The European Social Fund Plus in Spain

An analysis of its economic, social and territorial impact

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Executive summary

The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) is a strategic investment for Spain. It addresses priority social needs, targets vulnerable groups and delivers strong outcomes in employment, qualifications and social inclusion. The estimated boost to economic activity also generates public revenue exceeding Spain's national co-financing. The report's evidence supports preserving ESF+ funding and safeguards for social allocations in the context of the European Commission's proposed reform for 2028–2034.

1. Investment aligned with Spain's and the EU's social priorities.

ESF+ interventions address the main challenges for Spain identified in the EU Social Scoreboard: unemployment and barriers to entering employment, early leaving from education and training, and poverty and social exclusion, particularly among children. The programmes concentrate most of their funding on guidance and labour market integration, training and reskilling, education support, active inclusion and basic material assistance. The investment addresses both barriers to employment and situations of vulnerability that require targeted social support.

For 2021–2027, Spain has €16,257 million in programmed investment, including technical assistance. The €15,621 million allocated directly to measures is distributed across employment (41.8%), education (21.1%), social inclusion (33.3%) and material deprivation (3.8%). This allocation aligns funding with Spain's social and labour market needs.

2. Funding targeted at those most in need.

Although the ESF+ has substantial reach, it effectively targets financial resources at people with the greatest needs. Spain recorded 13.82 million participations from 2014 to 2025, equivalent to 15% of the EU total. Four out of five participation records relate to people out of work at entry: approximately 50% were unemployed and 30% were economically inactive. About 60% of beneficiaries had a low level of educational attainment (ISCED 0–2), and young people accounted for four in ten participations.

Over the same period, many recorded participations involved groups facing specific barriers: 2.8 million by migrants or members of minorities, 1.4 million by people in long-term unemployment, 1.6 million by people with disabilities and 600,000 by young people not in employment, education or training.

The redistributive focus also has a territorial dimension: less developed regions receive approximately 42% of investment in measures, although they account for only 24.5% of the population.

3. Effectiveness and efficiency demonstrated by outcomes.

In absolute terms, over the past decade, 3.7 million participants gained an educational or training qualification and 3.3 million were in employment on leaving. In 2023–2025, 44.4% of unemployed or economically inactive participants in employment programmes entered work, compared with 31.7% in the EU. In education programmes, 40.2% gained a qualification, compared with 18.9% in the EU.

The evaluation of the 2014–2023 reporting period supports this assessment. By the end of 2022, 56% of participations in Spain had produced an immediate positive result, compared with about 35% across the EU. Declared expenditure per positive outcome was €2,115, indicating a favourable relationship between expenditure and results. These indicators support the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the Fund but do not establish that all improvements were caused by the ESF+. Counterfactual evidence from the European Commission's Joint Research Centre estimates an average increase of 6.5 percentage points in the likelihood of entering employment following participation. There is still a need to reach and support the most disconnected groups and to monitor job quality and stability.

4. A high multiplier and a substantial fiscal return.

Chapter 3 uses an input–output model to estimate that €16,257 million in planned ESF+ investment over 2021–2027 generates €21,387.8 million in GDP. Each euro invested is associated with approximately €1.32 in economic activity. Social inclusion has the highest GDP multiplier (1.44), followed by education (1.38).

The model estimates employment associated with this investment at 394,695 jobs over the whole period: 243,918 direct, 53,109 indirect and 97,668 induced. These are estimates linked to programmed expenditure, not counts of observed permanent jobs.

The estimated fiscal return is €6,772.8 million from taxes and social security contributions, net of subsidies on production. It amounts to 41.7% of ESF+ investment, or about 42 cents per euro invested, and exceeds Spain's €4,961.3 million contribution by 36.5%. On these estimates, public revenues generated by the economic activity associated with the ESF+ would cover the value of the national contribution and generate additional revenue.

Diluting the ESF+ or, in the extreme case, withdrawing it altogether would have substantial economic costs for Spain, particularly for certain labour-market and social groups. Complete withdrawal would reduce investment by €16,257.0 million and cumulative GDP by €21,387.8 million over seven years. It would also reduce annual employment by the equivalent of 56,385 jobs and remove annual capacity for 550,742 participations in employment and labour market integration, 202,214 in education and training and 393,234 in social inclusion.

5. Preserving social safeguards under the proposed reform.

The European Commission’s proposal for the 2028–2034 financial framework would substantially change how the ESF+ is managed. It would bring the Fund together with other instruments under National and Regional Partnership Plans, with greater emphasis on milestones and results. An aggregate social spending target of 14% would replace specific minimum allocations for priorities such as social inclusion, child poverty, youth and material deprivation.

This new design poses obvious risks: a minimum aggregate does not guarantee resources for each specific need; greater flexibility could dilute the funding of the most vulnerable groups and reduce the Fund's autonomy and visibility. Given the documented social, economic and fiscal results, the report is based on maintaining an independent ESF with its own fiscal capacity or, if integration is successful, shielding specific percentages of social investment that preserve its priorities.

Introduction

The European Social Fund was established by the 1957 Treaty of Rome alongside the European Economic Community. It is therefore one of the EU's oldest financial instruments. The 2021 reform created the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) under the 2021–2027 Multiannual Financial Framework. It brought together the former European Social Fund, the Youth Employment Initiative, the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived and the Employment and Social Innovation programme (EaSI).

In the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021–2027, the ESF+ allocation is clearly identifiable, with its own funds, own programmes and minimum percentages of social expenditure. Thus, once ESF+ allocations take place between EU Member States (according to regional development criteria), they are obliged to maintain a series of minimum thematic concentrations set out in the ESF+ Regulation. Member States cannot freely spend their entire allocation on any social or labour priority. The ESF+ Regulation requires that minimum percentages be set aside for certain objectives identified as priorities by the EU: social inclusion, child poverty, youth training and employment, material deprivation, social partners, etc. The legal basis for this approach is Article 7 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 on "coherence and thematic concentration". In other words, Spain can currently design state and regional programmes, but it must demonstrate to the Commission that a minimum part of its ESF+ is directed towards these areas of action, leaving some of the money legally reserved for specific social objectives.

However, the European Commission's proposal for 2028–2034, submitted on 16 July 2025, substantially changes the model. If approved, the ESF+ would cease to follow the classic model of cohesion programmes and become integrated into national and regional partnership plans (NRPPs) together with other funds, with a logic more similar to the national plans set up in the context of the Next Generation EU Funds, with specific milestones and objectives.

These plans would bring together 14 existing funds, which are currently being managed with Member States, including those in the fields of cohesion, agriculture, migration and social policy; in the new model, each Member State would have to prepare a single national and regional plan with reforms, investments and interventions linked to the European Semester and country-specific recommendations. The ESF+ would thus be integrated into the regulation of these National and Regional Partnership Plans, and the minimum rates currently set by the required funding thresholds for each of the thematic axes (social inclusion, child poverty, youth, material deprivation, social partners) would be eliminated. Thus, the ESF+ would no longer have its own legally-protected envelope as it currently has.

The Commission proposes an aggregate target: at least 14% of National and Regional Partnership Plan expenditure would support social objectives. Agriculture, fisheries and the Social Climate Fund would be excluded, but the new EU Facility would be included. The Commission estimates that this would represent at least €100 billion in grants and loans for social objectives and social investment, depending on the mix of social

objectives chosen by each Member State. Integrating the future social fund into broader plans could replace several current minimum allocations with an aggregate social target, potentially jeopardising funding for social inclusion, child poverty and material deprivation.

The current model offers stronger protection for the visibility and budgetary autonomy of the ESF+. The Commission's 2028–2034 proposal would integrate it into a broader national package, with a risk of diluted funding and less control over thematic allocations. The €100 billion would have to cover existing policy areas, social infrastructure and activities not primarily social in nature, such as tourism and sports promotion. Spending on social objectives would therefore likely fall relative to the current ESF+. Table 1 summarises the main differences between the existing delivery model and the Commission's proposal.

Table 1. Comparison of the current ESF+ delivery model and the Commission's proposal for 2028–2034

Institutional aspect	2021–2027 framework	Commission proposal for 2028–2034
Architecture	A clearly identifiable ESF+	ESF integrated into National and Regional Partnership Plans alongside other funds
Programming	Dedicated national and regional ESF+ programmes	One broad national or regional plan per Member State
Social allocation	Dedicated ESF+ budget and specific thematic concentration	Aggregate social spending target of 14% within the plan
Delivery model	Conventional shared management, largely based on declared costs	Stronger focus on results, milestones and targets; financing not directly linked to costs
Thematic controls	Minimum percentages within the ESF+	No specific percentages equivalent to those of the ESF+
Negotiation	Programmes negotiated with the Commission within the ESF+ framework	Bilateral negotiation between the Member State and the Commission, with approval by Council decision

Source: Authors' calculations.

The Commission presents the change as a way to simplify funding instruments, increase their flexibility and target expenditure at results.

But the risk, pointed out by the European Parliament and other social actors, is that the ESF+ will lose its own identity and dilute its current commitments: as part of a large national plan, social resources would compete more directly with other priorities – such as territorial cohesion, agriculture, migration policies, security, competitiveness or housing – within the same financial package. Therefore, the difference between the current and the proposed new model is not only technical. In 2021–2027, Spain has received an allocation linked to the identifiable ESF+ and is implementing it through specific social programmes that must necessarily guarantee thematic minima. In the proposal for 2028–2034, Spain would receive an allocation within an integrated

national/regional plan, with an aggregate social minimum, but with less specific guarantees that the money will be set aside in the same way for the traditional ESF+ priorities.

This report is part of this debate, in order to provide useful evidence for assessing which elements of the current model generate added value, which priorities should be strengthened and what risks could arise from a possible loss of ESF+ budget commitment within broader National Plans.

In particular, we will do so by following what is often referred to as the "logic of intervention" associated with these programmes. First, we will present, in Chapter 1, the "inputs" of this intervention, i.e. the funds invested (amounts), how they are structured into operational programmes, what objectives and priorities they are intended for and what are the main concrete measures that are implemented under the ESF+.

Then we will refer, already in chapter 2, to the "outputs": how many actions of each type are carried out and, mainly, how many people benefit from them and which groups are primarily beneficiaries of the ESF+. This will give us a first idea of how these investments actually address identifiable social priorities.

The final part of this chain is the "results", which can be of two types. From a "micro" point of view, we will refer to the impact that participation in these actions actually has on the situation of these people, in terms of improving their possibilities for labour and social integration. This type of impact will also be considered in chapter 2. On the other hand, from a more global point of view, in Chapter 3 we will look at the macroeconomic impact of the ESF+ on economic activity and employment. An interesting result is that the economic momentum generated by ESF+ expenditure generates enough fiscal returns to fully finance the national contribution to these projects.

Finally, Chapter 5 draws five main messages from the analysis. They support keeping the ESF+ as a stand-alone instrument or, if the Commission's current proposal is adopted, protecting specific allocation and investment shares in the future national plan.

Chapter 1. ESF+ investment in Spain (2021–2027)

1.1. Investment by operational programme and category of region

This first chapter addresses the first specific objective of the project, which will be the quantification of the importance of ESF+ investments in Spain, differentiating by autonomous community, type of region, operational programme and investment priority. This will allow us to know what volume of resources has been programmed in the period 2021–2027, as well as to identify the target groups and the main lines of action financed.

The European Social Fund (ESF+) is part of European cohesion policy and, in particular, includes investments that meet its fourth policy objective: "a more social and inclusive Europe through the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights".

To this end, the EU budget allocates funds to programmes covering four priority areas: employment, education, social inclusion and combating poverty. These European funds are complemented by national investment (which can be public or private) in co-financing rates that vary according to two criteria: the type of region where they are invested and the priority they serve.

As with EU cohesion policy more broadly, these programmes have a strong territorial focus. Regions are divided into three categories according to GDP per capita relative to the EU-27 average: less developed regions, below 75%; transition regions, between 75% and 100%; and more developed regions, above 100%. In Spain, Andalusia, Castilla-La Mancha and Extremadura, together with the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla, fall in the first category. Transition regions comprise Asturias, the Balearic Islands, the Canary Islands, Cantabria, Castile and León, Galicia, La Rioja, Murcia and Valencia. Aragon, Catalonia, Madrid, Navarre and the Basque Country are more developed regions.

Transition and less developed regions receive greater financial support because of their more substantial structural convergence needs. The standard EU co-financing rates are 85% for programmes in less developed and outermost regions (the Canary Islands), 60% in transition regions and 50% in more developed regions. Specific types of investment can have different rates. Social innovation programmes, including pilot projects and new labour market integration or inclusion methods, can receive up to 95%; measures supporting the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP) can receive up to 100% [1]. The effective EU co-financing rates for investment are 85.2% in less developed regions, 65.5% in transition regions and 45% in more developed regions.

1. Established in 2024, STEP supports critical and emerging strategic technologies and their value chains. It finances the development and manufacturing of digital technologies, clean and resource-efficient technologies, and biotechnologies, including medicinal products. It also supports measures to address shortages of critical skills and labour.

It is also important to note that a percentage close to 4% of ESF+ budgets is allocated to technical assistance, i.e. to cover the costs of design, management and evaluation of the programmes themselves. The rest of the funds are already allocated to actions aimed at achieving ESF+ objectives, or what we will henceforth generically call “measures”.

The total ESF+ investment is structured into 19 regional operational programmes (one for each autonomous community, plus the two autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla) and 4 state programmes (co-ordinated by the General State Administration and comprising investments throughout the national territory).

- Youth Employment Programme, aimed at the employment of people under 30 and meeting the European obligation to devote specific resources to regions with youth unemployment rates above the EU average. This programme constitutes the main funding framework for the National Youth Guarantee System and includes job placement pathways, practical training grants in enterprises or incentives for the recruitment of unemployed young people, among other measures.
- Employment, Education, Training and Social Economy Programme (ÉFESO) deals with the structural problems of the labour market in Spain, with the aim of promoting quality employment and improving adaptability and skills of workers. The main measures include vocational training and retraining, support for recruitment on open-ended contracts, promotion of entrepreneurship through entrepreneurship projects and strengthening of enterprises in the social economy.
- Programme for Social Inclusion, Guaranteeing Children and Combating Poverty (INCLUSION), the main objective of which is to promote the active inclusion of vulnerable persons or at risk of exclusion and reduce child poverty. It finances personalised social and labour market integration pathways, projects aimed at deinstitutionalisation and strategies for access to housing for the homeless.
- Basic Material Assistance Programme (BASIC). This programme replaces the former Fund for Assistance to the Most Deprived (FEAD) and contributes to the attention of the most serious forms of poverty and social exclusion through the provision of direct non-financial assistance (pocket cards and exchangeable checks for food and other commodities) complemented by accompanying social measures to help families escape from this vulnerable situation.

Across the 23 operational programmes [2], total investment channelled through the ESF+ in Spain over 2021–2027 amounts to €16,257 million (Table 2). Of this, €636 million is allocated to technical assistance, leaving €15,621 million for measures that pursue the specific objectives of the Fund. Of this latter amount, €10,852 million (69.5%) comes from the EU budget and €4,769 million (30.5%) from national sources.

This total amount of investment directed directly to measures related to the ESF+ objectives is channelled through regional programmes (€7,756 million, 49.7%) and through state programmes (€7,865 million, the remaining 50.3%). Among the latter, the most well-funded is the Ephesus programme (€3,556 million, 22.8% of the total) followed by Inclusion (2,010 million, 12.9%), Youth Employment (1,701 million, 10.9%), and finally the Basic Programme (598 million, 3.8%).

Table 2. ESF+ investment in Spain by operational programme, 2021–2027

Programme	EU funding (€)	Spanish funding (€)	Combined total (€)	Technical assistance (€)	Direct measures (€)	EU rate
Andalusia	1,787,792,929	315,492,872	2,103,285,801	80,895,605	2,022,390,196	85.0 %
Aragon	72,017,120	108,025,680	180,042,800	6,924,723	173,118,078	40.0 %
Asturias	127,432,897	84,955,266	212,388,163	8,168,773	204,219,390	60.0 %
Balearic Islands	102,499,500	61,499,667	163,999,167	6,307,657	157,691,510	62.5 %
Canary Islands	446,553,468	78,434,549	524,988,017	24,999,426	499,988,591	85.1 %
Cantabria	37,620,239	21,664,073	59,284,312	2,280,163	57,004,149	63.5 %
Catalonia	400,984,297	557,380,422	958,364,719	36,860,178	921,504,541	41.8 %
Castilla-La Mancha	345,338,256	60,942,047	406,280,303	15,626,162	390,654,141	85.0 %
Castile and León	169,416,292	97,094,597	266,510,889	10,250,415	256,260,474	63.6 %
Ceuta	13,039,830	2,301,147	15,340,977	590,036	14,750,941	85.0 %
Extremadura	434,224,663	76,627,884	510,852,547	19,648,173	491,204,374	85.0 %
Galicia	448,558,949	274,941,406	723,500,355	27,826,936	695,673,419	62.0 %
La Rioja	19,168,577	12,779,053	31,947,630	1,226,608	30,721,022	60.0 %
Madrid	409,091,161	517,905,275	926,996,436	35,653,706	891,342,730	44.1 %
Melilla	14,467,907	2,553,164	17,021,071	654,653	16,366,418	85.0 %
Murcia	164,120,796	99,333,621	263,454,417	10,132,862	253,321,555	62.3 %
Navarre	22,067,311	30,493,325	52,560,636	2,021,559	50,539,077	42.0 %
Basque Country	79,041,968	118,562,952	197,604,920	7,600,188	190,004,733	40.0 %
Valencia	343,203,636	113,595,808	456,799,444	17,569,208	439,230,236	75.1 %

Programme	EU funding (€)	Spanish funding (€)	Combined total (€)	Technical assistance (€)	Direct measures (€)	EU rate
Regional total	**5,436,639,796**	**2,634,582,808**	**8,071,222,604**	**315,237,030**	**7,755,985,574**	**67.4 %**
Youth Employment	1,232,223,892	536,918,814	1,769,142,706	68,037,808	1,701,104,898	69.7 %
ÉFESO	2,575,433,769	1,122,770,127	3,698,203,896	142,238,600	3,555,965,296	69.6 %
Social Inclusion	1,486,315,815	604,209,043	2,090,524,858	80,404,794	2,010,120,064	71.1 %
BÁSICO	565,083,719	62,787,081	627,870,800	29,898,608	597,972,192	90.0 %
National total	**5,859,057,195**	**2,326,685,065**	**8,185,742,260**	**320,579,809**	**7,865,162,451**	**71.6 %**
All programmes	**11,295,696,991**	**4,961,267,873**	**16,256,964,864**	**635,816,839**	**15,621,148,025**	**69.5 %**

Source: Compiled from the operational programmes.

2. Operational programmes are available from Spain's ESF Administrative Unit. Accessed in August 2026.

In Spain, 42% of total investment in measures, including national programmes, is concentrated in less developed regions (€6,594 million), which account for just 24.5% of Spain's population (Table 3). This confirms the prioritisation of regions with the greatest needs. A further €5,734 million is allocated to measures in transition regions (36.7% of spending, against 35.8% of the population), and €3,293 million to measures in more developed regions (21.1% of spending, against 39.7% of the population).

Table 3. ESF+ investment in Spain by category of region, 2021–2027

Category of region	EU funding (€)	Spanish funding (€)	Combined total (€)	Technical assistance (€)	Direct measures (€)	EU rate
More developed	1,541,366,215	1,884,744,561	3,426,110,776	133,771,667	3,292,339,109	45.0 %
Transition	3,908,307,719	2,062,683,174	5,970,990,893	236,723,139	5,734,267,754	65.5 %
Less developed	5,846,023,057	1,013,840,138	6,859,863,195	265,322,034	6,594,541,161	85.2 %
Total	**11,295,696,991**	**4,961,267,873**	**16,256,964,864**	**635,816,839**	**15,621,148,025**	**69.5 %**

Source: Compiled from the operational programmes.

1.2. Investment by specific objective, priority and type of intervention

Looking already at the content of the measures financed by the ESF+, in addition to the four areas we have identified (employment, education, inclusion and combating poverty), European legislation defines 13 specific objectives (Table 4).

Table 4. ESF+ specific objectives and investment in Spain, 2021–2027

Code	Specific objective	Investment in measures (€)	Share
SO1	Improve access to employment and labour market activation	5,605,093,168	35.9%
SO2	Modernise labour market institutions and services	41,138,203	0.3%
SO3	Promote gender-balanced participation in the labour market	133,032,940	0.9%
SO4	Promote adaptation of workers, enterprises and entrepreneurs to change	754,198,353	4.8%
SO5	Improve the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems	1,125,297,188	7.2%
SO6	Promote equal access to quality, inclusive education and training	2,038,517,225	13.0%
SO7	Promote lifelong learning opportunities for all	124,571,622	0.8%
SO8	Foster active inclusion and equal opportunities	3,499,773,489	22.4%
SO9	Promote integration of third-country nationals, including migrants	173,225,089	1.1%
SO10	Promote integration of marginalised communities, such as the Roma	128,443,828	0.8%
SO11	Improve equal and timely access to essential services	466,431,840	3.0%
SO12	Promote social integration of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion	933,452,886	6.0%
SO13	Address material deprivation through food and basic material assistance	597,972,192	3.8%

Source: Compiled from the operational programmes.

- In the area of employment, the first four specific objectives are set, accounting for 41.8% of total investment: improvements in access to employment and activation measures; modernisation of labour market institutions and services; gender balance in access to employment; and adaptation to the change of working people, businesses and entrepreneurs, especially in the context of green and digital transitions. In total, investment for these four specific objectives amounts to €6,533 million.
- The second set of specific objectives is that of education, which includes objectives 5-7: improving the quality of training systems; promoting inclusive and equal access

systems; and lifelong learning. In this case, an investment of €3,288 million or 21.1% of the total is earmarked for projects related to these objectives.

