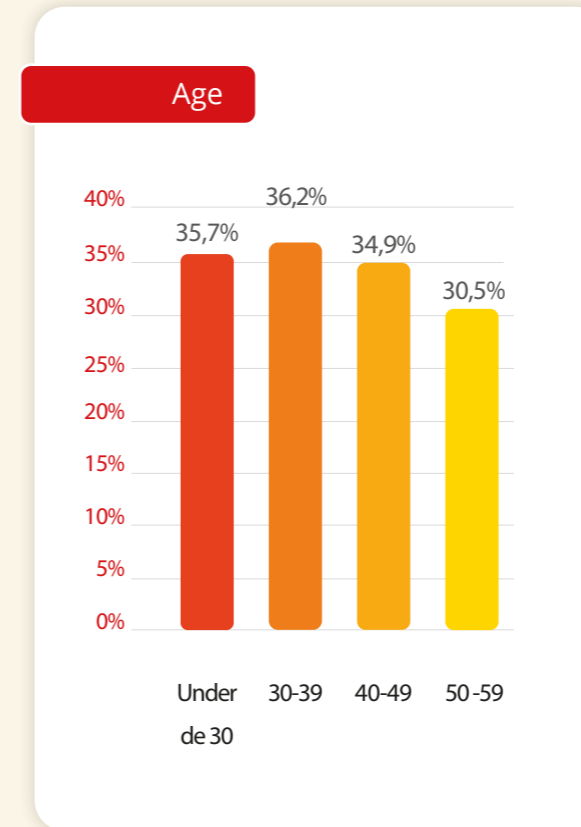
Source: Compiled by the authors using data provided by the four social organisations. Note: "after participation" should be understood as up to 28 days after the participant's departure date.

The programme shows greater effectiveness among women than men. The labour market integration rate, at 33.8%, reaches 35.6% among women and 31.7% among men. This result is especially significant considering that the national unemployment rate among women during the period in question was considerably higher than that of men (17.1% compared to 13.6%).

However, women experience a more precarious integration, with higher levels of temporary employment, meaning that labour integration six months after participation is almost identical between the sexes.



Employment enrolment rate by sex, age and whether qualified training has been completed



Source: Compiled by the authors using data provided by the four social organisations.

On the other hand, the programme has **a similar activation capacity for women as for men**: 37.7% of men and 38.0% of women who were initially inactive started looking for employment after participation. In contrast, **the percentage of women who pass a training course is higher** than that of men (27.7% compared to 22.1%), as is the percentage of women who pass certified training (21.8% for women compared to 13.8% for men). **Likewise, the effect of training on employment is greater among women** than among men. The employment rate among women who have completed qualified training is 42.1% compared to 37.9% among men who have completed this type of training.

There is a positive causal relationship between participation in the programme and job placement. Participating in the programme increases the probability of getting a job by 13.3 percentage points, representing **a 58% improvement over the counterfactual situation** (compared to the population not participating in the programme). The impact is **even greater for inactive people**, whose likelihood of accessing employment increases by 24.7 percentage points, equivalent to an improvement of 79.1%. In the case of unemployed people the increase reaches 4.9 percentage points, increasing the probability of finding employment by 23.5%.

Estimated effects of pathway programmes.

Participants	All	p-value Unemployed	p-value Inactive
Estimated effect (percentage points)	0.133 ***	0.049 ***	0.247 ***
p-value	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.036)
Estimated impact (%)	58.3	23.5	79.1

Source: Econometric analysis based on the matching technique using microdata from the Spanish Labour Force Survey (EPA) to obtain a suitable control group and ensure a fair comparison. This involved matching groups of workers (those who received intervention) with the control group (those who did not receive intervention) based on age, sex, province of residence, level of education, recipient or not of social benefits, and completion of job training. Standard errors are shown in brackets below the corresponding coefficient. The symbols ***, **, * indicate that the estimated coefficient is statistically significant at 1%, 5% and 10% significance, respectively. The table reports the estimated average effect both as a percentage point and as a percentage. Statistical significance is indicated only in the first instance for reasons of efficiency.