- Projects related to social inclusion are structured around specific objectives 8-12: active inclusion to promote equal opportunities; social integration of nationals of other countries; integration of marginalised communities, especially Roma; improving equal opportunities for access to essential public services; and social integration of people in situations of special vulnerability or social exclusion. This group of specific objectives is the second largest investment, reaching 5,201 million (33.3% of the total).
- Finally, Goal 13 is aimed at addressing material deprivation through direct aid for the purchase of food and other basic necessities. This objective is identified with the scope of the fight against poverty and is only articulated through the basic State programme. It involves an investment of €598 million, or 3.8% of the total.

Table 5 elaborates on how ESF+ funds are targeted by combining specific objectives with the 10 priorities to be pursued:

1. Employment, adaptability, entrepreneurship and the social economy (26.9% of total investment).
2. Social inclusion and combating poverty (23.2%).
3. Education and training (13.3%).
4. Combating material deprivation (3.8%).
5. Youth employment (17.6%).
6. Innovative social action (1%).
7. Child Guarantee (10.9%).
8. Employment, social inclusion and education in outermost regions (1.2%).
9. Skills and qualifications linked to the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (1.0%).
10. Response to natural disasters (in this case, the cut-off low and associated floods in Valencia in October 2024, 1.1%).

Three combinations of specific objectives and priorities stand out, accounting for almost 54% of investment (Table 5). Specific Objective 8 under Priority 2 (active inclusion and combating poverty) accounts for 19%. Specific Objective 1 under Priority 1 (access to employment and labour market activation under the employment and adaptability priority) accounts for 18.7%. The same objective under Priority 5 (youth employment) accounts for another 16.2%.

Finally, we can look at the type of concrete measures that are financed by these funds in order to achieve the objectives and priorities described. Spain's Partnership Agreement 2021–2027 [3] defines generically what type of measures can be financed within each specific objective, and each operational programme specifies the destination of those funds in specific measures.

The European Commission classifies these measures according to the codes set out in Table 6 [4], where they cross with the 13 previous specific objectives. As can be seen, the

type of intervention that concentrates a greater percentage of resources is that of "integration and reintegration into the world of work of the disadvantaged", which absorbs 22.2% of the total ESF+ investment, followed by "youth employment and socio-economic integration of young people" (18.1%). Both represent 40% of the funds. If we add the "improved access to employment" and the "primary and secondary education" (both with 9.5% each), we reach 60% of the total funds.

3. Spain's 2021–2027 Partnership Agreement is a strategic document ratified by the Spanish Government and the European Commission in December 2022. It sets out the main lines of action and investment priorities of the EU funds under the Multiannual Financial Framework.

4. Regulation (EU) 2021/1060.

Table 5. Investment in Spain by specific objective and priority, 2021–2027

Code	Priority	SO1	SO2	SO3	SO4	SO5	SO6	SO7	SO8	SO9	SO10	SO11	SO12	SO13	Total
P1	Employment, adaptability, entrepreneurship and the social economy	18.65 %	0.26 %	0.85 %	4.73 %				2.39 %						26.9%
P2	Social inclusion and combating poverty								19.01 %	1.11 %	0.70 %	1.31 %	1.08 %		23.2%
P3	Education and training					6.62 %	5.95 %	0.70 %							13.3%
P4	Combating material deprivation													3.83 %	3.8%
P5	Youth employment	16.17 %					1.37 %						0.09 %		17.6%
P6	Innovative social action	0.03 %				0.07 %	0.01 %		0.29 %			0.60 %	0.04 %		1.0%
P7	Child Guarantee						5.27 %				0.13 %	0.74 %	4.75 %		10.9%
P8	Employment, inclusion and education in outermost regions	0.04 %					0.34 %	0.10 %	0.68 %	0.00 %					1.2%
P9	Skills and qualifications for the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform	0.29 %			0.10 %	0.50 %	0.12 %								1.0%
PR	Response to natural disasters	0.70 %				0.02 %			0.03 %			0.33 %			1.1%
	Total	**35.9 %**	**0.3%**	**0.9%**	**4.8%**	**7.2%**	**13.0 %**	**0.8%**	**22.4 %**	**1.1%**	**0.8%**	**3.0%**	**6.0%**	**3.8%**	**100.0%**

Source: Compiled from the operational programmes.

Table 6. Investment in Spain by specific objective and type of intervention, 2021–2027

Code	Type of intervention	SO1	SO2	SO3	SO4	SO5	SO6	SO7	SO8	SO9	SO10	SO11	SO12	SO13	Total
134	Improving access to employment	9.2%		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%	0.2%						9.5%
135	Promoting access to employment for the long-term unemployed	0.6%							0.0%						0.6%
136	Youth employment and socio-economic integration	15.5 %			1.0%		1.2%		0.3%				0.1%		18.1%
137	Self-employment and business creation	5.1%													5.1%
138	Support for the social economy and social enterprises	0.4%													0.4%
139	Modernising labour market institutions and services, skills assessment and personalised assistance	0.0%	0.3%			0.0%									0.3%
140	Matching labour supply and demand and supporting labour market transitions	0.1%			2.7%	0.3%	0.0%								3.2%
141	Labour mobility	0.5%													0.5%
142	Promoting women's participation and reducing gender segregation in the labour market			0.6%					0.1%						0.6%
143	Work–life balance, including access to childcare and care for dependants			0.1%					0.0%						0.1%
144	A healthy working environment adapted to health risks, including promotion of physical activity											0.1%			0.1%
145	Developing digital skills			0.0%	0.1%	0.4%	0.1%	0.1%							0.7%
146	Adaptation of workers, enterprises and entrepreneurs to change				1.0%	0.0%		0.1%							1.2%
147	Promoting active and healthy ageing											0.1%			0.1%
148	Early childhood education and care (excluding infrastructure)					0.0%	1.3%						0.0%		1.3%
149	Primary and secondary education (excluding infrastructure)	0.0%				1.4%	6.5%						1.6%		9.5%
150	Tertiary education (excluding infrastructure)	0.0%				3.2%	3.5%	0.2%							6.9%

Code	Type of intervention	SO1	SO2	SO3	SO4	SO5	SO6	SO7	SO8	SO9	SO10	SO11	SO12	SO13	Total
151	Adult education (excluding infrastructure)	0.3%		0.0%		1.6%	0.2%	0.4%							2.5%
152	Equal opportunities and active participation in society	0.2%		0.0%		0.1%	0.0%		2.8%	0.0%		0.5%	0.0%		3.7%
153	Labour market integration and reintegration of disadvantaged people	3.9%					0.1%	0.0%	17.9 %	0.1%		0.1%	0.0%		22.2%
154	Access to education and employment and social inclusion of marginalised groups such as Roma people								0.1%		0.7%				0.8%
155	Support for civil society working with marginalised communities such as the Roma	0.0%									0.1%		0.0%		0.1%
156	Specific action to increase the participation of third-country nationals in employment								0.2%	0.6%					0.8%
157	Social integration of third-country nationals								0.0%	0.4%			0.0%		0.4%
158	Improving equitable and timely access to quality, sustainable and affordable services					0.1%				0.0%		0.5%	0.0%		0.7%
159	Improving local and family services											0.6%	0.2%		0.7%
160	Improving accessibility, effectiveness and resilience of healthcare systems (excluding infrastructure)											0.1%			0.1%
161	Improving access to long-term care (excluding infrastructure)											0.3%			0.3%
162	Modernising social protection systems and promoting access to social protection											0.1%			0.1%
163	Social integration of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, particularly the most disadvantaged and children						0.1%		0.8%			0.7%	4.0%		5.5%
164	Material deprivation: food, material assistance and accompanying measures												0.0%	3.8%	3.8%

Code	Type of intervention	SO1	SO2	SO3	SO4	SO5	SO6	SO7	SO8	SO9	SO10	SO11	SO12	SO13	Total
175	Outermost regions: compensation for extra costs arising from limited access and territorial fragmentation						0.2%								0.2%
	Total	**35.9 %**	**0.3%**	**0.9%**	**4.8%**	**7.2%**	**13.0 %**	**0.8%**	**22.4 %**	**1.1%**	**0.8%**	**3.0%**	**6.0%**	**3.8%**	**100.0%**

Source: Compiled from the operational programmes.

1.3. Examples of interventions under each specific objective

In order to better specify the type of measures associated with the various specific objectives, we then set out, for each of them, the range of actions contained in the Partnership Agreement and a selection of 25 measures drawn from regional and state operational programmes which can serve as a sample of the use of ESF+ funds:

Specific Objective 1. Improve access to employment and labour market activation measures.

- Employment training for the majority of unemployed, with emphasis on vulnerable groups further away from the labour market: certificates of professionalism, catalogue training and, in particular, planned training according to needs and in collaboration with employers.
- Aid and bonuses for the recruitment on open-ended contracts of unemployed persons or for the conversion into indefinite contracts of training contracts, in addition to aid for the recruitment on open-ended contracts of persons with disabilities or belonging to vulnerable groups, or social security subsidies for the insertion into the ordinary market of specific groups away from the labour market.
- Measures to increase the registration of unemployed and inactive persons in employment services or their reintegration into the education system, in particular young people who neither study nor work.
- Collective and individualised guidance, job search support and information on employment opportunities. Alternative training programmes and routes or programmes combining various measures (pre-work, training, recruitment or entrepreneurship support, social support, access to services etc.) aimed at unemployed or inactive persons but not necessarily at risk of social exclusion.
- Actions to promote entrepreneurship and to create businesses, as part of the provision of training and advice or workshops aimed at facilitating this process and in addition to actions in this area which are programmed under specific ERDF objective 1.3. Aid will also be provided to facilitate the return to employment of self-employed or self-employed persons who have caused their activity to decline, as well as the promotion and support of generational replacement.
- Aid for the creation of social economy enterprises, given the fundamental role this type of enterprise plays in equal access to the labour market and the promotion of fair working conditions, including the possibility of considering aid for the incorporation of

partners into cooperatives and stable contracts in social economy enterprises and in addition to actions that may be planned under specific ERDF objective 1.3. In addition, measures to promote the social economy and advisory and technical support actions will be implemented.

Example 1: "SCHEDULES-TALLER" (STATAL EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME)

Workshop schools organised by Ministries or other entities of the General Administration of the State will be financed. The projects will consist of one stage of training and another of training in alternating activities for the recovery of artistic, historical, cultural or natural heritage, the rehabilitation of urban environments or of the environment and the maintenance and care of urban environments that allow the insertion through professionalisation and the acquisition of experience of the participants.

Example 2: "Support and aid to self-employment and enterprise creation" (REGIONAL ANDALUCY PROGRAM)

Aid to persons wishing to become self-employed, whose activity is maintained for at least 12 months, ensuring that the aid granted fulfils minimum conditions which ensure viability and have special monitoring.

The aid may be increased when they have ceased their previous business or economic activity in the last 24 months, when maintaining a business or economic activity they re-lease by means of new self-employment to another who ceases to be close to retirement age.

Among others, the following priority groups are considered: women, young people, victims of gender-based violence or terrorism, persons with disabilities recognised to a degree equal to or greater than 33%, long-term unemployed persons registered with the SAE as job seekers, at least 24 months continuously, and persons at risk of social exclusion.

Specific Objective 2. Modernising labour market institutions and services.

- Improve the provision of services to job-seekers and job-changers, including profiling, personalised services and counselling, upgrading skills and reorientation of qualifications.
- Improve collaboration with and offer services to women entrepreneurs.
- Establish partnerships with social services, educational and training institutions and the third sector.
- Improve tools for profiling, skills adequacy and anticipation of skills demand.

Example 3: "INFORMATION AND SUPPORT SYSTEM IN DECISIONS WITH ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND AUTOMATIC LEARNING FOR PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT SERVICE" (REGIONAL GALICE PROGRAMME)

Improving the provision of the public employment service means achieving a service providing analytical and forward-looking value information in the area of employment management, active employment policies and the labour market by applying modern management methods linked to new information and communication technologies.

AI solutions impact the internal forms of work of organisations, for example, reducing repetitive tasks such as document processing and simple queries, and externally providing value by improving services focused on citizenship and business and delivering services through greater accessibility and customisation.

The development of these solutions is mainly aimed at facilitating access to job offers through various techniques of intermediation and assistance in job search, carrying out systematic management and monitoring of unemployed persons (needs diagnosis, aspects that improve employability, periodic interviews and application of personalised formulas for action); contribute to the coordination of all services for job seekers, and also facilitate international labour mobility and reduce obstacles to the free movement of workers in the European Union.

The implementation of this measure during the years 2022–2023 is covered by technical assistance from the OP ESF Galicia 14-20 and it is a question of continuing to evolve the tool from 2024 onwards.

Example 4: "PROSPRECTION OF ENTERPRISES" (REGIONAL PROGRAMME OF THE VALENTIAN COMMUNITY)

This action involves the recruitment of personnel to carry out exploration actions in the business fabric, namely 54 prospectors, one for each Espai Labora and thus to be able to cover the whole territory.

It is noted that in the Valencian Community, employers' enterprises/entities make little use of the services offered by Labora in terms of labour intermediation, therefore, this action involves undertaking entrepreneurial prospecting actions in order to locate employment needs, as well as the recruitment of job offers to adapt the orientation processes to the needs of the labour market.

Specific Objective 3. Promote balanced gender participation in the labour market.

- Reversing the gender gap in the labour market, pursuing equal employment and socio-economic opportunities for all persons, including those who are homeless and single-parent families, mostly headed by women, through measures aimed at improving the employability of women, among others, and all through the implementation of the Spanish Employment Support Strategy (2021–2024) and the National Strategic Plan for Gender Equality 2022–2025.

Example 5: "LABORAL AND FAMILY CONCILIATION FOR THE PROMOTION OF GENDER EQUALITY IN THE LABOUR FIELD" (REGIONAL PROGRAM OF CANARIAS)

Support programme to promote the reconciliation of work and family life, involving women and men and promoting the care of minors, older persons and dependent persons. The aim of this action is to improve the employability of working people by encouraging ways of reconciling access to and stay in the labour market, following the difficulties encountered by the health crisis, as well as improving access to resources to reconcile workers from outermost areas, with fewer possibilities and resources than larger populations and, finally, to motivate unemployed and inactive persons or those who may find themselves in a vulnerable situation towards employment.

Example 6: "MULTIPLICATION" (REGIONAL PROGRAM FOR CASTILLA AND LEON)

Training and advice to companies for equality in the labour market. The aim of the action is to promote the implementation of positive actions that facilitate the incorporation, permanence and promotion of women in entities that carry out their activities in Castile and León, helping to reduce the gender gap in the labour market. These are specific actions that contribute to improving the position of women in the labour market through concrete solutions for personal, work and family reconciliation and equal opportunities between women and men.

The proceedings shall consist of:

- Individualised advice to companies for the implementation of measures for equality and reconciliation of personal, family and work life, with monitoring and mentoring of the measures implemented.
- Information and guidance to enterprises wishing to implement positive action measures to promote equal opportunities between women and men, including measures to reconcile personal, family and work life.

The service will also be made up of other complementary actions, which contribute to the effective implementation of equality measures, such as:

- Distance training courses aimed primarily at those responsible for implementing equality measures in the firms advised.
- Training sessions through meetings and workshops with professionals, future professionals of the human resources and staffs of the companies advised.
- Collection, selection and dissemination of documentation, especially through new technologies, to support employers in Castilla y León on equality issues.

Specific Objective 4. Promote the adaptation of workers, businesses and entrepreneurs to change.

- To improve the adaptability of workers to change, through the programming of different types of actions, such as training for employees organised on the initiative of employment services or other institutions, or at the initiative of enterprises, for retraining and training for transitions, in particular green and digital.
- Incentives for the transition of workers (business changes/sectors), in particular to adapt to structural changes.
- Aid and promotion of voluntary mobility between sectors or regions for employed or unemployed persons.
- Measures to support businesses in introducing new organisational methods, e.g. teleworking, flexibility, new HR practices, occupational health and safety measures, or even measures to adapt workplaces to older people, among others.

Example 7: "HEARNING FOR EMPLOYMENT FOR OCCUPIED IN THE MINORIST TRADE SECTOR" (REGIONAL EXTREMADURE PROGRAM)

It will be aimed at agents of the retail trade sector, managers and employees and employees of the sector, commercial dynamizers and sectoral associations. The Strategic Plan in which foreign trade actions are framed is the Comprehensive Plan to Support the Retail Trade of Extremadura. Small businesses must adapt to the new reality, with training in the use of new technologies and the implementation of digitalisation in their business. The application of new technologies to the business environment has ceased to be an option to become an obligation, on the part of traders if they really want to be competitive in the current market.

Example 8: "RECONVERSION OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES IN RISK" (REGIONAL PROGRAM OF MELILLA)

The actions will include training, guidance, information and mentoring to encourage the reconversion of the border trade model, as well as other sectors affected by the reality of cross-border relations, through:

A. Entrepreneurship workshops in business conversion with the aim of promoting and enhancing entrepreneurial attitudes and values, as well as facilitating the acquisition of basic knowledge and strategies favourable to entrepreneurship and business conversion.

B. Work to develop individual routes and support through the Entrepreneur Care Point (PAE). In addition, depending on the prior training of different employers and workers in the border trade sector, including workers who have lost their jobs due to border restrictions, specific training activities will be designed on demand, according to the need identified in each case.

C. Mentoring. Through outsourcing, in order to support the creation of enterprises, their conversion, and then their follow-up until the consolidation of them, through the figure of the "business mentor".

Specific Objective 5. Improve the quality and effectiveness of training systems.

- Actions aimed at teacher training.
- Actions to improve and update the National Qualifications System.
- Training activities in specific or strategic areas.

Example 9: "DIGITALIsATION TRAINING AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES" (REGIONAL ARAGON PROGRAM)

Vocational training activities for workers in the field of new information and communication technologies, as well as image and sound. The main objective is the constant updating of professionals to the new computer programmes and applications that are being implemented in the daily activity of technological companies, allowing their constant requalification according to the needs of this economic sector, which has a transversal character to the general economic activity, in which an adequate update and constant requalification of its professionals is structural and strategic.

On the other hand, training activities will be carried out aimed at the incorporation and requalification of workers from other surplus economic sectors in this technological sector, in which there is a constant lack of professionals who are needed to cover the supply of existing jobs.

The training to be given will be carried out through the INAEM Centre for New Technologies, of recognised national prestige, which in turn is also a National Reference Centre in the field of image and sound.

Example 10: "ASSISTING THE PROFESSORATE FOR MOBILITIES AND STANDARDS IN EDUCATIONAL CENTRES AND ENTERPRISES IN THE EU" (REGIONAL PROGRAM OF THE VALENCIAN COMMUNITY)

Support for teachers for training stays in specific vocational training sectors aligned with the business market for up to 2 weeks in addition to Erasmus+ stays of up to 2 months.

The teachers who form part of this call acquire specific competences in their sector and the knowledge of innovative good practices that will inform their students to show where the sectors of this teaching evolve. Some places offered would be: Cloud Architecting AWS level training to learn how to identify services and features to create robust, safe and high-availability IT solutions in the cloud; Visits to companies in the circular economy sector; visits to companies in the electric and hybrid vehicle sector: electrical mobility, from e-cars to e-bikes, information on charging stations, the freight infrastructure market, and subsidies.

Specific Objective 6. Promote equal access to quality and inclusive education and training.

- Encourage the competent administrations to promote vocational training (VET) as a high-quality and high-skilled occupational route, mainly by increasing the supply of VET at its various levels and modalities, through co-financing, in a joint effort between the State and the Autonomous Communities.
- Development and participation in the National Network of Centres of Excellence, which will include important elements such as the transfer of knowledge, training activities for teachers or educational and innovation projects involving companies in the dual component.
- Unify the development of vocational training qualifications and training offers, allowing for a permanent update of the Catalogue.
- The transition from education and training to employment will be promoted, with special attention to young people who neither study nor work nor receive training.
- To increase cooperation between the education and business sectors in order to improve the skills and qualifications required in the labour market, encouraging the transition between different levels of education and education and employment, especially for those young people who neither study nor work nor receive training.
- Improve pre-doctoral training of research and technologist staff and the recruitment process for training activities.
- Activities in the area of Child Guarantee aimed at improving accessibility to early childhood education and childcare, as well as actions to prevent school drop-out and educational support for vulnerable groups, including the Programme for Guidance, Advancement and Educational Enrichment in Centres of Special Educational Complexity (Programme #PROA+).

Example 11: "PROGRAMS FOR IMPROVING LEARNING AND PERFORMANCE (PMAR) /CURRICULARY DIVERSIFICATION (PDC)" (REGIONAL PROGRAM OF ASTURDAYS)

Programmes aimed preferably at pupils who have significant learning difficulties not attributable to lack of study or effort: students who have repeated at least one course at any stage, and who once they have completed the first year of compulsory secondary education are not in a position to promote the second year, or who once they have completed the second year are unable to promote the third. The programme will be developed during the second and third courses in the first case, or only in the third course in the second case.

The programme starts in the second year of compulsory secondary education (ESO). It uses a dedicated teaching approach, with different content, practical activities and, where appropriate, subjects from the standard curriculum. Its purpose is to enable students to take the fourth year through the mainstream route and gain the compulsory secondary education leaving qualification.

Example 12: " GENERAL MODALITY PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMS IN LABOUR TRAINING AND INSERVATION UNITS (UFILS)" (REGIONAL PROGRAM OF THE MADRID COMMUNITY)

These programmes, which are aimed primarily at disadvantaged young people at risk of social exclusion, aim to reduce the lack of vocational qualifications among them, as well as to promote re-training opportunities for young people who have entered the labour market with insufficient and inadequate skills or training, adapting the educational system of training for young people to present and future demands of the labour market and increasing the employability of the population throughout life.

Specific Objective 7. Promote lifelong learning through opportunities for all.