The programme achieves very positive results in activation, training and employment, prepares people for the future and has a transformative impact on changing mindsets at an individual and collective level.

The evaluation concludes that the programme achieves very positive results in terms of activation, training and employment, which are sustained over time. Two out of three inactive people start looking for work or manage to find employment after participating in the programme. In fact, almost two thirds (64.4%) of the companies surveyed indicate that one of the main contributions of the programme is its ability to foster positive attitudes towards work.

The integration rate (33.8% participants) is high, considering the profile of vulnerability and low employability, and is higher in women (4pp); the programme has a positive causal effect on the probability of getting a job compared to the unemployed population in general, increasing this probability by 13.3 percentage points.

In addition, 113,181 people improve their training with almost 100,000 individuals gaining a qualification, improving technical and transversal skills.

Six months after having completed the programme, 24.2% of participants who were unemployed or inactive continue to work. This was similar for both men and women, which shows that women have higher but less stable employment rates than men. Fifty-nine per cent of those who had found employment within six months of finishing the programme continue to work, a figure that rises to 65% for men and falls to 55% for women. However, some participants who initially struggled to find employment after participating on the programme did manage to do so after six months.

The programme has a lasting impact not only on skills acquisition but also on the family environment and a change in mindsets and expectations. Labour market integration represents a change for both the individuals themselves and for their environment, improving the living conditions of the family unit and enabling individuals to play an active and productive role in society. This effect on the family unit is particularly relevant given the high risk of poverty or social exclusion rate among children (under 18 years of age) which stands at 34.6%, well above the average of the population as a whole (25.8%). Furthermore, it has a transformative effect on changing mindsets at both an individual and collective level, boosting self-esteem and personal expectations and improving social perception. This contributes to overcoming prejudices and stereotypes, thereby reducing the need for social support and benefits.

The characteristics of the labour market context reduce the quality of employment achieved. The jobs found have often been temporary and low-skilled, reflecting the vulnerability of the participants and the precarious nature of the labour market.

86.1% of the job placements have been through temporary contracts and two-thirds through contracts not lasting more than three months, although this situation has tended to improve in recent years with the changes to the employment rights act. The most common occupations are concentrated in the service sector, especially in low-skilled positions and basic tasks, most notably cleaning staff (18.6%), hospitality jobs (such as waiters/waitresses, kitchen staff and fast-food preparation workers) (10.2%), and sales teams in stores and warehouses, and shelf stockers (7.6%).

These results, together with the growing demand from businesses for more qualified profiles, highlight the **need to strengthen the training aspect of the programme in the future.** In fact, participants who complete a qualifying training course increase their enrolment rate to 40.5%, compared with the enrolment rate of 32% for those who do not take such training.

What economic return does the programme generate?



The programme generates an economic return equivalent to three times the investment. According to the most conservative calculation, for every euro invested there is a return of 2.9 euro, meaning that the economic benefits generated, for people who find employment and society as a whole, far exceed the costs incurred.

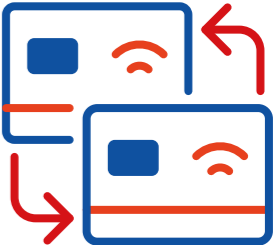
The average cost per person is low. The total investment of the programme in the period assessed was EUR 366.3 million, representing an average of €898 per person, a figure that is remarkably low compared to that reported by other evaluations³, and given the high vulnerability profile of the participants and the intensity of the pathways.

Even in the most conservative scenario, the economic return is highly positive. Considering all the costs of the programme, both direct and indirect, the private return for the participants, derived from receiving a salary, is between €2.12 and €2.93 for every euro invested, depending on the reference salary level used (10th or 25th percentile of the salary distribution adjusted for characteristics). When social benefits are incorporated (that is, savings in social benefits, increased revenue from contributions, personal income tax and VAT), the total social return ranges between €2.90 and €4.02 per euro invested. All of this within the recommended three-year time frame.

³ Administrative Unit of the European Social Fund (UAFSE)(2018) II Evaluation of the Youth Employment Initiative. (available in Spanish).

Return per euro invested by salary distribution percentile (three-year timeframe).

Salary distribution percentile	Private Return (€)	Social Return (€)
10th Percentile	2,12	2,90
25th Percentile	2,93	4,02



The evaluation demonstrates conclusively that the programme is cost-effective and generates a positive return for all financiers. It is especially beneficial for the Spanish public administrations responsible for the social and labour market integration of these groups:



- For every euro contributed by the ESF, there is a return of more than four euro (4.1). That is, ESF funding acts like seed capital and the economic return quadruples.



- For every euro invested in the programme by all European and national public administrations, there is a return of almost 4 euro (3.71), that is, it is public money well spent because it is a good investment.



- The return is particularly beneficial for the Spanish public administrations that co-finance the programme, as, for each euro they invest, they get a return of 38 euro, given that their financial contribution to the programme is very low (7.6%).



- Private organisations also make an efficient investment of their resources in this programme as for every euro they invest, they contribute to a return of more than 13 euro (13.26).

How have these results been achieved?



The keys to the programme's success lie in the organisations' expert knowledge, comprehensive support, the empowerment of individuals and alignment with the needs of the labour market.



The keys to the programme's success in terms of its reaching different areas and benefiting a large number of people are: a regional and proximity-based approach thanks to the local presence of organisations, continuity of actions, specialisation, a person-centred approach, comprehensive support, trust-building, flexibility, proactivity, adaptation and continuous improvement.

The evaluation confirms that the effectiveness of the results reflects the approach of the interventions. The four organisations apply a model of **personalised attention** in which individuals take the lead in their own process of change. This is supported by strong emotional support, closeness and empathy, essential elements for restoring self-esteem and generating

motivation. In addition, the organisations provide **comprehensive support** to individuals and their families, addressing problems that go beyond job placement. In fact, this support continues even after employment, with the aim of promoting job stability. The support is provided by **staff who specialise** in the challenges faced by the different groups, including people from the groups being supported. This allows them to understand the individuals concerned, their circumstances and their environment and offer adequate guidance that also creates a bond of trust. Research, awareness-raising and mediation work with **companies** are essential for creating genuine employment opportunities and providing training tailored to market needs.

The implementation, experience and characteristics of the organisations are decisive in achieving results. Given its particularities, this is an intervention model that is difficult for public administrations to carry out. The effectiveness of the intervention model, the personalised approach and the comprehensive nature of support explain the high satisfaction expressed by the participants (8.9 points out of 10), companies (89% consider that the profiles of the candidates are appropriate to their needs and the same percentage (89%) would recommend this programme to other companies) and administrations (92.2% of public administrations rate the programme's performance as positive or very positive).

What effects has the programme had on the ecosystem formed by public administrations, companies and social organisations?

After 25 years, the programme has consolidated itself as an essential part of active employment policies in Spain, operating in a specialised way with close coordination and complementarity and providing innovative solutions.

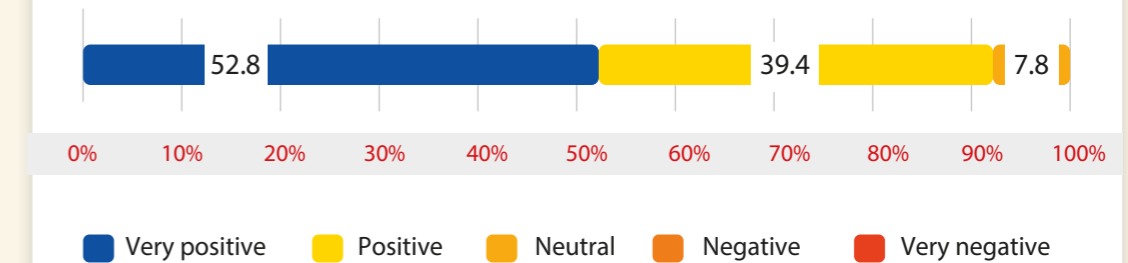
The organisations have played a central role in the implementation of active inclusion policies in Spain, supporting groups that face structural barriers to accessing employment in a context of high inequality and social exclusion. Their work has been instrumental in translating the European objectives of social cohesion into concrete and effective interventions on the ground.