- Support the acquisition of key skills, including digital qualifications, and promote professional development and mobility of teachers and trainers.

Example 13: "DIGITAL TRAINING PROGRAM FOR 55-YEAR-OLD PERSONS (CAPACITATIC+55)" (REGIONAL PROGRAM FOR CASTILLA – LA MANCHA)

The programme will co-finance a specific digital literacy action for people over 55 years of age, which will enable progress to be made in developing the skills needed to understand and harness the potential of new technologies when studying, working, communicating, purchasing or trading, accessing online public services and finding reliable, autonomous, sufficiency and secure information.

The digital training programme for people over 55 (CapacitaTIC+55) is an initiative that aims to reduce the digital divide of older people, through free training adapted to different needs, offering a wide range of training according to the difficulty required, the initial level of knowledge of students and their objectives and expectations.

Together with the digital training actions, work orientation actions are also planned to improve the employability and empowerment of those over 55 years of age in unemployment, with a view to increasing their chances of re-entering the labour market in our region.

Example 14: "ACTS TO IMPROVE COMPETITION AND QUALITY OF WORKING PERSONS" (EFFESSIVE STATE PROGRAMME)

The productive transition requires new skills and qualifications, as well as the change in the social model makes it necessary to increase training in subjects related to the emerging new social consciousness, in order to ensure the alignment of the economic and social fabric. Thus, measures aimed at working people are envisaged with the aim of improving their adaptation to the labour market and promoting professional retraining, guaranteeing the maintenance of employment and enabling their career progression in specific areas by encouraging the acquisition by employed persons of skills linked to the green and/or blue economy, with the aim of promoting their consolidation in the productive fabric. This measure also provides for training for the social partners.

Specific Objective 8. Promote active inclusion to promote equal opportunities.

- Implementation of the National Strategy to Prevent and Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion (2019–2023), the Action Plan for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the National Strategy on the Rights of Children and Adolescents 2021–2030, and the State Action Plan (SAP) for the Implementation of the European Children's Guarantee 2022–2030.

Example 15: "INTEGRATED SOCIAL INSERTION IMMIGRANT PERSONS" (REGIONAL PROGRAM OF BALEARES)

This action promotes the social inclusion of immigrants at or at risk of social exclusion through the design and development of integrated social integration pathways, enabling processes for those persons to improve their social and work skills, as well as their personal skills.

Among other actions, tasks will be carried out in the analysis and diagnosis of the beneficiary person, the design of the route and operations to be developed, training in basic social and personal skills, guidance, information and advice, pre-work training, and follow-up, mentoring and ongoing support.

Example 16: "INTEGRATED PARTNERSHIPS OF social and labour market integration IMPLEMENTED, PRINCIPLELY, BY ENTITIES OF THE THIRD SECTOR" (STATAL PROGRAM INCLUSION)

Inter-related actions will be carried out to improve the employability of vulnerable or disadvantaged people, with the ultimate aim of achieving their integration into the labour market and improving their living conditions.

Actions will be taken to improve the employability of urban and rural women in vulnerable situations or potential social and economic vulnerability.

Personalised integrated routes to promote the social inclusion of persons with disabilities of working age, in a situation or at risk of social exclusion, primarily unemployed or inactive. They will include, inter alia, training activities (combined training and employment programmes including the implementation of training practices in enterprises, training programmes including in-service training) and employment (support for quality jobs and qualifications among university students with disabilities, scholarships for external academic practice, language training abroad, specialisation and academic and research careers of persons with disabilities).

Specific Objective 9. Promote socio-economic integration of third-country nationals, including migrants.

- Itineraries or social labour market integration programmes combining various measures (orientation, pre-work, training, recruitment or entrepreneurship aid, social support, etc.) aimed at migrants.

- Educational support measures and measures to combat prejudice, discrimination and segregation of migrants, including awareness-raising campaigns and those aimed at combating hate crimes.

Example 17: "INTEGRAL ATTENTION TO YOUTH WITHOUT FAMILY SUPPORT IN NAVARRA" (REGIONAL PROGRAM OF NAVARRA)

The arrival in recent years of children without a family support network poses a challenge to protection systems, having to adapt resources and procedures to the specific needs they present.

A large proportion of minors reach the age of majority shortly after they arrive and have access to the protection system or, where appropriate, reach the age of majority before the end of their migration process. As a result, the processes of accompanying independent life cannot be completed adequately.

The situation of social, institutional and legal vulnerability in which this group finds itself carries a serious risk of social exclusion. Because the vast majority are in an irregular administrative situation, they cannot access the labour market, which leads to economic difficulties in undertaking a process of personal autonomy with guarantees.

It should be noted that the gender variable increases the social vulnerability of immigrant women who face greater difficulties in areas such as employment, training, housing or access to other resources.

Therefore, the aim of the action is to promote the integral development of young migrants who are not accompanied by social accompaniment and mentoring in order to facilitate their process of social and labour market integration.

The aim is to promote the process of autonomy of young migrants without a family support network, facilitate their access to institutional resources, promote women ' s empowerment and access to and training in egalitarian masculinities to combat gender inequalities.

To this end, the social services will develop individualised intervention plans for this group of young people. Specifically, actions will be developed in areas of intervention such as language skills, job training, social-relational counselling, psychological-emotional support, legal-administrative counselling and accompaniment, housing, etc.

Example 18: "MEASURES TO COMBAT PREJUDICIES, DISCRIMINATION AND THE SEGREGATION OF MIGRANTS" (REGIONAL PROGRAM OF MURCIA)

Support will be given to the development of projects of the local entities of the Region of Murcia with the aim of promoting the integration and social inclusion of immigrants and the improvement of coexistence and social cohesion in the different territories. These projects will contain actions specifically aimed at promoting coexistence, social cohesion and promoting the diversity of the territories. The local plans will design actions aimed at the active participation of the immigrant population by promoting the processes of reception, inclusion and integration in our society and other actions aimed at the general population, promoting intercultural coexistence and raising awareness and social awareness, so as to combat prejudices and discrimination. In addition, projects of local authorities may include training actions aimed at professionals in the administration on the integration and inclusion of immigrants.

Specific Objective 10. Promote the socio-economic integration of marginalised communities, such as Roma.

- Measures to combat prejudice, discrimination and segregation of the Roma population.
- Itineraries or social labour market integration programmes combining various measures (guidance, pre-work, training, recruitment aids, social support, etc.) aimed at the Roma population and educational support measures, in implementation of the National Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of the Roma People 2021–2030.

Example 19: "PROGRAMS OF SOCIOLABORAL INCLUSION OF THE ROMANI POPULATION" (REGIONAL PROGRAM OF CANTABRIA)

These programmes include promoting more active policies with the Roma population through the following actions:

- Information and advisory services in labour regulations, self-employment, access to micro-credits and social economy enterprises.
- Improvement of cross-cutting competences, especially in new technologies (ICT); community mediation.
- Information on obtaining professional qualifications and certificates (through recognition and accreditation of work experience and unregulated training).
- Comprehensive care for persons and the development of individualised socio-labour routes, with special attention to social integration and pre-work pathways for Roma women.
- Training programmes that encourage access to employment in future professional areas (digital and green employment) of young and adult Roma people, especially Roma women and young women.
- Promote lifelong learning and retraining to find new job opportunities.

- Awareness-raising activities aimed at businesses to combat stereotypes and discrimination in the access, permanence and promotion of the Roma population to the labour market and to value the talents of the Roma population, using an intersectional approach with special attention to Roma women.
- Disseminate the Youth + Guarantee to the Roma population through Roma mediators, and prioritise programmes for it.
- Measures to raise awareness and improve the image of the Roma population engaged in street trade.
- Actions leading to the enhancement of street trade and training and information for Roma people who carry out this activity by strengthening their managerial role and digital skills.
- Community mediation and relations with public administrations. Mediation activities shall be of a community, social, labour and educational nature, and shall include those actions necessary for the dissemination and offer of the programme to persons of Roma ethnicity.

Example 20: "LABORAL SOCIETY INSTRUMENTS DIRIGED TO GITANA PERSONS" (STATAL PROGRAM INCLUSION)

This is a set of interventions to address the plurality of situations affecting the Roma population and which are the result of low rates of activity, especially for women who are subject to double discrimination. These interventions, focused on employment, education and training, seek to generate protective factors and tools that drive the exit from poverty and/or social exclusion through employment, as well as to promote the growth and professional and personal development of the beneficiaries. Thus, the proposed routes may include, among others, the following components:

- Actions for recruitment, dissemination, orientation, motivation towards the labour market and educational return; improvement of basic, cross-cutting and digital skills, occupational training; mixed training and employment programmes (dual training); intermediation for employment; support and monitoring in employment. In this line, integrated and personalised pathways of socio-laboral insertion will also be carried out for women in situations of high vulnerability that improve motivation, self-care, healthy habits and digital skills, promoting empowerment, employability and social inclusion.
- Comprehensive actions to promote entrepreneurship and self-employment, taking into account the capacities of people far from the labour market.
- Actions to strengthen learning of basic, cross-cutting and digital skills, especially linked to digital employment.
- Actions to strengthen the social and solidarity economy.

Specific Objective 11. Improve equality and opportunity in access to essential services.

- Strengthening equal and adequate access to basic services adapted to the characteristics of each territory, including health and housing services and sustainable social protection, through the implementation of the National Deinstitutionalisation Strategy and the development of community support services.

Example 21: "MORE OF ACCESS TO HEALTH, INCLUDING BUCODENTAL HEALTH FOR CHILDREN AND CHILDREN IN RISK OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION" (REGIONAL PROGRAM OF CEUTA)

Health inequalities are also closely related to the social situation of children. Therefore, it is necessary to articulate services and benefits that make up for inequalities in access to health-related services and equipment, but also to healthy lifestyles, addressing aspects such as food, hygiene, and the promotion of physical activity and prevention of sedentary lifestyles, among others.

Oral diseases disproportionately affect poor and socially disadvantaged populations; most oral diseases have been associated with other non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancer, pneumonia, obesity and premature delivery. However, most oral health conditions can be largely prevented and treated in their early stages, but treatment is often not affordable for the population as it is generally not part of coverage in health systems.

Interventions aimed at achieving such a measure would include:

- Programmes to raise awareness, identify and provide health care, including oral health, to families at risk of social exclusion.
- Access of socially excluded minors to essential oral health treatments which are not covered by the public health system and which cannot be covered by other means because of the geographical characteristics of the territory.

The National Health System has a wide range of services, in addition, the Ceuta Health System covers all expenses established in the oral health portfolio. However, given the geographical uniqueness of the Autonomous City and the difficulty of having a variety of alternative services at present, it is not possible to guarantee access for vulnerable children and adolescents to a set of specific oral health services. For this reason, the ESF+ will temporarily support some limited specific actions that fall outside the oral health programme and affect children aged 6 to 14 who are beneficiaries of social programmes (children and girls with disabilities and beneficiaries of social inclusion programmes of the Social Services Department). The present programme will not have the condition of complement to the health service, but will support the social inclusion of this group that in case of not receiving early care may incur a continuous degradation of their social conditions in the medium term.

Example 22: "DAY SERVICE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITY" (REGIONAL PROGRAM OF RIOJA)

The objective of this operation is to provide comprehensive care for people in a situation of dependence during the daytime period with the aim of improving or maintaining the best possible level of personal autonomy and dependency and of supporting families or caregivers. The action is directed towards people in a situation of dependence, respecting the right to independent life and the principles of accessibility. The aim of this action is to recover and/or maintain as much autonomy as possible and improve the quality of life of users through the development of personal and social rehabilitation and empowerment programmes, as well as to provide support services for the family, encouraging the stay of persons with disabilities at home.

Specific Objective 12. Promote the social integration of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

- Routes or social inclusion programmes aimed at young people.
- Itineraries or social inclusion programmes aimed at vulnerable children.
- Deinstitutionalisation support programmes.
- Social integration measures, counselling, social services (non-employment) and access to other services, in coordination with the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (FAMI).
- Measures to promote the inclusion of persons with severe disabilities.
- Measures to promote the social and labour inclusion of homeless people or persons with difficulties in accessing housing, through approaches such as Housing First.
- Within the framework of the Child Guarantee, actions such as socio-educational promotion pathways aimed at families with children aged 0-18 in poverty and social exclusion.
- Actions to improve inclusive education for students with special educational needs.
- A programme aimed at structural reform to ensure free access to accessible, inclusive and high-quality places in the first cycle of child education for students from families with incomes below the poverty risk threshold.
- Actions aimed at deinstitutionalisation and promotion of community-based child care provided by the protection system.
- Measures to develop a universal early care system (0-6 years).
- Measures to promote educational leisure and healthy lifestyles for students from families living in poverty or at risk of poverty.

Example 23: "Support for the process of reinsertion of PENITENCENTRES through INDIVIDUALIsED ITINERARIATS" (REGIONAL CATALUÑA PROGRAM)

Resources for inmates of prisons in residential units located outside the centres themselves, in which reintegration processes are carried out through tutoring and individualised follow-up, in order to achieve stability and progress in all areas indicated in their Individual Treatment Programme. It is also intended to provide them with a positive socio-family and work environment before their conditional or final release. The areas of intervention are personnel, violence, addictions, road, socio-family, reparation and institutional, depending on the needs of each user. While it may be an action that includes aspects of prison policy, the resources available to ESF funding are exclusively related to the staff who manage and execute the actions planned in the different areas of intervention to achieve social reintegration of the collective.

Example 24: "COMPANYING IN THE PROCESS OF TRANSIT TO THE ADULT LIFE AND SOCIAL INCLUSION OF YOUTH PERSONS WITHOUT FAMILY SUPPORT NETWORK"

An integral and personalised itinerary aimed at young people aged 18 to 29, whether or not graduated from the protection network (childhood) and in many cases migrants, but also indigenous, so that they develop and consolidate personal capacities, on the one hand, and social support, on the other, that allow them to undertake and sustain an autonomous life, completing the transition to adult life.

Pilot interventions developed in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic have shown that young people who are targeted by these programmes, if supported by specific housing resources with social support, do not respond to the profile of those at risk of exclusion and often complete their inclusion processes.

These itineraries include housing, maintenance, socio-educational intervention and case coordination actions aimed at the development of personal capacities on the one hand, and social support on the other.

These itineraries provide accommodation alternatives that are usually of a collective nature, or shared housing alternatives - usually in rent- that can be continued and consolidated after the departure of the programme. Different support needs are given: from the group that needs help for accommodation, maintenance and accompaniment, to the group that only needs it for accommodation and support for receiving support for their maintenance, to the group that only needs support for receiving an Income Guarantee Income or minimum working income.

Also included are actions of socio-laboral intervention, oriented to access to employment and social inclusion, and therefore to the closing of the itinerary and the departure of the programme, acting as an accelerator of the inclusion, with routes of different duration, depending in any case on the starting profile of each young person.

The action provides for a first phase focusing on the development of attitudes, skills and relationships necessary to start moving in this direction (development of motivations, clarification of personal objectives, development of social skills, acquisition of linguistic

skills, training for employment, etc.), to later access other accompanying actions in social integration.

Specific Objective 13. Address material deprivation through food, provision of basic assistance to the most disadvantaged.

- Programming and accompanying measures for the provision of food aid and other basic assistance.

Example 25: "ASSISTANCE THROUGH TARJETS AND/OR VALES" (BASICAL STATE PROGRAM)

Indirect mode of provision of aid through a single system of cards and/or vouchers, redeemable for food products and another "basic material assistance", such as hygiene items.

The recognised aid shall have a validity of 12 months, with the possibility of extensions, each for the same period, and within a maximum period of 6 months from its recognition, monitoring shall be carried out of the evolution of the situation of the person and of the accompanying measures received, by the centre which has prescribed the aid or by the entity providing the measures.

BASIC will also include a series of accompanying measures to be taken to receive at least one beneficiary, according to their needs.

These activities are part of a personalised itinerary oriented to social inclusion, after a singularised assessment and social diagnosis of the situations consisting of: providing information on the available social resources and on access to them, referral or reorientation to social, educational and health resources or direct provision of services, programmes and activities aimed at the socio-laboral integration.

1.4. Examples from third-sector social action organisations under the Social Inclusion Programme, 2021–2027

In March 2026 an impact evaluation [5] was published of interventions by Cáritas Española, the Spanish Red Cross, Fundación ONCE and Fundación Secretariado Gitano under the 2014–2020 Operational Programme for Social Inclusion and the Social Economy (POISES), the predecessor of the current Social Inclusion Programme (2021–2027).

These actions were initiated 25 years ago under the Operational Programme to Combat Discrimination (POLCD). Its main objective is the activation, training and access to employment of people away from the labour market, and the four organisations share an intervention methodology based on individualised pathways. Each one adapts the actions it promotes to different vulnerable groups: persons with disabilities, migrant population, Roma population, workers over 45 years of age and people with vulnerability factors such as problems of homelessness or drug dependence.

According to the evaluation, since 2000 these interventions have supported more than 1.3 million people, helped nearly half a million into employment and trained over

400,000 participants. Investment was close to €1,200 million. The ESF contributed 71% and the organisations themselves a further 22%.

The evaluation concludes that this is a unique programme at both Spanish and European level, noting that there is no similar programme aimed at vulnerable groups that reaches a similar volume of beneficiaries and is further developed with this continuity.

In fact, these actions will continue in the current programming period. Here is an example developed by each of these entities.

‘Uno a uno’ (‘One to One’) — Fundación ONCE

Through this programme, the Eleven Foundation grants financial support, co-financed by the ESF+, to third sector entities that submit projects for the direct improvement of the employability of young people with disabilities through theoretical training (a minimum of 160 hours focused on work, technical and cross-cutting skills) combined with practical training in enterprises or productive environments (a minimum of 100 hours tutored).

It began to be implemented under the Structural Funds 2014–2020. In 2025, 48 projects were selected from social entities that trained 416 persons with disabilities, offering a financial envelope of 4,000 euros per participant. Similar figures for projects and beneficiaries are foreseen in the 2026 call. More information is available Fundación ONCE — Uno a uno

5. The impact evaluation is available from Fundación ONCE. Fundación ONCE — impact evaluation

‘Puentes por la igualdad en el empleo’ (‘Bridges to Equality in Employment’) — Spanish Red Cross

It is a project aimed at eliminating barriers of gender, origin and age in the labour market and targets women who face multiple forms of discrimination, such as being migrants, monomarines or experiencing gender-based violence. The ultimate goal is for these women to regain their autonomy, fully exercise their rights and access decent job opportunities on equal terms and reduce the feminisation of present and future poverty.

Two main areas are developed: to offer personalised pathways to improve women's access to decent jobs, to develop professional skills, to diversify into work options, to professionalise care and promote co-responsibility in conciliation; and to collaborate with companies to reduce discrimination, eliminate stereotypes and generate egalitarian and violence-free work environments.

The project has reached 44,000 women, of whom 18,000 found work and 16,000 gained a qualification aligned with labour market needs. Further information is available from the Spanish Red Cross. Spanish Red Cross — Bridges to Equality in Employment

‘Moda re-’ — Cáritas Española

Through this project, Caritas promotes the creation of protected and paid jobs for people at risk of social exclusion within its second-hand clothing stores and textile recycling plants. During the period in the insertion company, participants receive social and technical support so that, after a maximum period of 3 years, they can make the leap with guarantees to the ordinary labour market.

This has resulted in more than 50,000 hours of training and support, 1,600 jobs generated in Spain (more than 55% of them for people at risk or in a situation of exclusion) and a rate of more than 60% transformation of training actions into fixed employment.

In addition, as a sustainable fashion initiative based on a circular economy approach, it promotes textile reuse and recycling projects to mitigate the environmental impact of industry and promote a more environmentally friendly model and efficient use of resources. More than 50,000 kilos of clothing, footwear and accessories are collected per year. Moda re-

‘Programa Calí’ (equality for Roma women) — Fundación Secretariado Gitano

It is a comprehensive programme focused on the social and labour inclusion of Roma women, who often suffer from a multidimensional gap (gender, ethnicity and educational level). It was launched in 2016 and has been renewed until 2029.

It is developed through personalised itineraries where counselors (many of them, Roma women referent) conduct individual and group sessions on personal empowerment, work motivation and digital literacy. In addition, the programme includes a specific line of care and legal advice in situations of ethnic discrimination or hate crimes in access to employment or housing.

The Cali programme works not only with Roma women, but also with the Roma community, institutions and key actors, to involve society as a whole in achieving a more egalitarian society.

Its results include the participation of nearly 5,000 women in social and labour market integration pathways, or the 2,700 awareness-raising activities on gender equality, reconciliation and co-responsibility and prevention of gender-based violence, with 27,000 participants. Fundación Secretariado Gitano — Programa Calí

Chapter 2. Reach, participant profile and outcomes for priority groups in Spain

2.1. Reach of the ESF and socio-demographic profile of participants

The objective of this section is to analyse, on the basis of available empirical evidence, the extent to which actions financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) and, in the current period, by the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) are reaching the target groups identified as priorities by national and European authorities.

These actions are carried out in Spain, as we have seen in chapter 1, through national and regional programmes aimed at promoting employment and labour mobility, social inclusion, the fight against poverty and discrimination, as well as education and training. In this chapter 2 we will assess the extent to which these actions are actually reaching out to people with greater difficulties of access, permanence or progression in the labour market, as well as to those groups exposed to situations of poverty and social exclusion.

We examine two complementary dimensions. The first is the reach of ESF+ interventions over the last decade: the number of recorded participations, the policy areas and the socio-demographic and labour market profiles reached. The second is the effect of participation and what happens on leaving, in terms of activation, training, qualifications, employment and improvements in labour market status. Both dimensions matter: a programme may reach many people without focusing on priority groups, or may target the right population but generate insufficient results.