92.2% of the public administrations surveyed rate the programme's performance as positive or very positive and 72.5% consider the programme complements and reinforces the services provided by the administration through actions that are better adapted to certain profiles. The actions carried out by the organisations are closely interrelated with the initiatives offered by the public administration: vulnerable individuals often receive support from both the organisations and the public services, with mechanisms for referral and mutual coordination in place.

The programme managed by social organisations has also contributed to the improvement of active employment policies, transferring innovative practices and improving their effectiveness and adaptation to vulnerable people. Half of the public administrations (48.7%) report that the programme has had a positive effect on adapting existing programmes to the needs of certain groups, and almost half of the administrations (43.5%) say that they have improved the integration pathways that already existed. In addition, the scale and continuity of the programme have favoured the creation and consolidation of alliances between administrations and entities, opening the door to their participation in the formulation of public policies aimed at vulnerable groups.

Assessment of the programme by public administrations.

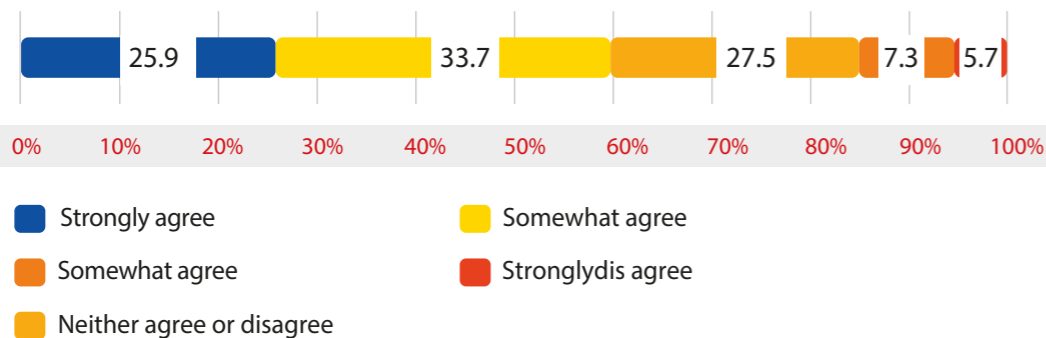
How would you rate the overall performance of the programme?



Source: Compiled by the authors based on a survey of public administrations.



Indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statement: The support offered by the programme is better suited to the vulnerable situations of its participants than that offered by the administration.



Source: Compiled by the authors based on a survey of public administrations.

Thanks to the programme, organisations have become a key player in the social and labour market integration of vulnerable groups, strengthening their capacity, implementation and specialisation.

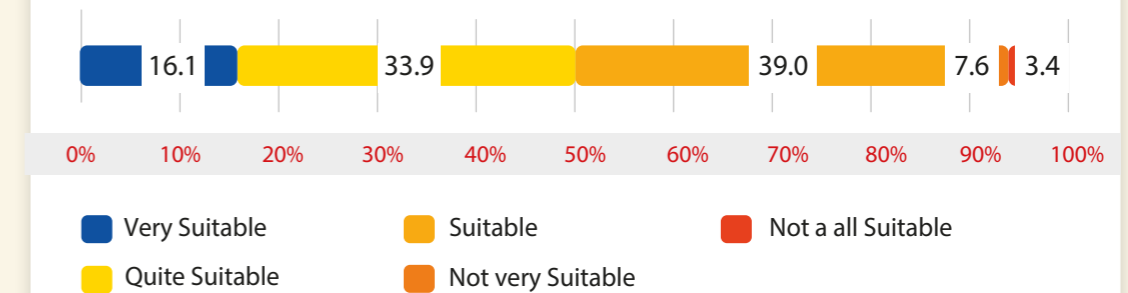
The programme has had a significant impact on the organisations themselves, increasing their size and territorial coverage, promoting specialisation in the social and labour integration of vulnerable groups and the management of European funds, as well as consolidating the culture of data-driven guidance and evaluation. It has also strengthened its networking culture and partnership with companies, administrations and other entities. Likewise, it has favoured constant adaptation and innovation, improving the ability to strengthen the soft skills of the participants, adapting the content of the training to the needs of the companies and the profiling of individuals in order to tailor the support more accurately. Technology is an ally in this process, contributing to social innovation by offering tools such as generative AI in the analysis and recording of data from organisations.

The programme has succeeded in developing a collaborative ecosystem in which more than 18,000 companies have participated throughout the period.

The programme has helped strengthen the production system, providing solutions to the companies' human resources needs and promoting a change in attitudes. The vast majority of companies (89%) consider that the profiles of the applications submitted are appropriate to their needs. In addition, a large proportion values the programme's ability to promote positive attitudes toward work, such as greater motivation, enthusiasm, responsibility or greater professionalism (64.4%), to provide knowledge and skills tailored to their needs, in particular, basic skills (61%) and to promote the integration of people into employment (60.2%) through the support and monitoring provided by the organisations once the individuals have started a job. All this has contributed to a change of attitude in the business environment by eliminating or reducing prejudices and stereotypes when hiring people belonging to vulnerable groups and improving the businesses' attitudes towards organisations, considering them as providers and allies of their human resources departments and positively valuing their support in the recruitment, selection and training of candidates.

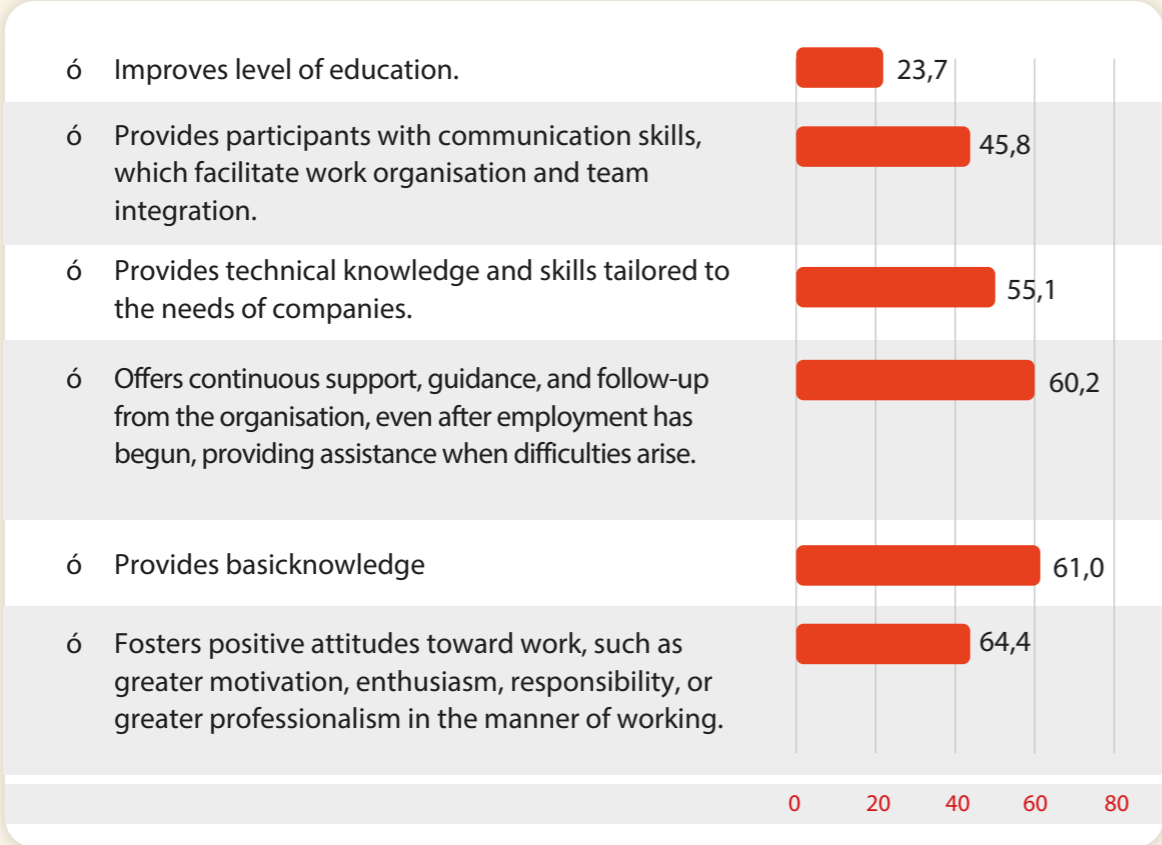
The programme has limitations when it comes to responding to new job offers from companies. Changes in the labour market mean that companies are demanding new profiles that organisations find difficult to respond to as we move toward a context in which, at the same time as more labour is needed, there is a demand for improved productivity and, consequently, better qualifications and specialisation among workers. In fact, 57.6% of the companies surveyed report having not found candidates with the appropriate profile to their needs to fill certain positions. All this poses new challenges for the programme in the future in terms of adjusting its response to companies and intensifying more specialised and intensive training actions.