We will use empirical evidence for two programming periods of the ESF: the period 2014–2020, already concluded, and 2021–2027, still in progress. However, statistical availability means that when ordering data, we present evidence for the period 2014–2023, on the one hand, and for the period 2023–2025, on the other, as envisaged by the European Commission's Cohesion Open Data Platform statistical portal.

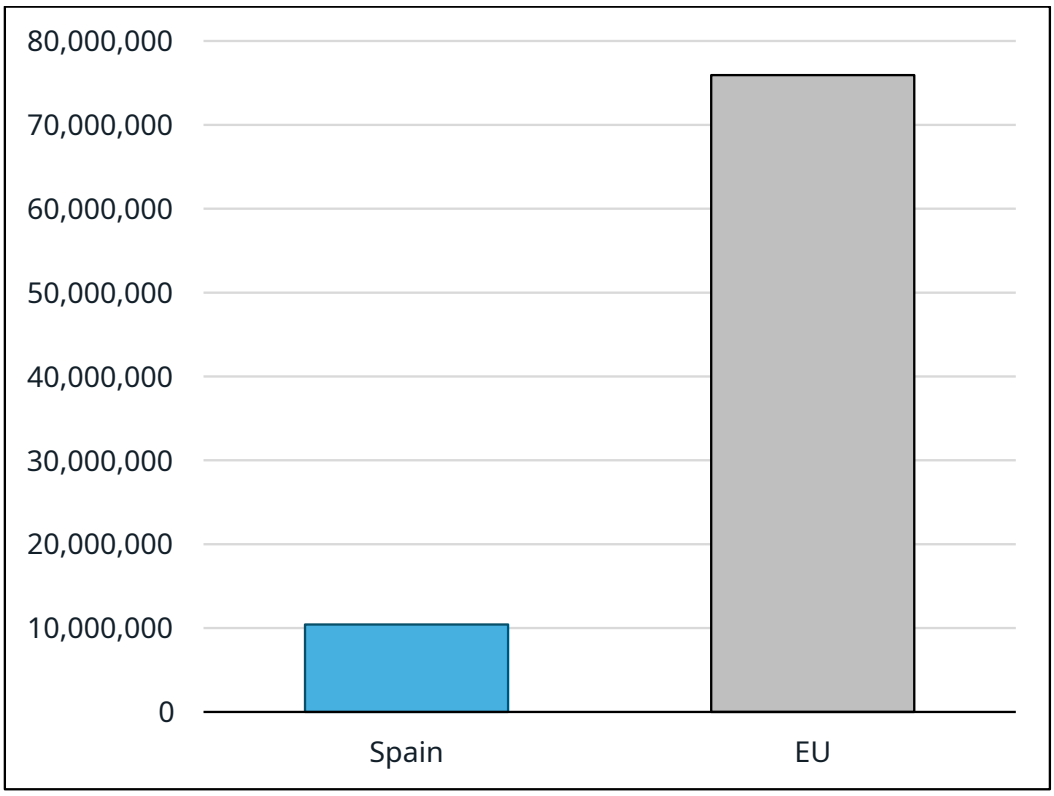
From 2014 to 2023, the ESF and Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) together recorded 10.42 million participations in Spain and 75.93 million EU-wide (Chart 1). Spain accounted for 13.7% of recorded participations, above its 11% share of the EU population. This demonstrates the Fund’s considerable reach in Spain, a prerequisite for effects at scale: without enough participants, even effective interventions would have a limited aggregate impact.

However, participations in ESF+ programmes should not automatically be equated with actual needs coverage; firstly, the number of participations does not necessarily correspond to single persons, since the same person can be counted more than once if he or she participates in different operations or programmes. In addition, the intensity of aid differs significantly between the different ESF+ programmes. On the other hand, beyond the scope of the programme, it is necessary to analyse – as we will do later – whether the people served are in fact those who need such attention most in each of the respective fields, and whether that care is really effective.

In 2023–2025, participation in ESF+ operations, which have incorporated the previously separate ESF and YEI programmes since 2021, continued to reach substantial numbers. Spain recorded 3.4 million participations compared with 16.1 million for the EU (Chart 2). Spain's share thus rose to 21.1%, nearly twice its share of the EU population.

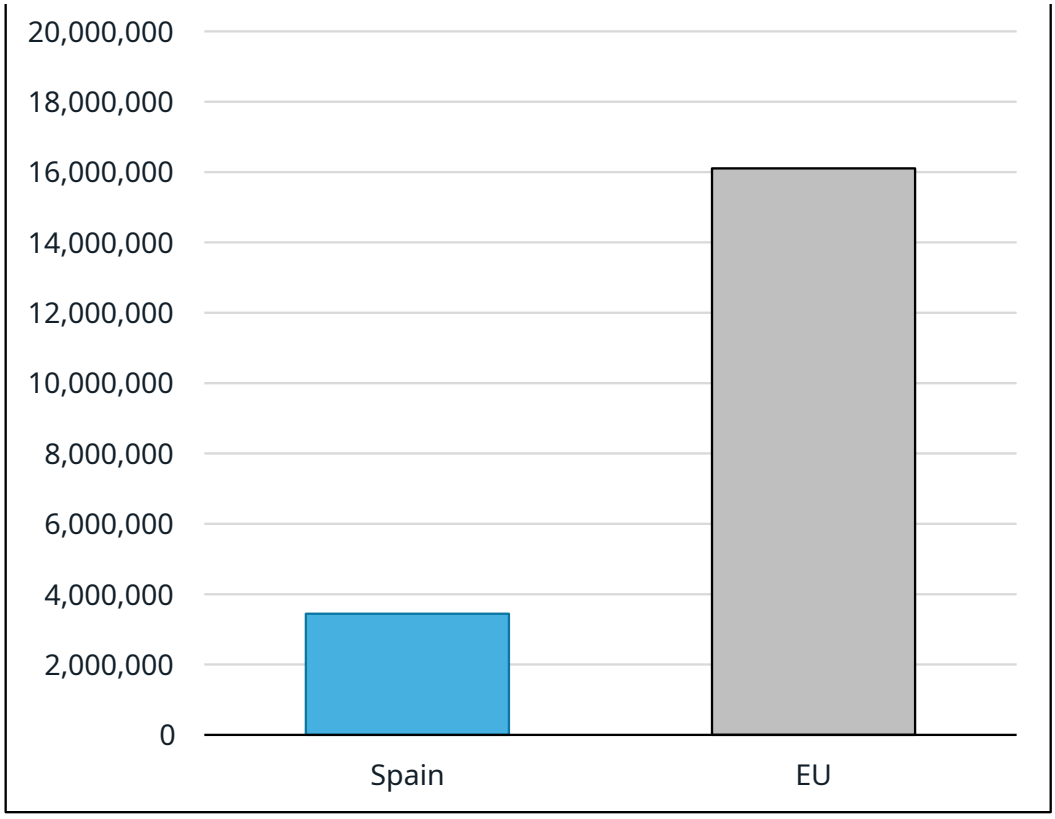
The explanation for this greater advance of participations in Spain in the period 2023–2025, as noted by the mid-term evaluation of the ESF+ carried out by the European Commission (European Commission, 2025), responds to a late start of the ESF+ which has led to uneven progress in the implementation and reporting of indicators between Member States, with some countries – such as Spain – showing faster implementation capacity and reporting before the results obtained. The relative weight jump from the previous period (2014–2020) is very notable and shows a very intense activation of Spanish programmes in the initial phase of implementation. This reading is consistent with the relevance assigned to ESF+ in Spain and with the strong priority given to employment, inclusion and youth objectives. In any case, the results for the period 2023–2025 shown in Chart 2 et seq., although they are very useful in identifying trends, should not yet be read as a definitive balance sheet for the programming period 2021–2027 (European Commission, 2025).

Chart 1. Participation in ESF and Youth Employment Initiative operations, 2014–2023 (cumulative)



Source: European Commission, Cohesion Open Data Platform.

Chart 2. Participation in ESF+ operations, 2023–2025 (cumulative)



Source: European Commission, Cohesion Open Data Platform.

Participation by thematic objective shows a clear focus on labour-market priorities (Charts 3 and 4), consistent with the investment priorities in Chapter 1. In 2014–2023, employment and labour mobility recorded 3.3 million participations (32% of the total) and REACT-EU recorded 2.4 million (23%). Together they accounted for 55% of participations in Spain, considerably above the corresponding EU shares of 31% for employment and labour mobility and 9% for REACT-EU.

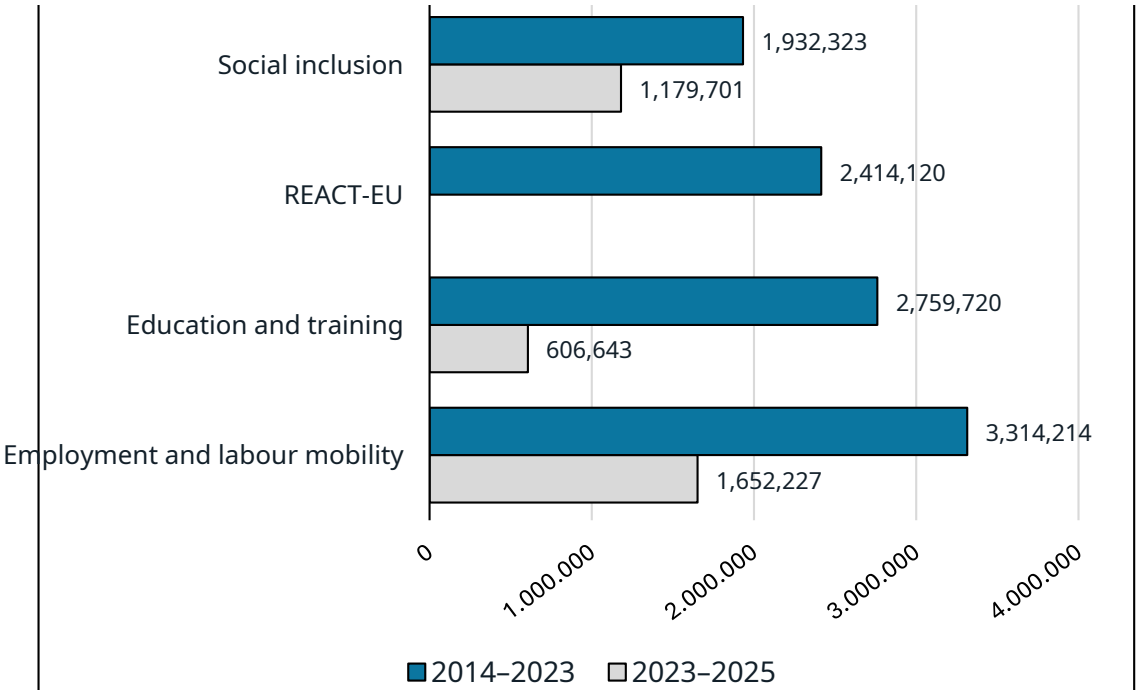
In the case of Spain, the remarkable importance presented by the REACT-EU programme reflects the extraordinary turn of action associated with the decision of national authorities during the pandemic: an important part of the ESF was used to sustain employment, business and essential public services during this crisis.

In addition, the objectives of education and training, on the one hand, and social inclusion, on the other, amounted to 2.7 and 1.9 million additional participations in the period 2014–2023 (26% and 19% of total participations, respectively, as seen in Chart 3 and 4). In the case of Spain, these two objectives have a lower relative weight during these years than in the EU, where they reached 35% and 23% of participations.

The 2023–2025 data show some changes in the composition of ESF+ participation (Charts 3 and 4). Employment and labour mobility remained the leading objective, with 1.65 million participations and a larger share of the total (48%). Social inclusion increased from 19% in 2014–2023 to 34% in 2023–2025. The education and training share fell from 26% to 18%, well below the EU share of 41% in 2023–2025.

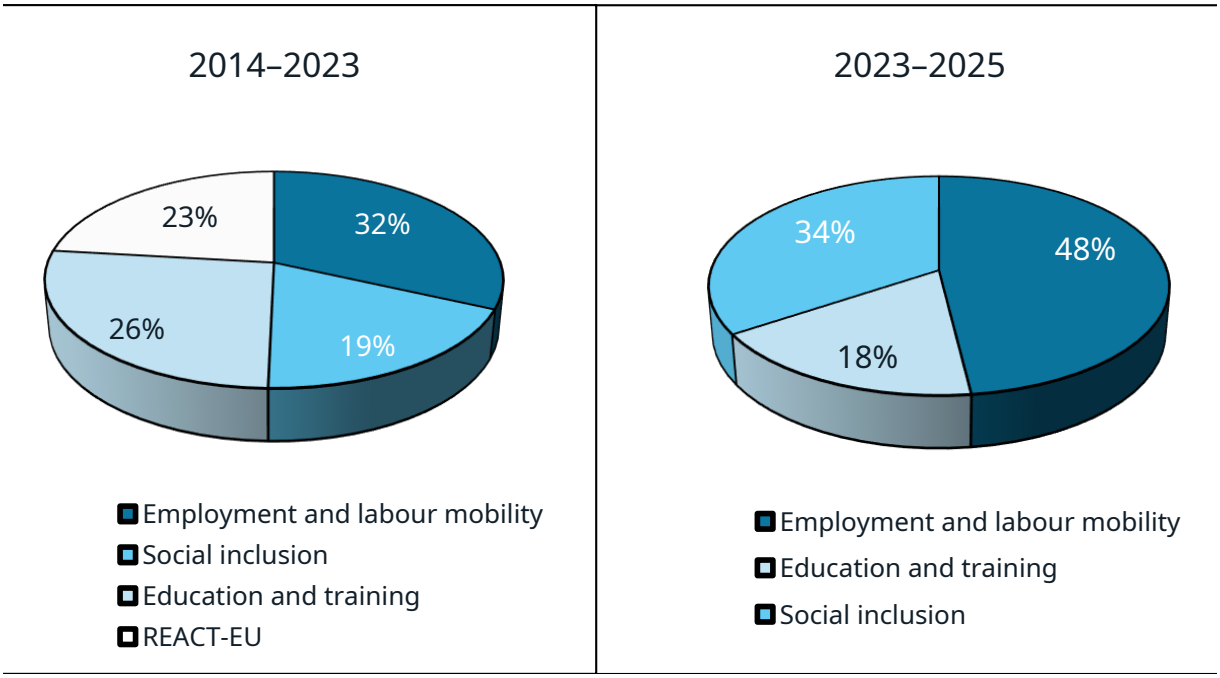
Thus, the most recent period concentrates more participation in measures of employment integration and social inclusion, precisely those areas that, by design, are addressed with greater intensity to the unemployed, inactive or at risk of exclusion. The lower relative weight of education and training actions should not yet be interpreted as reducing the priorities associated with this objective: the current ESF+ cycle is in the phase of deployment and the pace of implementation is different for some objectives or others. In any case, the combined impetus to employment and inclusion objectives suggests that the current strategy of the Spanish national authorities is not limited to improving the skills of the already integrated population, but strongly promotes strategies for activation and support to groups with more labour and social barriers.

Chart 3. Participation in Spain by thematic objective (cumulative)



For 2014–2023, figures combine ESF and YEI operations. For 2023–2025, figures cover ESF+ operations.
Source: European Commission, Cohesion Open Data Platform.

Chart 4. Participation in Spain by thematic objective (% of total)



For 2014–2023, figures combine ESF and YEI operations. For 2023–2025, figures cover ESF+ operations.
Source: European Commission, Cohesion Open Data Platform.

The profile of participants in ESF+ actions provides one of the clearest evidence of targeting and concentrating such programmes on the social groups most in need. As we can see from Chart 5, in 2014–2023, 50% of participants in ESF+ actions were unemployed and 32% were inactive, while only 18% were already employed. These percentages have remained relatively stable in the period 2023–2025, although the weight of unemployed persons has increased to 55%, and that of inactive persons has fallen to 26%.

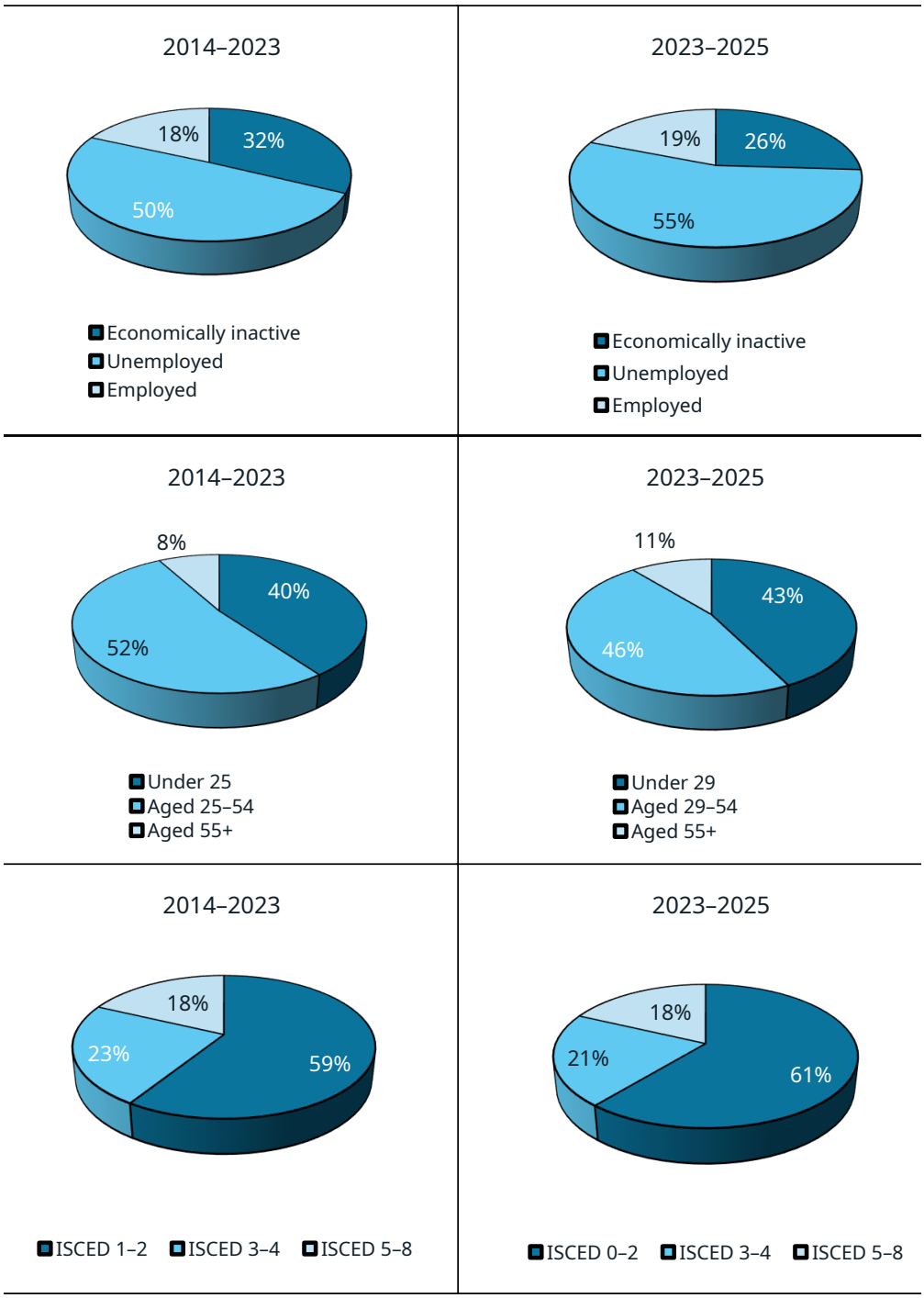
In other words, over the last decade about four out of five participations have concentrated on people who were unemployed when entering ESF+ programmes. This indicates a very clear and focused orientation towards those who need job activation, retraining or support to access the labour market, and not just to already inserted workers.

The analysis of the educational dimension reinforces this conclusion (Chart 5). 59% of the participations in 2014–2023 corresponded to ISCED 1-2 levels, and 61% in 2023–2025 to ISCED 0-2 levels; that is, around 60% of participants are people with a low level of qualification (primary or lower secondary education). This majority presence of the low-skilled population is particularly significant because the European Commission's ex-post evaluation (European Commission, 2026) identifies low levels of education as one of the factors that most raise the risk of persistent unemployment and social exclusion. In fact, 48% of European participations were held by persons with ISCED 2 or lower (European Commission, 2026); Spain therefore shows an even greater concentration of its shares in this low-skilled population group.

In terms of age, young people represent a very notable fraction of the recipients of ESF+ actions, accounting for 40-43% of participants in the last decade (Chart 5). The aggregate

profile of the participants is, in sum, consistent with a strategy aimed at promoting job activation and professional requalification, particularly in the unemployed population, the low-skilled population and among young people, three of the main factors of occupational vulnerability in Spain.

Chart 5. Demographic and educational profile of participants in Spain (% of total)



ISCED 1–2: primary and lower secondary education. ISCED 3–4: upper secondary education and intermediate vocational training in Spain. ISCED 5–8: tertiary education. Source: European Commission, Cohesion Open Data Platform.

Following on from the analysis of the profile of the participants in ESF+ actions, we can see how there is indeed very clear evidence of concentration of these programmes in

the social groups declared to be priorities. Chart 6 and 7 show the intense orientation of ESF+ actions towards groups with strong employment or social disadvantages, or in a situation of exclusion.

Chart 6 shows how, over the last decade, the ESF+ has concentrated much of its actions in groups in a particularly weak position vis-à-vis employment. Between 2014 and 2023 there were 1.07 million participations of long-term unemployed people, 415,909 unemployed persons over 54 years of age and 589,227 young people who neither study nor work, although for the period 2023–2025 we still do not have enough comparable information. In all three cases, these are priority groups, which are key to the ESF+ focus strategy, as they present clear risks of structural disconnection with the world of work, depreciation of skills, discouragement, loss of labour networks and greater likelihood of exclusion.

Chart 7 also shows that between 2014 and 2023 approximately 1.53 million immigrant or minority participations and 1.06 million persons with disabilities were recorded. In 2023–2025 there are already 1.27 million immigrant or minority participations, 525,456 persons with disabilities, 111,950 homeless persons and 338,564 in rural areas.

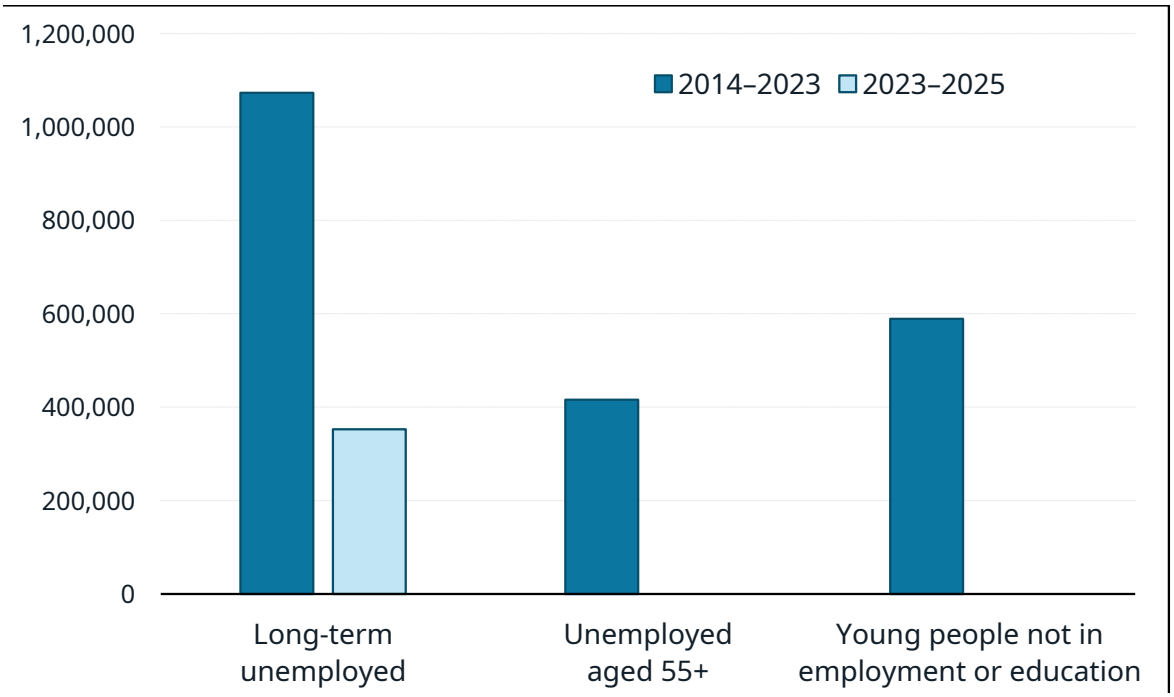
As can also be seen, during the last period, the number of actions taken by some of these social groups has increased considerably: in just three years a migrant population equivalent to more than 80% of the total recorded in the previous period has already been reached, rural participations are already similar to the previous accumulation, and those of homeless people are much higher.

These data are in line with the mid-term evaluation of the ESF+ (European Commission, 2025), which identifies Spain among the countries with the largest presence of participants with foreign origin and third-country nationals. They also point to a strengthening of the severe exclusion component: the increase in the category of homeless persons is related to the integration into the ESF+ of the instruments of inclusion and material deprivation, which previously operated more separately, as well as changes in coverage and registration.

Finally, with regard to the gender distribution (Chart 8), we can see that this is very balanced. In all dimensions (employment and labour mobility, education and training, social inclusion, and REACT-EU) we find a participation of around 50%, with a global balance sheet in which there is a slight female majority, where women represent about 51% of the people served.

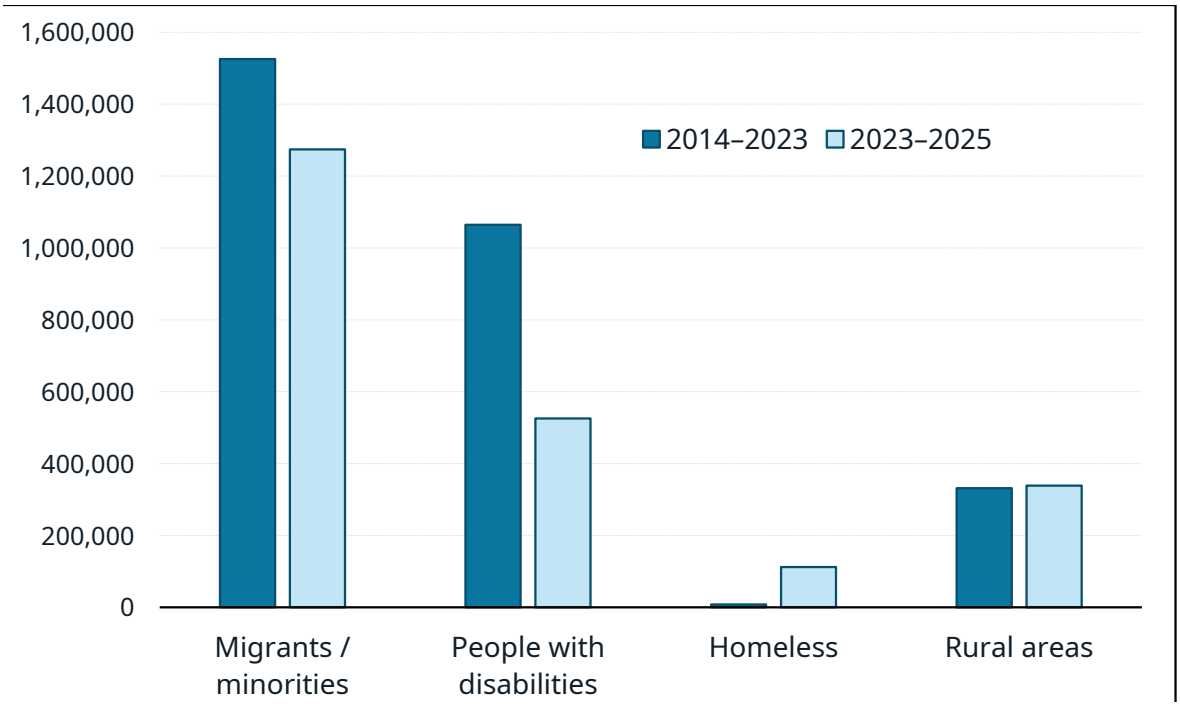
This parity of access is positive, although it is not enough to say that the ESF+ corrects gender inequalities in the labour market. Spain has maintained higher female than male unemployment rates over the last decade, so a policy strictly proportional to the population could be insufficient to compensate for the initial disadvantage. It is therefore important that the female presence be slightly higher in terms of employment and labour mobility, as well as in terms of social inclusion; in any case, Chart 8 suggests that there is no general barrier to women's access to the ESF+.

Chart 6. Participation in Spain by labour-market characteristics (cumulative)



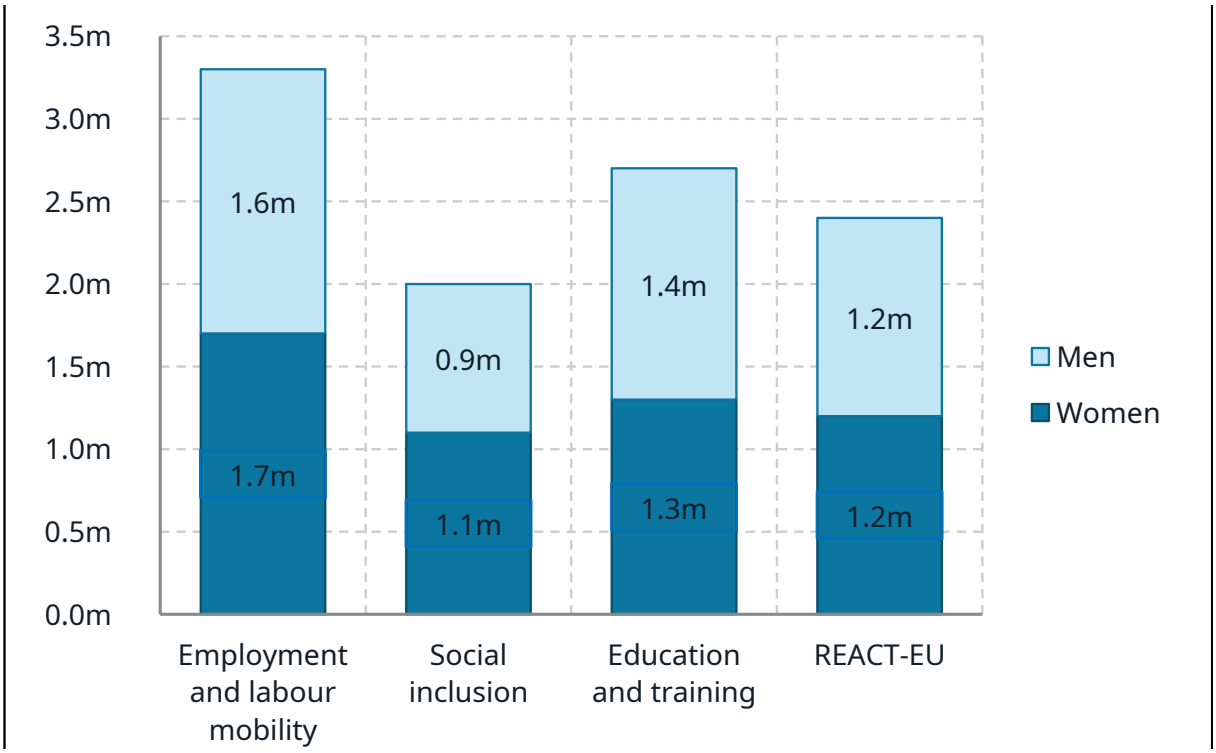
For 2014–2023, figures combine ESF and YEI operations. Source: European Commission, Cohesion Open Data Platform.

Chart 7. Participation in Spain by social characteristics (cumulative)



For 2014–2023, figures combine ESF and YEI operations. Source: European Commission, Cohesion Open Data Platform.

Chart 8. Participation in Spain by gender and thematic objective, 2014–2023 (cumulative)



For 2014–2023, figures combine ESF and YEI operations. Source: European Commission, Cohesion Open Data Platform.

2.2. Outcomes and impacts for ESF+ participants

In order to analyse the impact and effectiveness of ESF+ actions, it is essential to review not only the social and labour profile of the beneficiaries, but also to observe the aggregate indicators of success of these programmes. This will make it possible to assess the extent to which the actions financed are reaching the groups most in need and, moreover, the extent to which these actions improve the position of these groups in the labour market and in society.

The immediate results of ESF+ actions (Chart 9 to 11) show that the participation of beneficiaries is not limited to passive reception of services. In the period 2014–2023, just over 3.14 million beneficiaries obtained a qualification that improved their qualifications, and 2.55 million were in employment at the end of the performance (a very relevant fact if we take into account, as we saw in Chart 5, that more than 80% of the recipients of ESF+ actions were people either unemployed or inactive). In addition, 363,519 inactive participants went on to seek employment at the end of their participation in ESF+ programmes, and 455,756 were either studying or training at the end of those actions.

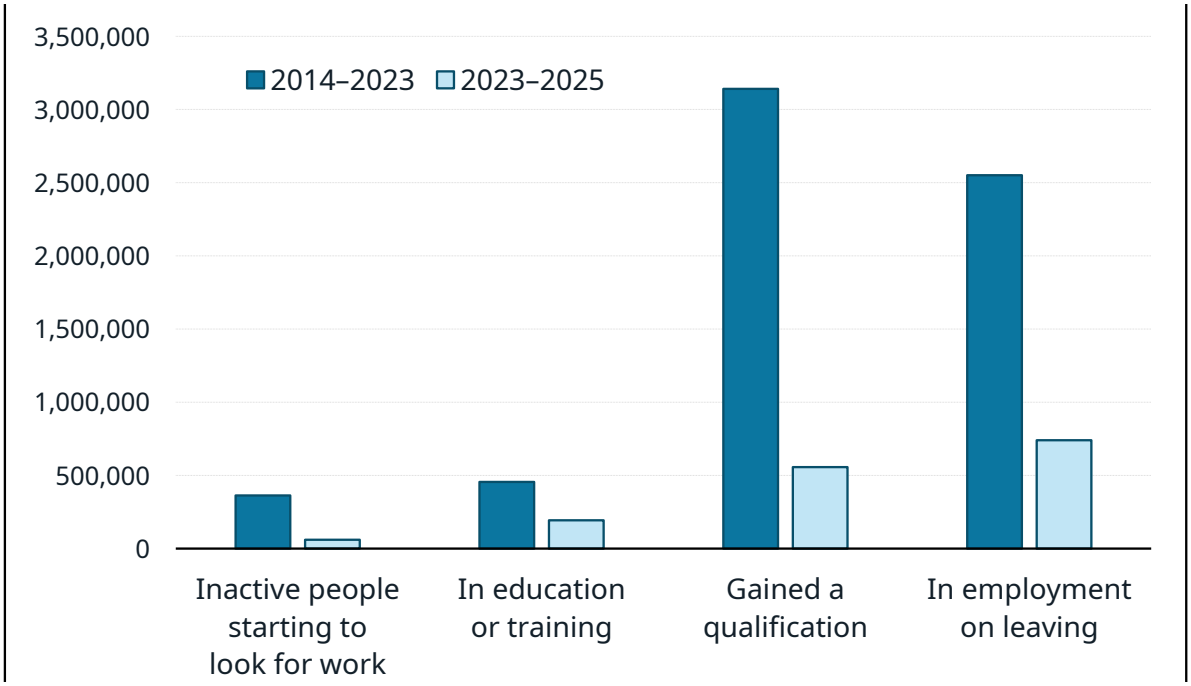
In the period 2023–2025 there are already 60,157 transitions from inactivity to job search, 193,867 participants studying or training at the end of the programme, 556,090 with a new qualification and 740,435 with employment at the end.

The scale of the new qualifications obtained in the last decade in Spain is consistent with the strong weight of vocational training, retraining and educational actions within the ESF+. In turn, the more than 3 million jobs achieved (or maintained) at the end of

participation in the programmes are a very important sign of job performance, although they should not be interpreted as jobs created causally by the Fund: some of these transitions would surely also have occurred without ESF+ intervention.

The counterfactual evidence of a recent research by the Joint Research Centre (2026), linked to the European Commission, helps to resolve this limitation: a meta-analysis, based on 95 impact assessments for all EU countries, estimates that, on average, ESF and YEI interventions increase the likelihood of finding employment by participants in these programmes by 6.5 percentage points, compared with control groups not participating in them. The effect in any case is certainly heterogeneous: employment subsidies and financial aid have much greater average effects, while public employment programmes yield poorer results on average; traineeships, vocational training and accompaniment also show positive effects. This heterogeneity implies that the next step in the evaluation and design of these programmes should not only be to expand the number of participants, but also to concentrate resources on those combinations of instruments that work best for each group. For social groups facing multiple barriers, the Commission's case studies identify as best practices individualised diagnoses, personalised support, cooperation with specialised social organisations and the territorial adaptation of measures.

Chart 9. Education and employment outcomes of ESF+ participants in Spain (number of participants)

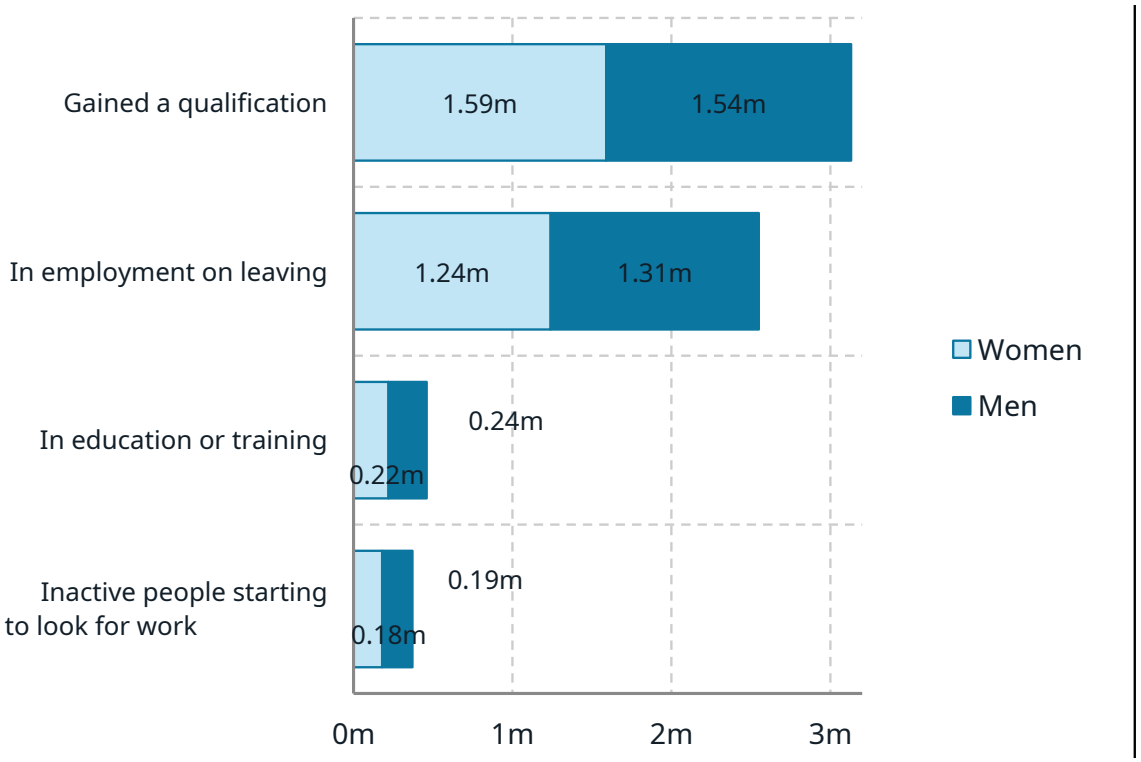


For 2014–2023, figures combine ESF and YEI operations. Source: European Commission, Cohesion Open Data Platform.

The gender breakdown of the previous results, for the period 2014–2023 (Chart 10), shows small differences in terms of obtaining degrees, obtaining (or retaining) employment, as well as inactive persons who go on to seek employment and those who continue to be trained at the end of the interventions. In all these cases, women account for approximately half of the cases, showing relatively balanced access to the

interventions. In any case, and as noted above, these data do not allow us to conclude that there is substantive equality (insofar as the figures are absolute and are not standardised by the number of women and men who participated in each type of measure and, moreover, do not collect wages, hours, temporaryities or occupational quality).

Chart 10. Education and employment outcomes by gender in Spain, 2014–2023 (million participants)



For 2014–2023, figures combine ESF and YEI operations. Source: European Commission, Cohesion Open Data Platform.

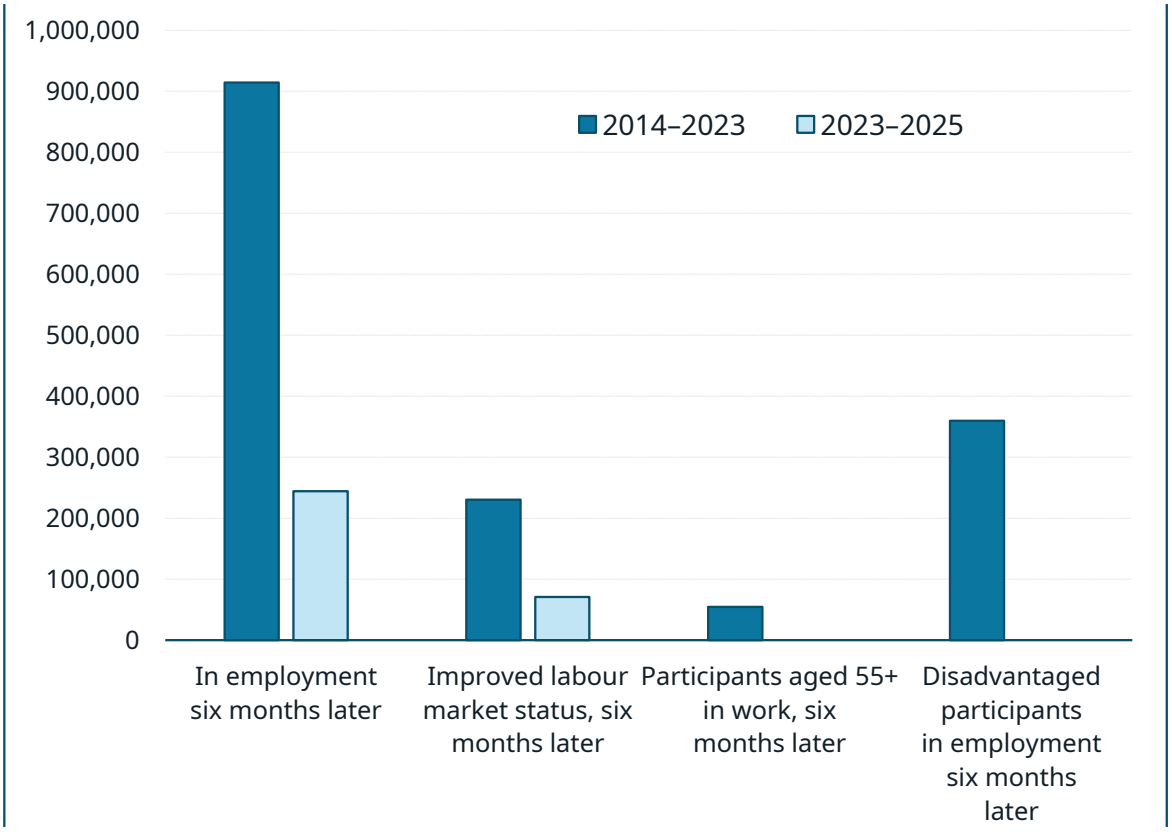
Outcomes six months after leaving (Chart 11) are particularly useful for assessing the persistence of improvements associated with participation. For 2014–2023, 914,190 participants were recorded in employment six months after leaving, 230,426 had improved their labour market status, 54,549 people aged over 54 were in employment and 359,621 disadvantaged participants had retained or entered employment.