Assessment of the suitability of participants' profiles by the companies.



Source: Questionnaire administered to companies.

Key contributions from the organisations to improve the employability of participants.



Source: Questionnaire administered to companies.

What value has the European Social Fund provided?



Continued funding from the ESF has enabled the development of a stable, large-scale programme focusing on the social and labour activation of vulnerable groups. Without the ESF contribution, the programme would not have been possible.

The ESF has played an essential role in the development of the programme. It has been key to providing **volume and continuity in funding**, allowing the programme to remain stable for 25 years with a large-scale national coverage, these being key elements for the success of the intervention.

The European Social Fund contributed a total of EUR 837 million between 2000 and 2023, financing 71% of the programme's cost (77% in the period evaluated) and its co-funding system acts as a driver for additional private and public resources. Furthermore, ESF priorities have made it easier to focus action on integrating vulnerable groups, developing personalised pathways, allowing flexibility in interventions and promoting social innovation. At the same time, the ESF has promoted a greater culture of evaluation and the development of management and administrative capacity in institutions.

Reciprocally, the programme has been strategic for the ESF in Spain, putting into practice the objectives and the active inclusion approach of POISES through labour market integration pathways while contributing 37% of the total POISES participation and 23.8% of the total participation in Thematic Objective 9 in Spain "Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and all forms discrimination" in all regional and national operational programmes.

The eligibility of certain ESF expenses limits the potential impact of the programme. The development of comprehensive actions often requires funding to cover equipment and infrastructure expenses that are not eligible under the ESF, but which are necessary, especially to carry out training that is better adapted to the demands of the labour market and which lead to higher quality jobs.

Is the programme relevant today and for the future?



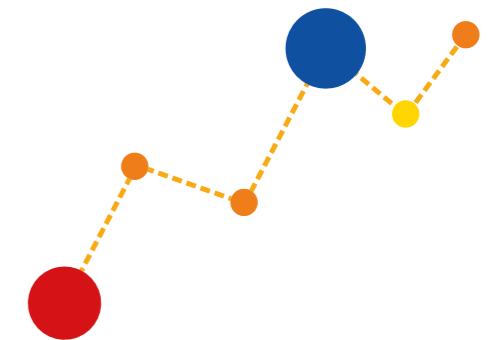
The programme's objectives remain relevant

25 years on, despite the achievements made. Poverty, inactivity and unemployment rates among vulnerable groups remain very high and the labour market demands more workers with greater specialisation

The programme is fully relevant to the general and specific objectives set out for the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) 2021-2027 and the European Pillar of Social Rights. At the national level, the programme is fully aligned with the objectives and approach of the Programme for Social Inclusion, Child Guarantee and Poverty Reduction for the period 2021-2027.