For the period from 2023 to 2025, data are still very limited, logically, with 244,288 participants having been reported so far at six months, and 70,884 with a better employment situation; comparable data are not yet shown for the two remaining subgroups.

The recent ex-post evaluation by the European Union (European Commission, 2026) stresses that, in the case of Spain, the number of participants who obtain a qualification at the end of their participation in ESF+ programmes, or those who have a job, is much higher than the number of participants who obtain positive work results 6 months after their participation in the Fund's actions (as we can see when comparing Chart 9 and 11). However, the Commission itself expressly warns that part of this difference may be due to the lack of final data on people monitoring (by understatement), once they leave ESF+

programmes. Therefore, both indicators should not be mechanically compared. The main message that emerges from this empirical evidence is another: there is a very significant number of people – more than a million people in Spain – who enjoy positive and persistent work results after the completion of their participation in ESF+ actions.

Chart 11. Employment outcomes in Spain six months after leaving (number of participants)

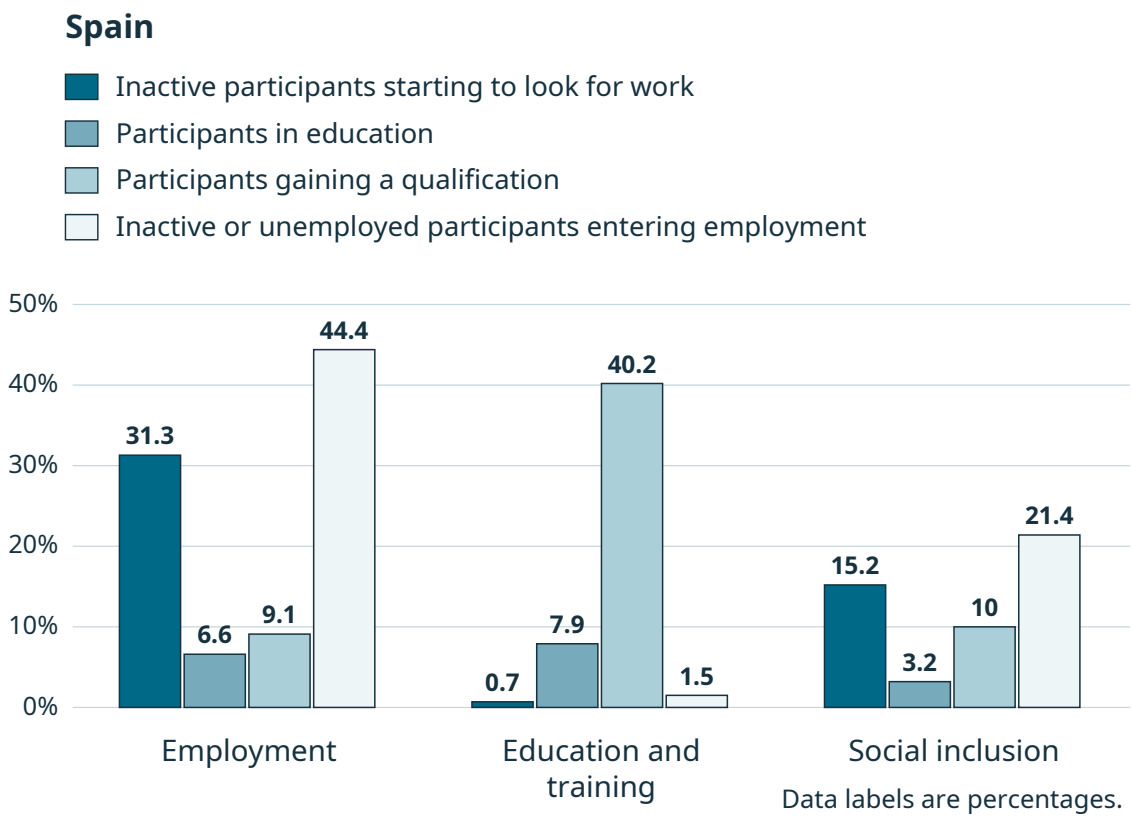


For 2014–2023, figures combine ESF and YEI operations. Source: European Commission, Cohesion Open Data Platform.

When analysing the impact and effectiveness of ESF+ actions, it is essential to assess not only the positive results – in aggregate terms – on people benefiting from ESF+ actions, as the above graphs do, but also the so-called success rates. These refer to the positive results in relation to the total population participating in the respective programmes, thus assessing the capacity and efficiency of these actions to achieve the objectives set and thus strengthen the employment position and inclusion of the recipients.

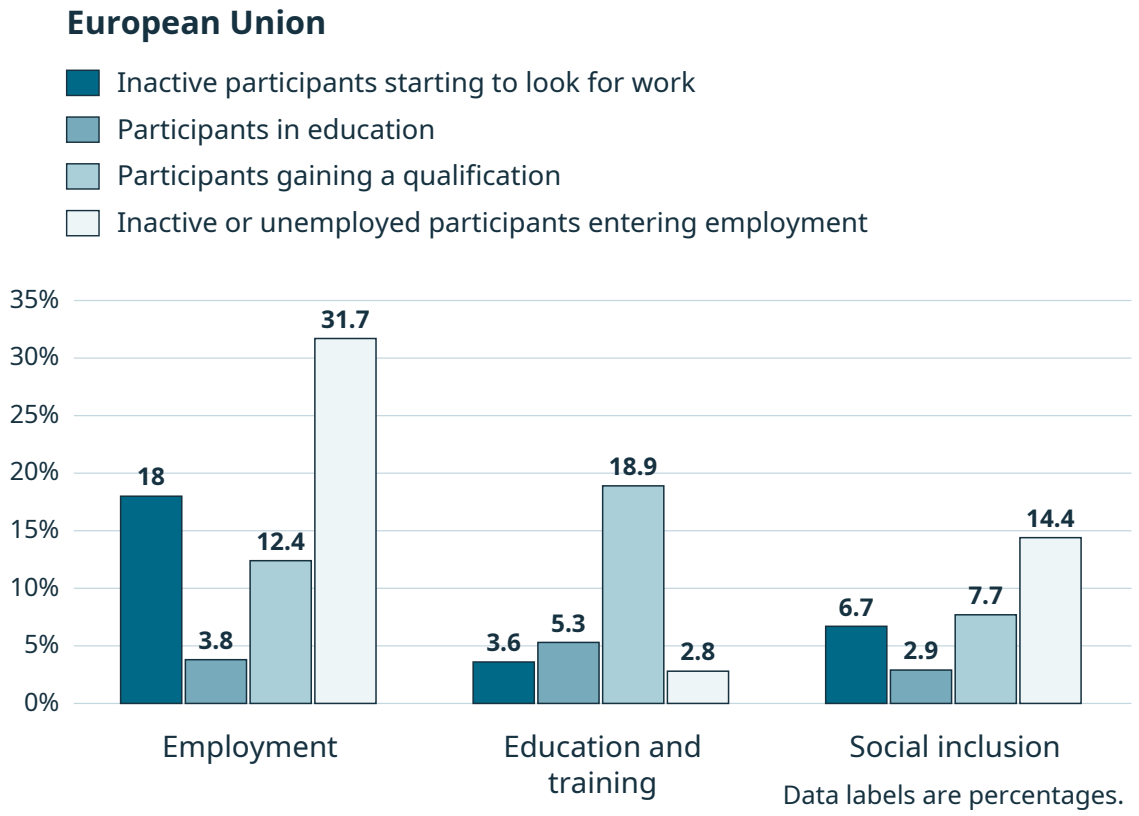
Success rates by specific policy area (Chart 12) allow programme performance to be assessed. In Spain in 2023–2025, 44.4% of economically inactive or unemployed participants in employment programmes entered employment, and 31.3% of economically inactive participants started looking for work. In education programmes, 40.2% gained a qualification. In social inclusion programmes, the chart shows two distinct outcomes: 15.2% of economically inactive participants started looking for work, and 21.4% of economically inactive or unemployed participants entered employment.

Chart 12. Outcomes of ESF+ participants by policy area, 2023–2025 (success rates) — Spain



Source: European Commission, Cohesion Open Data Platform.

Chart 12. Outcomes of ESF+ participants by policy area, 2023–2025 (success rates) — EU



Source: European Commission, Cohesion Open Data Platform.

These are undoubtedly highly positive results which, moreover, are clearly above the average levels of the EU, as we can see in Chart 12: success rates per target are significantly higher in Spain for the main programmes and objectives. Thus, for example, while only 18.9% of people participating in training programmes receive a degree in the EU, this percentage exceeds 40% in the Spanish case, as mentioned above.

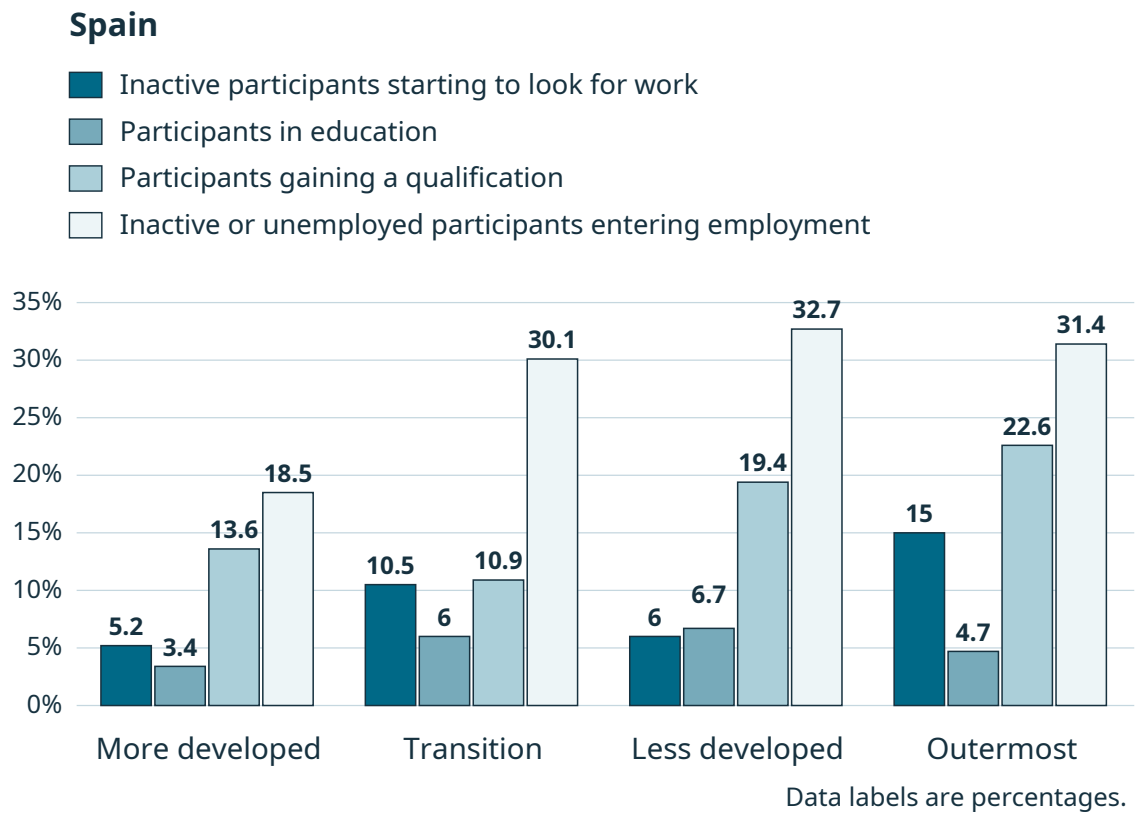
As expected, the results reflect a division of roles across programmes. Employment interventions are particularly effective in helping people become active in the labour market and enter employment. Education interventions lead to new qualifications, while social inclusion interventions combine progress in training with a substantial rate of entry into employment. The alignment of objectives and results also indicates effective and efficient delivery.

Success rates must also be examined by category of region, as both social and territorial cohesion are objectives of the ESF+. In Spain, rates are generally higher in transition regions and particularly in less developed regions (Chart 13). As a share of all people who participated in any ESF+ programme in each region category in 2023–2025, transitions from inactivity or unemployment into employment represented 18.5% in more developed regions, 30.1% in transition regions and 32.7% in less developed regions. Qualification rates similarly reflect the territorial cohesion objective. They were 13.6% in more developed regions, 10.9% in transition regions, 19.4% in less developed regions and 22.6% in outermost regions.

As we can see, the territorial breakdown of beneficiaries' success rates shows a pattern consistent with the cohesion logic of the ESF+. This pattern suggests that the territorial dimension is not only acting as a criterion for financial distribution, but that actions may be generating relevant results precisely in territories where employment and skills difficulties are greatest. The mid-term evaluation of the ESF+ (European Commission, 2025) highlights that the Spanish model –with autonomous communities acting as intermediate bodies and with a significant degree of autonomy – allows interventions to be adapted to regional needs, including rural areas.

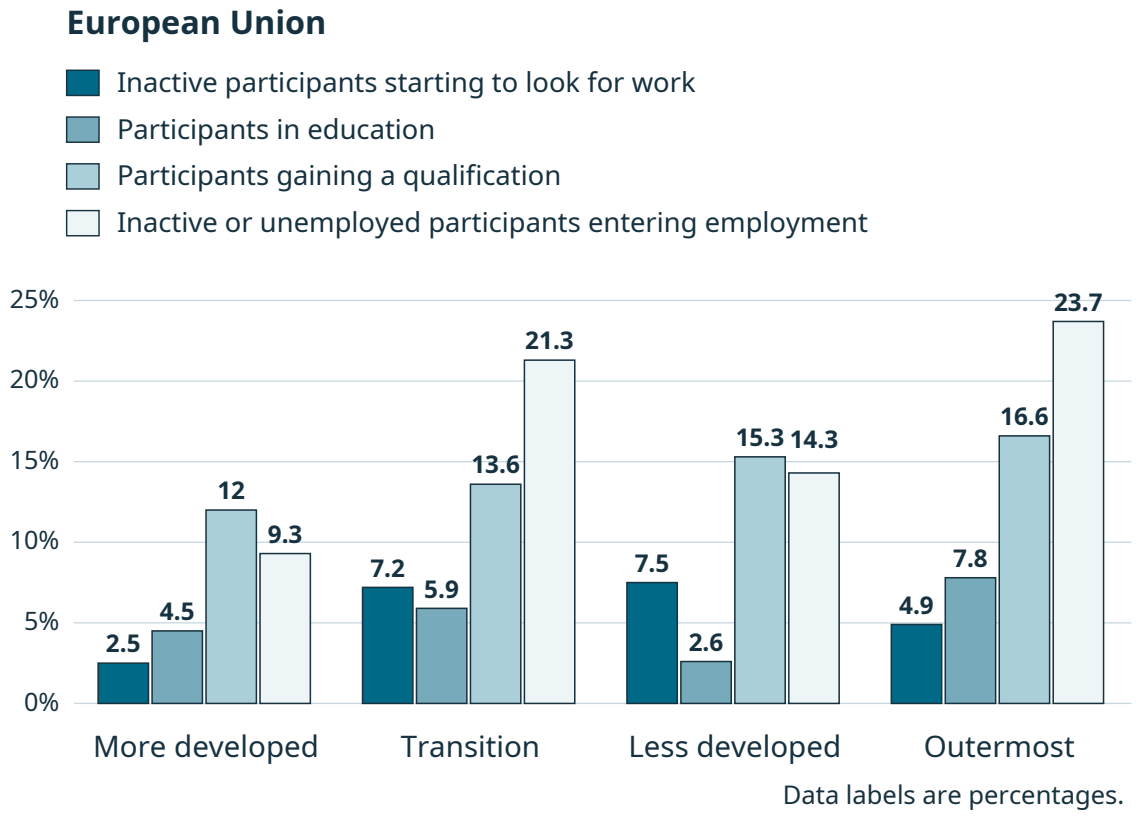
In any case, it is necessary to avoid attributing existing differences exclusively to the quality of regional management: success rates also depend on the composition of participants in ESF+ programmes that exist in each territory, the type of operations and the implementation phase. These data should therefore be read as evidence of territorial scope and promising cohesion results, but not as a ranking indicating unequal management capacity among autonomous communities.

Chart 13. Outcomes of ESF+ participants by category of region, 2023–2025 (success rates) — Spain



Source: European Commission, Cohesion Open Data Platform.

Chart 13. Outcomes of ESF+ participants by category of region, 2023–2025 (success rates) — EU



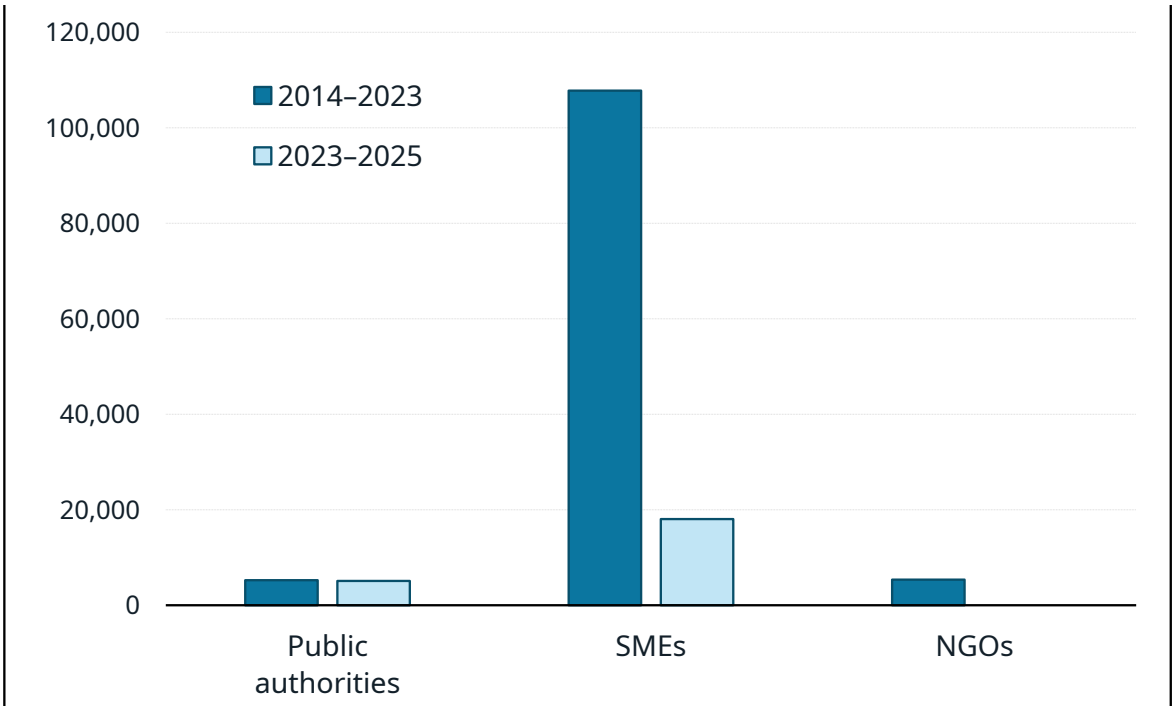
Source: European Commission, Cohesion Open Data Platform.

An additional issue that we can also see in Chart 13 is that, again, the success rates that the various ESF+ programmes present in Spain are, in general terms, significantly higher than the EU average for the period 2023–2025. Thus, the percentage of inactive or unemployed people who, in each of the regions, become employed is significantly higher in Spain – being more than double in the case of the less developed regions (32.7% vs. 14.3%). The percentage of people who, in the less developed regions, obtain a degree (19.4% in Spain vs. 15.3% in the EU) is also higher.

Finally, in Chart 14 we broaden the analytical focus from people to organisations that make it possible to implement the different ESF+ programmes. In the period 2014–2023 5,250 public administrations, 107,768 SMEs and 5,374 NGOs participated or were supported. In 2023–2025, we already have a statistical record of the participation of 5,080 administrations and 18,068 SMEs, although there is still no comparable data from NGOs.

The high number of SMEs in the period 2014–2023 reflects the importance of incentives for recruitment, training in enterprises, practices and other measures in which the company acts as a space for learning and job insertion. The volume of administrations, on the other hand, demonstrates the important institutional dimension and the strong territorial capillarity of the Fund.

Chart 14. Public authorities, enterprises and civil society organisations reached in Spain



For 2014–2023, figures combine ESF and YEI operations. Source: European Commission, Cohesion Open Data Platform.

The significant involvement of NGOs is particularly relevant for reaching social groups that are sometimes far removed from education systems and the labour market. In fact, the ex-post evaluation (European Commission, 2026) identifies as a success factor work with experienced social entities that know vulnerable groups, can engage in proximity and offer support to these groups for their proper integration into ESF+ programmes. For example, in Spain, programmes such as Roma economics6 or other actions developed by social entities – such as those seen in chapter 1 – show that the intermediation of specialised organisations can reduce access barriers, combat stigma and encourage participation.

In terms of public policies, the ESF+ functions as a network: its ability to reach vulnerable people, excluded or with job and training shortages depends not only on the budget, but also on the density and experience of public services, businesses and social entities that turn resources into concrete pathways.

2.3. Overall assessment: does the ESF+ reach priority groups?

In the light of the empirical evidence reviewed in the graphs of this chapter 2, we can affirm two substantive conclusions. First, ESF+ actions in Spain are reaching, in general terms, a large part of the groups with the greatest disadvantages in the labour market and in society. In addition, and secondly, we can also state that these measures have a high degree of efficiency, insofar as a very significant percentage of the beneficiaries in ESF+ programmes end these programmes with positive results in terms of their integration into the labour market, their training and qualification, or their social inclusion.

In terms of scope and immediate effectiveness, Spain has particularly high results. By the end of 2022 some €10,480 million of expenditure had already been declared and approximately 4.96 million participations had registered some positive result when they left the operation, equivalent to 56% of the participations (European Commission, 2026). This is a clearly higher rate than the European average, which stood at approximately 35%. The concept of "positive outcome" is, in any case, broad: it includes entry into employment, obtaining a qualification, moving to an education or training situation or, in the case of inactive people, starting to look for work. The declared cost per immediate positive result was €2,115 in Spain, relatively low compared to many Member States.

The positive results are evident not only in the number of participations, but also in their composition. Around four fifths were recorded for unemployed or economically inactive people; six in ten participants had low educational attainment, and young people accounted for four in ten participations. Large numbers of participants were also recorded among the long-term unemployed, migrants and people belonging to minorities, people with disabilities and residents of rural areas. This targeting is consistent with the Fund's explicit priorities.

6. Spain's ACCEDER programme reached around 11% of the country's Roma population between 2000 and 2019. A total of 82,091 people completed personalised pathways into employment and 40.6% found work or became self-employed. The average cost was around €2,000 per participant, approximately one third of the benchmark used by public authorities.

The evidence also suggests that this focus is not limited to entry into programmes. Immediate results show millions of qualifications and transitions to employment in the period 2014–2023, and the ESF+ already accumulates substantial results in 2023–2025. The success rates per objective are particularly revealing: Spain exceeds the European averages for transition from inactivity and unemployment to employment, and has a very high rate of obtaining educational qualifications. The case of young Spaniards is one example: within the Youth Employment Initiative, 50% of the unemployed and young people who neither studied nor worked at the start of their participation in this programme were working or studying at the end of the intervention, and 31% had a positive result six months later (European Commission, 2026).

The territorial results also show particularly high rates of integration in transition, less developed and outermost regions, which is in line with the Fund's redistributive and territorial cohesion function.

In this way, the revised evidence clearly shows the importance of ESF+ programmes for Spain: it reaches millions of people, is properly targeted at groups with real labour and social needs, and has highly positive success rates, notably above the EU average. Thus, and in line with the various evaluations of the European Commission (European Commission, 2025 and 2026), we can say that the ESF and the YEI, first, and the ESF+, then, are globally effective programmes to reach the target groups (unemployed, low-skilled people, young people, migrant population and other vulnerable groups), investment priorities often exceed participation targets and success rates are certainly positive.

These overall positive results must, however, be nuanced on at least three levels. First, reaching a particular social collective with broad scope does not amount to adequately covering all the population in need. For example, the European Commission, 2026) identifies persistent difficulties in involving some people with disabilities (particularly people with intellectual disabilities), older workers, young people who neither study nor work and are more disconnected, as well as certain ethnic groups (the most vulnerable Roma population). Second, the aggregate participation figures do not measure the intensity and quality of support. The groups most remote from employment often need longer and more expensive routes, with social accompaniment, training, conciliation, health, housing or other supports, so that a lower rate of immediate exit to employment in these groups does not necessarily imply less effectiveness. Third, the initial phase of the ESF+ presents problems of comparability and data between countries; therefore, empirical evidence for the period 2023–2025 is still to be considered provisional.

The main institutional gaps are located not so much in the overall design of priorities and programmes, as in the last mile of these policies: better identifying and attracting those who are more disconnected from services, adapting routes to the most complex needs, ensuring that job placement is stable and of quality, and improving monitoring in the medium term. Further strengthening the success of these programmes requires maintaining a sufficient scale to influence the major structural problems of the Spanish labour market and, at the same time, increasing the intensity and personalisation of support so that the most difficult groups to achieve are not diluted within the good aggregate results.

Chapter 3. Macroeconomic impact of the ESF+ in Spain, 2021–2027

This chapter assesses the macroeconomic impact of ESF+-funded actions over the period 2021–2027, which have been presented and analysed in the two previous chapters. To assess this impact, we use an input–output (I-O) model whose input data will be such investments and on their exit we will obtain the impacts they have in terms of economic activity, employment and public revenue7.

The main idea on which our estimate is built is that the expenditure channelled through the ESF+ represents an increase in demand for some sectors of the economy (e.g., current costs arising from the organisation of courses needed to improve the training of unemployed people; expenditure on gross capital formation, to improve the efficiency of public employment services; payment of wages to counsellors; or transfers to beneficiaries to alleviate material shortage problems. This expenditure financed by the ESF+ is called autonomous demand and will result in a corresponding increase in production and employment.

Indeed, the economic system has a number of resources (work, capital, finance, infrastructure...) that are mobilised to produce goods and services to meet this new autonomous demand. When the resources from the ESF+ are spent, a signal is sent for the economic system to produce the goods demanded. Consequently, in the approach adopted here, the macroeconomic impact of the ESF+ is measured by the value of output that depends on expenditure financed from ESF+ resources.

It should be borne in mind that this effect is in fact the cumulative result of three "rounds" of expenditure, production and income generation. In a first round, the Spanish economic system must produce the goods demanded by different agents from ESF+ investments. This initial reaction will be called "direct effect". This includes educational services (in the case of training), public employment services, capital goods (to improve employment services), and goods and services bought by transfer agents and wages. It should be noted here that we will only take into account goods produced in Spain and not imported goods.

In a second round of effects, the system must produce the intermediate inputs needed to obtain those final goods (energy, semi-processed products, raw materials), which constitutes the "indirect effect".

In turn, during the production of final goods and inputs directly or indirectly necessary for their acquisition, income is generated that remunerates the productive factors involved in such production (benefits and wages, as well as indirect taxes), which in turn are spent on the purchase of consumer goods (the so-called induced consumption). Also, as the volume of final product expands, an increase in the volume of productive capacity (fixed capital stock) may be required. The investment needed to increase the volume of fixed capital stock is called induced investment. The sum of induced consumption and investment is called "induced effect".

7. The methodology is described in the Appendix.

In short, we measure the macroeconomic impact of ESF+-funded actions over the period 2021–2027 by the value of production corresponding to the sum of direct, indirect and induced effects. Since each euro spent (first round) results in a more than proportional increase in output (taking into account indirect and induced effects), the relationship between initial investment in the ESF+ and the total expansion of the economy that occurs is called “multiplier”. We obtain this information at a disaggregated level (64 sectors, although here we will offer the most aggregated information, to 15 sectors).

In addition to estimating the macroeconomic impact of the ESF+ by measuring changes in the value of production, in this chapter we also have the effect of these investment programmes on two other dimensions. First, we estimate the impact of the ESF+ on the income generated (value added). Second, we calculate the effect of the ESF+ on the additional employment generated in the economy to meet the new demand.

Another relevant additional result that we obtain from our estimate is the fiscal return that public administrations get from the initial ESF+ expenditure. That is, what amount of money returns to the public sector in the form of social contributions and taxes derived from the economic activity that puts into operation the autonomous expenditure associated with the ESF+.

It is important to note that initial autonomous demand can be channelled through three different channels, depending on the type of measure being implemented. On the one hand, some of the measures financed by the ESF+ result in increased demand for services provided by private sector companies. For example, training for unemployed persons employed by private entities would be included here; second, other measures will lead to the provision of services directly by the public sector. Finally, a third group of measures involves direct transfer to households (e.g. to alleviate material deficiency), which are expected to be used for consumption expenditure (in a variable proportion, depending on the type of measure); each of these types of expenditure is treated differently in the model, as explained in the methodological annex. For example, in the case of ESF+ expenditure which results in an increase in the production of public goods, it is necessary to calculate both their value and the expenditure derived from the salaries of public employees involved in producing them.

These differences require total ESF+ investment to be allocated to the three expenditure categories. The allocation by specific objective and intervention type was set out in Table 6. Table 7 shows the allocation across the 13 specific objectives [8].

8. Technical assistance chiefly covers internal and external staff costs of the organisations that manage these programmes. Payments from the European Commission for technical assistance are made only to the managing authority and intermediary bodies, whether public or private. The multiplier is estimated by distributing these amounts proportionally across the first two expenditure categories, not treating them as transfers, and allocating them to sector 45 (legal, accounting and management consultancy services).

The analysis indicates that 57.1% of ESF+-financed autonomous investment is met by goods and services produced directly by the public sector. A further 22.8% can be treated as income transfers to the private sector, and 20.2% as demand met directly by

private-sector production. These rounded percentages refer only to the first round of effects (the direct effect). Most indirect and induced effects are met by the private sector.

Table 7. ESF+ investment by type of autonomous demand (€ million and %)

Specific objective	Private sector	Public sector	Transfers	Total
SO1	1,112	1,471	3,022	5,605
SO2	0	41	0	41
SO3	0	133	0	133
SO4	321	433	0	754
SO5	1,055	68	2	1,125
SO6	10	1,985	43	2,039
SO7	0	125	0	125
SO8	496	3,004	0	3,500
SO9	0	173	0	173
SO10	0	128	0	128
SO11	0	433	34	466
SO12	13	918	3	933
SO13	0	0	598	598
Technical assistance	273	363	0	636
Total (€ million)	**3,280**	**9,275**	**3,702**	**16,256**
Total (%)	**20.2%**	**57.1%**	**22.8%**	**100%**

Source: Authors' calculations.

In addition to this initial decision, since the model is sectorally disaggregated, it is also necessary to allocate these initial investments to the different productive branches. Once this allocation is made, the model allows for the distribution of indirect and induced increases in production among the different sectors according to the productive connections that derive from the input–output table of the Spanish economy. The distribution of household consumption expenditure is carried out in a similar way, following the connections that are derived from the input–output table in Spain. Table 8 presents the allocation that we have made:

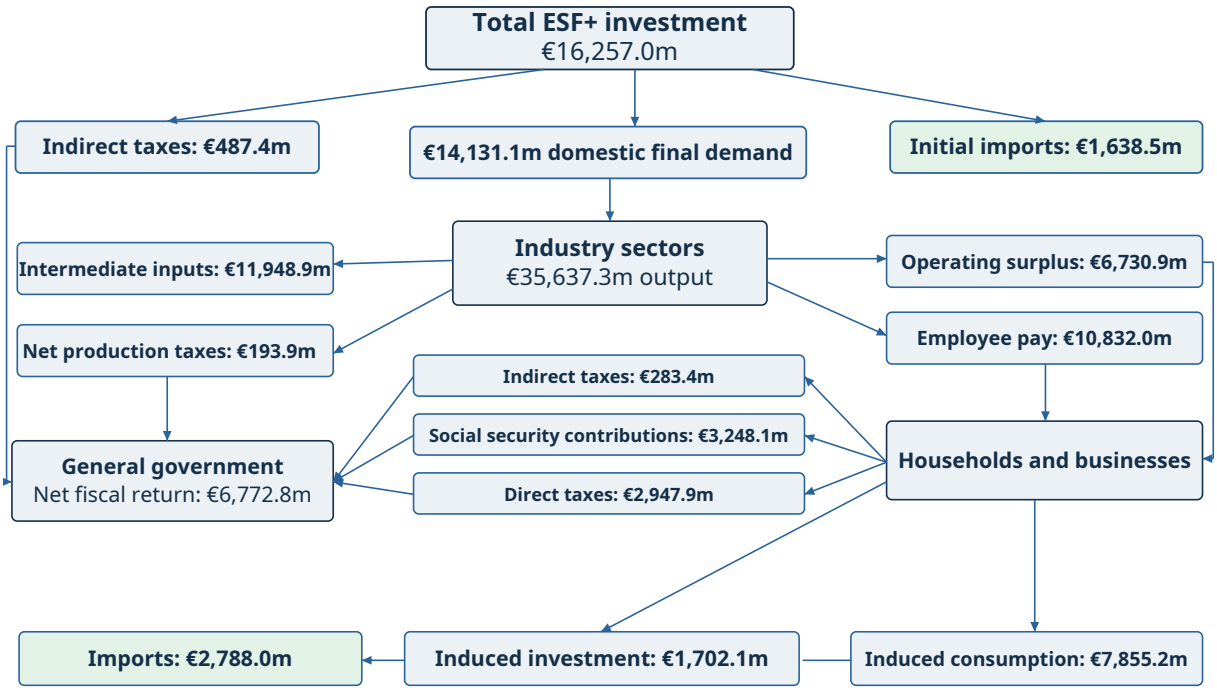
Table 8. ESF+ investment by sector (€ million)

Input–output sector	Total ESF+	Employment	Education	Social inclusion	Material deprivation	Technical assistance
45. Legal, accounting and management consultancy services	1,076.40	803.25	0.00	0.00	0.00	273.07
51. Employment services	8,705.45	5,380.80	256.24	3,068.41	0.00	0.00
54. Public administration, defence and compulsory social security	399.73	0.00	23.57	13.31	0.00	362.74
55. Education services	3,435.62	228.62	2,954.95	252.05	0.00	0.00
56. Healthcare services	43.52	0.00	0.00	43.52	0.00	0.00
57. Residential and non-residential social work	2,578.09	118.56	53.63	1,807.92	597.97	0.00
60. Services provided by membership organisations	18.34	2.40	0.00	15.93	0.00	0.00
Grand total	**16,256.96**	**6,533.63**	**3,288.40**	**5,201.15**	**597.97**	**635.82**

Source: Authors' calculations.

Figure 1 summarises the results obtained using this methodology. It shows the aggregate effect of €16,256.96 million in ESF+ investment on the Spanish economy.

Figure 1. Estimated effects of ESF+ investment on the Spanish economy, 2021–2027



Source: Authors' calculations. Values are in millions of euros.

The €16,256.96 million in ESF+ investment represents the initial increase in autonomous demand. Indirect taxes account for €487.4 million. The remainder is final demand for goods and services received by producers and is valued at basic prices, before indirect taxes and subsidies. Not all this demand is met by domestic producers. An estimated €1,638.5 million is paid to suppliers abroad for imports, so it does not generate additional production or employment in Spain. ESF+ investment therefore induces an initial increase of €14,131.1 million in purchases from Spanish industries at basic prices, before VAT and other indirect taxes.

Figure 1 below shows the result of the total effect of EU investment in the ESF+ on production (€35,637.3 million at basic prices) once the three types of effects on the Spanish economy mentioned above are accounted for:

- The direct effect corresponding to the entire increase in production in Spain, resulting from the application of initial expenditure in the thirteen specific objectives described in the ESF+.
- The indirect effect derived from the production of domestic companies. This production is associated with the demand for raw materials and supplies (intermediate and fixed capital consumptions) that Spanish companies require in their internal processes.
- This direct and indirect increase in production in turn generates additional income (the wages corresponding to the jobs needed to obtain it and the business profits), which will again increase demand, resulting in further increases in employment and production, in what is called an induced effect.

Deducting €11,948.9 million of intermediate consumption and adding indirect taxes of €487.4 million on initial demand and €283.4 million on induced consumption and investment, the report estimates GDP generated by ESF+ investment at €21,387.8 million at market prices. The initial investment of €16,257 million has an estimated GDP multiplier of 1.32 when all effects are included.

Table 9 below shows the data applied to obtain GDP at market prices, demonstrating the equivalence between the three traditional calculation procedures. The income generated in this process is distributed between the payment of indirect and production taxes, the remuneration to the labour factor (including social contributions by companies and workers themselves) and the remuneration of capital, in the form of business profits.

Table 9. GDP at market prices generated by ESF+ investment (€ million) (1 of 3)

1. Output approach	€ million
1. Gross output	35,637.3
2. Intermediate consumption at market prices	12,232.3
3. Imports	2,788.0
4. GVA at basic prices = 1 (2 + 3)	20,617.1
5. Indirect taxes on generated output and initial ESF+ investment	770.8
GDP at market prices = 4 + 5	**21,387.8**

Table 9. GDP at market prices generated by ESF+ investment (€ million) (2 of 3)

2. Income approach	€ million
1. Employee remuneration	10,832.0
2. Gross operating surplus	6,730.9
3. Social security contributions	3,248.1
4. Net taxes on production	193.9
5. GVA at basic prices = 1 + 2 + 3 + 4	20,617.1
6. Indirect taxes on generated output and initial ESF+ investment	770.8
GDP at market prices = 5 + 6	**21,387.8**

Table 9. GDP at market prices generated by ESF+ investment (€ million) (3 of 3)

3. Final demand approach	€ million
1. ESF+ investment at basic prices	14,131.1
2. Induced consumption	7,855.2
3. Induced investment	1,702.1
4. Imports	2,788.0
5. Indirect taxes on generated output	283.4
6. GVA at basic prices = 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 (as printed)	20,617.1
7. Indirect taxes on generated output and initial ESF+ investment	770.8
GDP at market prices = 6 + 7	**21,387.8**

Source: Authors' calculations.

Translator's note. The source prints plus signs for items 4 and 5 in the final-demand formula. Subtracting imports and indirect taxes gives €20,617.0 million using the rounded entries, compared with €20,617.1 million in the table. The published formula is retained here for traceability. The output and income approaches report the same GDP estimate of €21,387.8 million.

The model also estimates how much generated income flows back to general government as a fiscal return. It includes €487.4 million in initial indirect taxes and €283.4 million in additional indirect taxes on purchases financed by incomes generated in production. It adds €2,947.9 million in direct taxes (personal income tax and corporation tax), plus €3,248.1 million in employers' and employees' social security contributions. After deducting €193.9 million in net production subsidies, the total fiscal return is €6,772.8 million. This equals 41.7% of the total programmed investment and is 36.5% above Spain's €4,961.3 million national contribution, including technical assistance.

Table 10 summarises the estimated economic impact of ESF+ investment across the four policy areas covered by the 13 specific objectives (employment, education, social inclusion and combating poverty), plus technical assistance. Table 11 breaks down the increased demand, income generated and employment required to deliver the associated production into 15 sectors at basic prices. Employment is shown in total and by direct, indirect and induced effects. The model associates the increase in demand with more than 394,500 jobs in Spain over 2021–2027.

Table 10. Macroeconomic impact of the ESF+: main results for 2021–2027

Metric	Employment	Education	Social inclusion	Material deprivation	Technical assistance	ESF+ total
Specific objectives	SO1–SO4	SO5–SO7	SO8–SO12	SO13	—	—
Total ESF+ investment	**6,533.6**	**3,288.4**	**5,201.1**	**598.0**	**635.8**	**16,257.0**
GDP generated	7,897.2	4,534.3	7,474.8	599.2	882.4	21,387.8
GDP multiplier	1.21	1.38	1.44	1.0	1.39	1.32
Total fiscal return	**2,466.7**	**1,463.2**	**2,378.8**	**170.9**	**293.2**	**6,772.8**
Fiscal return / ESF+ investment	37.8%	44.5%	45.7%	28.6%	46.1%	41.7%
National ESF+ funding	2,057.3	1,025.2	1,626.9	59.8	192.1	4,961.3
Fiscal return / national ESF+ funding	119.9%	142.7%	146.2%	285.8%	152.6%	136.5%
Employment generated	137,804	73,507	162,534	7,422	13,428	394,695

Source: Authors' calculations.

Table 11. Sectoral distribution of the effects on income (€ million) and employment (jobs), 2021–2027

Sector	Change in demand (€m)	Income generated (€m)	Direct jobs	Indirect jobs	Induced jobs	Total jobs
Agriculture, livestock and fishing	129.5	514.7	1,148.8	2,465.4	4,359.7	7,973.8
Energy, water supply and treatment, sewerage and recycling	271.6	626.7	427.8	889.5	1,228.6	2,545.8
Food, beverages, tobacco, textiles and footwear	669.0	525.1	2,010.6	1,282.0	3,109.0	6,401.6
Manufacturing	377.5	804.2	923.6	4,817.6	4,400.1	10,141.3
Construction	9.0	493.6	61.3	4,906.1	3,734.0	8,701.5
Trade, motor vehicle sales and servicing	322.6	1,470.8	3,354.4	6,760.9	16,291.0	26,406.2
Transport	28.1	507.0	189.1	3,338.8	4,666.0	8,193.9
Accommodation and food services	190.8	1,436.2	1,628.5	1,255.9	17,949.9	20,834.4
Postal services, information and telecommunications	126.6	456.8	276.2	2,351.0	1,505.3	4,132.5
Financial intermediation and insurance	134.0	965.4	277.6	1,119.8	2,876.7	4,274.2
Real estate	465.7	1,103.4	1,589.2	998.0	1,981.7	4,568.9
Professional activities and R&D	5,909.4	6,183.6	144,589.7	14,779.0	11,315.3	170,684.0
Public administration, defence and education	3,435.8	3,214.9	48,338.0	1,852.3	5,264.1	55,454.3
Health and social services	1,879.3	1,566.3	36,240.4	2,364.5	5,334.2	43,939.0
Arts, association and leisure activities; maintenance, personal and domestic services	182.2	748.2	2,862.7	3,928.5	13,652.6	20,443.8
Total	**14,131.1**	**20,617.1**	**243,918**	**53,109**	**97,668**	**394,695**

Source: Authors' calculations.

Chapter 4. Economic and social consequences of withdrawing ESF+ funding in Spain

The objective of this chapter is to quantify the intervention capacity and economic activity that would be put at risk if Spain ceased to have the resources and actions that the ESF+ channels in our country. The empirical basis used to carry out this analysis is that contemplated in the previous chapters, including the estimation of the macroeconomic impact developed in Chapter 3 from the input–output model formulated.

We consider two possible scenarios, with data on financial programming of 2021–2027: scenario A assumes that both European funding and linked national contribution disappear and that the corresponding actions are cancelled. scenario B assumes that the European contribution disappears, but that national funding remains in the same areas.

In the two loss scenarios it is assumed that no other funds appear, that the withdrawn resources do not generate an alternative expenditure in Spain and that there is no compensatory response from other policies. The counterfactual raised is therefore an equivalent cycle of activity that would cease to take place.