The programme is still clearly needed due to the national context, characterised by high rates of poverty and unemployment. The risk of poverty or social exclusion rate (Europe 2030 target) in Spain stands at 25.8% of the population, being one of the highest in Europe and well above the UE-27 average (21.0%); 53.4% for non-EU nationals, 91.4% for Roma⁴ and 31% for people with disabilities⁵. The unemployment rate in Spain remains high at 11.0%, almost double the UE-27 average (5.7%)⁶. In the case of women this rate is still 2.5 points higher than that of men, while the rate for the Roma population stands at 52%⁷. In the case of people with disabilities, unemployment stands at 19.7%⁸ with activity rates of 35.5% compared to the Spanish average of 78.5%⁹. The unemployment rate of the population with foreign nationality reached 16.5%, well above the rate among the Spanish population (10%)¹⁰.

In the future, relevance is expected to increase due to a growing labour market specialisation and a shortage of skilled labour. Technological changes and environmental transition will accelerate in the future, as will the **reduction of people of working age**, due to the aging of the population. It will therefore be necessary to strengthen the competitiveness of the production system and the sustainability of the pension system. To this end, it is critical to develop measures and programmes that are capable of increasing the activation of the working-age population and their qualifications. In this sense, the programme is aligned with the **Commission's 2025-2029 priorities**, which emphasise sustainable prosperity and competitiveness in Europe, support for individuals and the strengthening of our societies and our social model.



⁴ Source: Fundación Secretariado Gitano (2023). [Study on the impact of the minimum living income on the poverty situation of the Roma population in Spain \(available in Spanish\)](#). ⁵ Source: State Observatory on Disability (2023). ⁶ Data from 2024 for the population between 20 and 64 years old. Source: Eurostat. Labour Force Survey. ⁷ Source: Fundación Secretariado Gitano (2018). [Estudio Comparativo study on the situation of the Roma population in Spain in relation to employment and poverty 2018](#). ⁸ Source: Observatory on Disability and the Labour Market (ODISMET) (2023). ⁹ Source: National Statistics Institute (INE) (2023). Labour force survey. ¹⁰ Data from 2024 for the population between 20 and 64 years old. Source: Eurostat. Labour Force Survey.



Recommendations

The following is recommended:

1

The continuity of the programme as an essential part of active employment policies that responds to individuals and groups in vulnerable situations, reinforcing the essential characteristics that have led to its success.

The findings of the evaluation conclusively support this recommendation, as it is essential to maintain the programme given its effectiveness, economic return and integration into policies, as well as its suitability to current realities and the foreseeable context in the coming years. In order to ensure the continuity of the programme under the ideal conditions that have determined its success, **it is necessary that future programming preserves the identity of the ESF as an instrument geared towards investment in people, ensuring the clarity of its objectives and the specific allocation of its resources**, which requires, as a minimum, the following conditions to be met:

- A clear delineation of the scope, objectives and resources of the ESF, safeguarding its specific nature in terms of operation and management.
- The specification of the social objectives that will guide the ESF's actions in the future, particularly those focusing on vulnerable groups.
- Ensuring that ESF will continue to support transformative interventions that require long-term continuity and commitment to have an impact on policies, thereby maintaining their multi-annuality, comprehensiveness and scale.
- Preserve a governance system in which there is a managing authority that reinforces the role of social organisations as strategic allies in the implementation of inclusive policies.

2

Broaden the scope of the programme and deepen the comprehensiveness of its actions. Despite the current magnitude of the programme, participation is equivalent to 1.6% of the unemployed population. Given the effectiveness of the programme,

it is recommended to expand the number of beneficiaries and the regions in which it operates, paying particular attention to those who are less represented and to rural areas.

It is also recommended to strengthen the comprehensiveness of the actions in response to emerging needs and new forms of vulnerability, which condition the inclusion of groups at risk of exclusion and which, going beyond employment, are related to factors such as access to housing, the effects of digitalisation on employment, depopulation, new forms of discrimination, new forms of job insecurity in the context of digitalisation, loneliness or mental health, creating new forms of vulnerability.

3 **Ensure a high percentage of ESF co-funding and balance actions across all regions.** The evaluation concludes that without ESF funding, the programme would not have existed. The high rate of funding from the ESF

(77%) acts as a driving force for the programme to be developed in all regions, attracting public and private collaboration. If the percentage is reduced or substantially reduced, the risk is that regional coverage and reach will be lost to the detriment of the most vulnerable areas. On the other hand, poverty and social exclusion rates do not differ substantially between regions, therefore, the programme should aim for balanced investment across regions according to population size rather than GDP per capita, with similar financing rates to guarantee regional equity. In this regard, it is recommended that a single co-financing rate be maintained in the future, regardless of regional category, and that pre-financing rates be improved to help speed up investments.

4 **Commitment to an inclusive architecture of the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028–2034 as a condition for ensuring adequate funding for the programme in the future.** It is recommended that the new MFF introduces sufficient specific funding allocations for vulnerable groups, maintains the specific objectives of each fund within the National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs) and maintains the condition that at least 25% of the ESF is allocated to social inclusion. In addition, it is necessary to integrate specific indicators related to vulnerable groups, such as disability, the fight against poverty or the Roma population, into the Performance Framework, and to link the allocation of funds to the specific indicators of vulnerable groups.

5 **Strengthen the role of social organisations in the implementation of policies and programmes for the social and labour market integration of vulnerable groups.** One of the keys to the success of the programme has been its

implementation through specialised social organisations that have the capacity to adapt and offer personalised responses to the needs of individuals. In this regard, it is recommended that the next Multiannual Financial Framework reinforces the structured participation of social organisations throughout the cycle of these policies and programmes, in planning, monitoring, implementation and evaluation, which will contribute

to strengthening and improving the effectiveness of these policies.

6

Increase the scope and duration of training, and its suitability to the needs of the labour market.

The labour market requires greater competitiveness and must address digital and environmental transitions. Companies demand more skilled human resources, while offering sustainable and higher quality jobs. To this end, it is suggested to:

- Expand the coverage of the training programme in the future, increasing the percentage of participants who take training actions and the average duration of the training.
- Within the diversity of the training models offered by the organisations, focus on models based on certified training linked to employment that, where possible, provide income for participants, as well as greater likelihood of finding a job. These models are already being implemented by the organisations; however, current regulations governing practices generate regulatory uncertainty, which effectively hinders the use of this formula, making it urgent to provide an adequate regulatory solution.
- Align the programme with the challenges of the labour market over the next decade in order to increase its contribution to achieving

the objectives of the environmental and digital transition and offset the effect of demographic change on vacancies that are occurring in many sectors due to the need for generational replacement. Some studies estimate that the working-age population will decline by 1.7 million people over the next decade.

7

Fund costs of equipment, infrastructure and resources necessary for training.

The necessary boost in training and specialisation required by the labour market implies increasing the average cost per participant and having adequate equipment and facilities to provide quality training that are currently not eligible under the ESF. This, therefore, requires that European funds be used to guarantee the necessary financing to develop these training programmes with quality and in line with the growing specialisation demanded by the labour market.

8

Increase the amount of funding for the programme by the Spanish administrations, given that it currently only represents 7%.

The evaluation notes the essential role that these programmes play in active employment policies, with their implementation throughout the national territory. Therefore, a more determined commitment by the Spanish administrations to the financing of the programme by increasing its economic contribution is necessary to guarantee its sustainability, scale-up and full integration into public policies. In fact, the total annual cost of the programme is low and does not exceed 1.5% of the public budget for active employment policies.

9

Improve partnerships with companies in order to increase the scale of the programme and tailor training to the new needs of the labour market.

This step requires greater cooperation with business groups at the regional and sectoral level, creating more strategic and larger-scale alliances that also facilitate the definition of needs, skills and the design of joint training. This requires more active involvement on the part of businesses, which must translate into greater participation and commitment both in terms of collaboration with these initiatives and their financing.

10

Continue to promote innovation and transfer learning to public administrations and social organisations.

The programme has carried out continuous improvement work and methodological innovations, tools, and so forth, which make a valuable contribution to employment policies. These innovations must continue to be promoted and transferred more systematically to public employment services, social services, third sector organisations and other actors.