In any event, the institutional significance of this scenario should be clarified. The European Commission's proposal for the financial cycle 2028–2034 proposes to modify the management model of the ESF+ by integrating it into the so-called National and Regional Partnership Plans, but this integration does not automatically mean eliminating all the funding currently included in the ESF+. The estimates below quantify this possible impairment of ESF+ funding, but this loss should not be directly attributed to the reorganisation of the fund.

4.1. A substantial reduction in investment

As Chapter 1 shows, total ESF+ investment in Spain is €16,256.96 million, including €635.82 million of technical assistance. Direct measures account for €15,621.15 million. EU financing represents 69.5% of the total (€11,295.7 million) and Spain’s national contribution the remaining 30.5% (€4,961.3 million).

In scenario A, 2,322.4 million per year, 2,231.6 million for measures and another 90.8 million for technical assistance would no longer be mobilised. In scenario B, the total loss of investment would be 1,613.7 million per year, of which approximately 1,550.3 million were earmarked for measures and 63.4 million for their management.

The complete withdrawal of investment would affect four crucial areas of public policy, in addition to the technical assistance that enables its implementation. As we can see in Table 12, the A scenario of loss of funding would mean, in annual terms, a decrease in investment of 933.4 million in employment and job placement programmes, 469.8

million in education and training, 743.0 million in social inclusion, 85.4 million in material deprivation programmes and 90.8 million in technical assistance. This loss would affect key policies in the case of Spain, since the priorities for youth employment and child guarantee represent, as we saw in chapter 1, 17.6% and 10.9% of total investment. Thus, the loss of investment associated with scenario A would entail a reduction of 392.8 million annually in youth employment and 243.2 million in child guarantee.

Within the framework of social inclusion, the specific objective of active inclusion has some 3,499.8 million for the entire financial cycle, as shown in Table 4 of Chapter 1. The interruption of this investment would affect guidance and accompaniment services crucial for social inclusion in Spain, and pathways for the insertion of people with barriers to access to employment. For example, the BASICO programme, with funding of 598 million, would lose its ability to provide food, other essential goods and social accompaniment.

Table 12. Reduction in investment if ESF+ funding were withdrawn (€ million, seven-year cycle)

Policy area	Scenario A: total loss	Scenario B: EU funding loss	Scenario B: % cut
Employment and labour market integration	6,533.6	4,510.8	69.0%
Education and training	3,288.4	2,135.9	65.0%
Social inclusion	5,201.1	3,664.9	70.5%
Material deprivation	598.0	540.3	90.3%
Technical assistance	635.8	443.7	69.8%
Total	**16,257.0**	**11,295.7**	**69.5%**

Source: Authors' calculations.

4.2. Lost opportunities for employment, training and inclusion, and groups most exposed

Chart 3 reports 1,652,227 participations in employment and labour mobility, 606,643 in education and training and 1,179,701 in social inclusion in 2023–2025. If these rates continued for the seven years of the ESF+ financial cycle, Scenario A would put about 3.86 million employment, 1.42 million education and training and 2.75 million social inclusion participations at risk, about 8.02 million overall. The annual losses would exceed 550,000 in employment and 202,000 in education and training and reach approximately 393,000 in social inclusion (Table 13).

In scenario B, approximately 2.66 million, 0.92 million and 1.94 million respectively would be lost; in total, some 5.52 million participations over the cycle.

Table 13. Reduction in delivery capacity if ESF+ funding were withdrawn (annual participation records lost)

Policy area	Scenario A	Scenario B
Employment and labour market integration	550,742	380,233
Education and training	202,214	131,346
Social inclusion	393,234	277,087
Total for the three areas	**1,146,190**	**788,666**

Source: Authors' calculations.

We also know that these participations are strongly concentrated in particularly vulnerable groups which, with the potential to abolish ESF+-related funds, would lose a capacity for support that is vital today to be able to develop their work projects, training projects or to promote their inclusion. Thus, as we can see in Table 14, the potential loss of participations for immigrants or minorities would reach almost 425,000 participations per year. The potential loss of support for some 175,152 participations per year by persons with disabilities and 37,317 by homeless persons also shows the relevance of specialised interventions that would be neglected.

Table 14. Groups most exposed to withdrawal of ESF+ funding (annual participation records lost)

Group	Records in 2023–2025	Scenario A: annual loss
Migrants and people from minorities	1,274,391	424,797
People with disabilities	525,456	175,152
Long-term unemployed people	352,668	117,556
People experiencing homelessness	111,950	37,317
Rural residents	338,564	112,855

Source: Authors' calculations.

The possible loss of ESF+ funding would also be very damaging for people experiencing difficulties in entering the labour market. Thus, around 930,000 participations per year are for unemployed or inactive persons, some 700,350 for those with low educational attainment and about 460,000 for those under 25. As can be seen, the social damage associated with the potential loss of these interventions would be very extensive and worrying.

The disappearance of the care capacity linked to the ESF+ would also put at risk the results achieved through these actions. In particular, in the current financial cycle programmes linked to the fund are enabling 185,363 people to obtain a qualification each year, 246,812 to have a job at the end of their transition through ESF+ programmes and more than 20,000 to move from inactivity to job search. Although it would not be correct to say that such jobs, or training, would automatically be lost – the data do not

allow to estimate the causal effect on obtaining a new job or a degree – there is no doubt that the complete disappearance of these programmes would disrupt this ability to act.

4.3. Loss of GDP and employment associated with ESF+ investment

In Chapter 3 we used an expanded input–output model to measure the activity that sustains demand financed by the ESF+. To estimate the loss of GDP and employment associated with a potential withdrawal from ESF+ investment, in scenario A we completely eliminate that investment vector, maintaining the same coefficients.

The result would be a cumulative loss of €21,387.8 million in GDP over the seven-year financial cycle, equivalent to €3,055.4 million per year if the activity were evenly distributed, and a loss of 56,385 jobs per year. Thus, and taking into account the estimated multiplier – equivalent to 1.32 – we would have to stop generating about 100 million GDP and 132 million fiscal returns for every 41.7 million euro of investment that was withdrawn, and some 2,428 jobs would be lost.

If national funding remained intact and European ESF+ funding was reduced (Scenario B), the effects on GDP, employment and equity would be proportional to investment cuts, as can be seen in Table 15.

Table 15. Sensitivity of GDP, employment and participation to possible cuts in EU financing of the ESF+

Cut to EU funding	Investment lost over seven years (€m)	GDP lost per year (€m)	Jobs lost per year	Participation records lost per year
25%	2,823.9	529.3	9,767	197,166
50%	5,647.9	1,058.7	19,535	394,333
100%	11,295.7	2,117.4	39,070	788,666

Source: Authors' calculations.

Note: Cuts are assumed to be proportional within the main policy areas (employment, education and training, and social inclusion). Actual cuts could concentrate on different priorities and produce different results.

A 25% reduction in the EU contribution, with national funding maintained, would put around 197,166 participations per year at risk and reduce employment by an estimated 9,767 jobs per year on average. The corresponding annual GDP loss would be about €529.3 million. With a 50% cut, the estimated annual losses rise to 394,333 participations, 19,535 jobs and €1,058.7 million in GDP.

Proportionality in the calculation presupposes that operations of the same type are cut off as the current ones. If priorities were protected and the reduction concentrated on others, coverage and multiplier would logically vary. Social inclusion has a multiplier higher than average and material assistance has a dependence on European funding close to 90%. These differences, among others, should be taken into account when considering previous scenarios for reducing European investment.

The exercise indicates that reducing ESF+ financing would harm the Spanish economy, particularly the groups most exposed to programme reductions. Maintaining current delivery capacity would require replacing €1,613.7 million of EU funding per year. Without replacement funding, even if all national funding were retained, Spain would lose around 789,000 participations in employment, education and inclusion each year, and economic activity equivalent to 39,070 jobs, under the model assumptions.

Complete withdrawal of both EU and national funding would widen the loss to around 1.15 million participations and the equivalent of 56,385 jobs per year. The impact would fall mainly on people without work, people with low qualifications or people facing specific barriers to inclusion. Less developed regions would also lose €942.1 million a year in funding for measures. These figures indicate the delivery capacity and economic activity at risk if the ESF+ is reduced.

In any case, the potential magnitude of actual losses would depend on funding that ultimately remains linked to these policies, to the programmes that are preserved and to the capacity to replace European resources.

Chapter 5. Conclusions and key messages

The analysis carried out in this report shows that the European Social Fund is a fundamental instrument for meeting Spain's social needs. Its funding mainly reaches groups with educational deficiencies, and with difficulties of employment and social integration, obtains positive results and sustains an economic activity that has a significant impact and whose fiscal return exceeds, according to the estimates made, the national contribution to the programmes developed. These conclusions justify preserving and strengthening its current structure, social orientation and budgetary guarantees.

Message 1. ESF+ investment addresses Spain’s main social needs

ESF actions respond to challenges identified by the Social Scoreboard, the European Commission's scoreboard for monitoring the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. It is enough to check, as can be seen in Table 16, the data that Spain presents in the main dimensions identified by the European Pillar of Social Rights, to realise that effectively the investment developed by the ESF+ remains crucial for our country. Although there have been significant improvements in recent years, significant differences remain with respect to the EU precisely in those dimensions funded by the ESF+.

The Spanish employment rate is 3.7 points lower than that of Europe, while youth unemployment, the key indicator of diagnosis, is almost ten points higher. Early school leaving is still significantly higher in Spain, as is the risk rate of poverty or social exclusion, which exceeds the European average by 4.8 points; Among Spanish minors, this rate reaches 33.8%, almost ten points above the European average. These gaps with the countries around us justify sustained interventions, even in a situation of economic growth and job creation such as today.

The distribution of resources in chapter 1 is clearly consistent with this diagnosis. Of the €16,257 million in investment in 2021–2027, 41.8% finances employment and job placement objectives; 21.1%, education and training; 33.3%, social inclusion; and 3.8%, assistance against material deprivation. This combination makes it possible to intervene on the gaps mentioned above, which often accumulate in the same households; job training and guidance may prove insufficient if those who need them lack basic resources or support to sustain their participation.

The examples of actions set out in the report show how the correlation between the different programmes to meet these needs is further defined: vocational training and school drop-out prevention programmes prepare young people and adults for qualifications, or to be re-qualified; personalised integration routes facilitate the transition from training – or from unemployment or inactivity – to employment; recruitment or conciliation support promotes stable employment in groups with difficult job placements; support for young people without family support and food assistance

support the social inclusion of vulnerable groups, preparing the possibility of employment.

Table 16. Main labour-market, social and education indicators: Spain and EU-27, 2025

Indicator	Spain	EU-27
Employment and labour market integration		
Employment rate, aged 20–64	72.4%	76.1%
Unemployment rate, aged 15–74	10.5%	6.0%
Youth unemployment rate, aged 15–24	24.9%	15.2%
Long-term unemployment rate	3.4%	1.9%
Young people aged 15–29 not in employment, education or training (NEET)	11.5%	11.0%
Gender employment gap	9.5 pp	9.6 pp
Disability employment gap	22.6 pp	24.2 pp
Education and training		
Early leavers from education and training, aged 18–24	12.8%	9.1%
Participation in education and training in the previous four weeks, aged 25–64	15.8%	13.7%
People aged 16–74 with at least basic digital skills	66.5%	60.4%
Social inclusion, poverty and equal opportunities		
People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE)	25.7%	20.9%
Children under 18 at risk of poverty or social exclusion	33.8%	24.3%
Severe material and social deprivation	8.1%	6.3%
Impact of social transfers (excluding pensions) on poverty risk	23.2%	33.2%
Income inequality (S80/S20 ratio)	5.24	4.62
Children under three in formal childcare	56.8%	40.5%

Source: Eurostat, Social Scoreboard, European Union.

Message 2. Funding is targeted at groups with the greatest needs

The profile of the participants in the ESF+ programmes provides clear evidence of the focus and concentration of these actions on the social groups that need them most. Thus, the investment priorities are clearly consistent with the social needs identified and with the objectives of the ESF+.

Spain recorded 13.82 million ESF+ participations over the last decade, or 15% of the 92 million recorded across the EU. This is well above Spain's 11% share of the EU population and illustrates the reach of ESF+ interventions in Spain.

During the period, approximately 50% of participants in ESF+ actions were unemployed and 30% were inactive. That is, in the last decade four out of five participations have therefore concentrated on unemployed people when entering the actions. Also, about 60% of beneficiaries have a low educational level and the youth presence reaches four out of ten participations.

In addition, a significant number of participations in groups facing specific barriers have been recorded in the last decade: 2.8 million immigrant or minority participations, 1.4 million long-term unemployed participations, 1.6 million participations by persons with disabilities and 600,000 participations by young people who neither study nor work. The categories can overlap and participations do not necessarily amount to single people, but their composition confirms the ESF+'s orientation towards disadvantaged groups in need of these interventions.

Territorial allocation reinforces this redistributive function: the less developed regions receive about 42% of investment, although they account for 24.5% of the population; in addition, European funding covers a higher proportion of their activities; the ability to meet needs is thus less conditioned by the availability of own resources in the most vulnerable territories.

The collaboration between administrations, companies and social entities makes it possible to convert this funding into effective support. During the last decade, 5,250 public administrations, more than 115,000 SMEs and 5,374 NGOs have participated and received it. This network brings territorial knowledge, intermediation capacity and closeness to people who do not always have access by themselves to public services or the labour market. Its continuity is part of the accumulated value of the ESF+.

Therefore, the available empirical evidence shows how the current design of the ESF+, in the case of Spain, has allowed to connect identified needs, finalist investment and actions adapted to the barriers that hinder the inclusion of the most vulnerable groups.

Message 3. The interventions show positive results on effectiveness and efficiency

The evidence in Chapter 2 shows a very favourable assessment of the performance of ESF+ in terms of achieving results. Over the last decade there have been 3.7 million participants who obtained an educational or training qualification resulting from their participation in ESF+ actions, and 3.3 million people in employment at the end of their transition through the Fund's programmes. Surely some of these qualifications and jobs would have been obtained the same, even if there had not been ESF+ actions, but certainly a high percentage would never have been produced without ESF+ intervention.

In addition to the effectiveness of the programmes, their efficiency is also remarkable, as seen in the analysis of the success rates of the various programmes. In the employment programmes of 2023–2025, 44.4% of those initially unemployed or inactive become employed, while 31.3% of those inactive begin to seek employment. These are highly positive data, which are also above average success rates in the EU (31.7% and 18% respectively).In education programmes, 40.2% obtain a degree, compared with

18.9% in the EU as a whole. Differences in composition, implementation and reporting suggest caution in comparison, but the results show a significant correlation between the objectives pursued and the improvements recorded.

In addition, there are signs of these results persisting. Over the last decade, more than 1.1 million participants have been employed six months after completing their ESF+ programmes, and approximately 300,000 with an improvement in their employment situation. This empirical evidence is consistent with the analyses of the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, which estimates an average increase of 6.5 percentage points in the likelihood of employment for those participating in ESF+ programmes (Joint Research Centre, 2026).

We also note that in Spain the success rates are significantly higher in those regions which the European Commission considers to be in transition and, even more, in the less developed regions. Thus, the percentage of inactive or unemployed persons who become employed – compared to the population who participated in any of the ESF+ programmes in 2023–2025 – is 18.5% in the more developed Spanish regions, and amounts to 30.1% and 32.7% in the transition and less developed regions respectively.

The efficiency of the ESF+ programmes identified in this report is similar to that observed by the European Commission in its ex post evaluation of the 2014–2020 cycle (European Commission, 2026), according to which, until the end of 2022, 4.96 million participations are detected with immediate positive results for Spain, with a proportion of participations associated with improvements reaching 56% (compared to approximately 35% European). This ex post evaluation estimates a cost per result for Spain amounting to €2,115, which is relatively low compared to other countries in our environment.

Message 4. Macroeconomic stimulus and a substantial fiscal return

The ESF+ has a dynamic role in the Spanish economy, generating significant macroeconomic momentum with a high fiscal return.

ESF+ investment increases demand in several sectors, through current expenditure on service delivery, gross capital formation, wages and transfers to organisations or beneficiaries. Output increases through direct, indirect and induced effects. Financing for public education, training and employment services, and public transfers, generates direct demand. Contracted providers require intermediate inputs, generating indirect effects. Income received by households and businesses induces additional consumption and investment. In this way, initial autonomous demand financed by the ESF+ generates successive increases in output, income and employment. We use an input–output model to estimate the overall macroeconomic impact of that increase in demand.

For the €16,257 million allocated to the various ESF+ programmes in 2021–2027, the model estimates a GDP generated of €21,387.8 million. The multiplier is 1.32: each euro investment is associated with €1.32 of GDP, considering the macroeconomic effects as a

whole. This magnitude corresponds to the programming analysed for the whole period, and should not be interpreted as a permanent annual increase in output.

The estimated GDP multipliers are positive in all four policy areas: 1.21 for employment, 1.38 for education, 1.44 for social inclusion and 1.00 for material deprivation. Social inclusion has the highest multiplier and is estimated to generate €7,474.8 million of GDP. Interventions aimed at vulnerable people therefore contribute to production as well as serving a redistributive purpose.

The model estimates that ESF+ investment in 2021–2027 supports activity equivalent to 394,695 jobs across direct, indirect and induced effects. Social inclusion stands out, with 162,534 jobs associated with the expenditure, or 31.25 jobs per €1 million invested in this policy area.

Taxes and social security contributions, net of production subsidies, yield an estimated fiscal return of €6,772.8 million. This amounts to 41.7% of ESF+ investment, or about 42 cents per euro invested. It is 36.5% higher than Spain's €4,961.3 million contribution. On the model estimates, the economic activity supported by the ESF+ yields Spanish public revenue approximately €1,811.5 million above the national contribution. Reducing ESF+ investment would therefore reduce economic activity and tax receipts.

It should also be borne in mind that our model measures exclusively the macroeconomic impacts on production, income and employment resulting from the increase in autonomous demand. However, lasting benefits of qualification, social and labour inclusion, not quantified here, should be added to this effect.

Message 5. Preserving the Fund's autonomy and social safeguards after 2027

The complete abolition of ESF+ actions would not only reduce investment in Spain by €16,257.0 million and GDP accumulated by €21,387.8 million over a seven-year cycle. An activity equivalent to 56,385 sustained annual average posts would also be lost. In addition, and if the average rate of registrations of 2023–2025 continued, capacity to attend, each year, 550,742 participations in employment and employment, 202,214 in education and training and 393,234 in social inclusion would disappear. There are approximately 1.15 million participations per year.

These results provide reasons for rejecting a reform – such as the one proposed by the European Commission – that could put ESF+ funding at risk. A reform that dilutes this fund within a broader budget architecture, and ends up with its current budgetary autonomy and with the thematic protection that certain objectives have at present, can become enormously risky.

At present, the ESF+ has a strong budgetary identity, following a design in which funding is legally reserved for specific social objectives. The ESF+ Regulation requires that minimum percentages of the national allocation be set aside for those objectives considered to be priorities by the EU: social inclusion, child poverty, youth, material deprivation, social partners, etc.

However, the proposal submitted by the Commission on 16 July 2025 proposes to integrate it into the National and Regional Partnership Plans, together with other funds, through comprehensive programming of reforms and investments linked to the European Semester. As already explained in the introduction to the report, this architecture would group fourteen funds under a single plan per Member State. It should be pointed out that a specific ESF regulation and formally shared management would be maintained, but the crucial question is what budgetary autonomy and what thematic guarantees it would retain within this new architecture9.

Simplifying procedures, coordinating investments and improving evaluation are reasonable objectives. However, the evidence in this report does not identify ESF+ programmes as inefficient investments. Rather, their results justify requiring any change to preserve the conditions that have allowed them to be obtained. Administrative integration does not in itself lead to better social outcomes and poses significant potential risks.

The first risk in the Commission's proposal concerns funding. The Commission proposes an aggregate target of at least 14% of National and Regional Partnership Plan expenditure for social objectives, excluding agriculture, fisheries and the Social Climate Fund, but including the new EU Facility. It estimates that this would provide at least €100 billion in grants and loans for social objectives and social investment, although the final amount would depend on the mix of social objectives chosen by each Member State. Integrating the future social fund into broader plans could replace several current thematic minima with an aggregate approach to social expenditure.

9. European Commission (2025), proposal for a Regulation establishing the European Social Fund for 2028–2034, COM(2025) 558 final, 16 July.

This means that the Commission's proposal to integrate the future social fund into broader national plans could replace several of the specific minima – currently covered by the ESF+ for each thematic area – with a more aggregated logic of social objectives within a common package. This could compromise the very viability of certain items such as social inclusion, child poverty or the fight against material deprivation.

The Commission presents the change as a way to simplify, increase flexibility and target expenditure at results. But the risk, pointed out by the European Parliament and social actors, is that the ESF+ will lose its own identity: being part of a large national plan, social resources would compete more directly with other priorities – such as territorial cohesion, agriculture, migration policies, security, competitiveness or housing – within the same financial package.

The Commission also proposes allowing loans to count towards the 14% social allocation under the plans, through the Catalyst Europe instrument. The aggregate target therefore need not provide earmarked grants equivalent to the current ESF+. This does not mean that existing programmes would have to be financed by loans, but repayable funding and grants must be distinguished when assessing the adequacy and continuity of support for social priorities.

The distinction between loans and grants is particularly relevant: loans may finance projects with money returns, but do not provide equivalent protection for services for people without resources; social support, childcare or food assistance require stable funding; Its continuity should not depend on the government's ability to borrow or to earn revenue from its recipients.

Funding adequacy must also be assessed in the context of the wider EU budget debate. As Hennen and Biegon (2026) point out, the announced nominal increase in the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework does not guarantee an equivalent increase in investment capacity, given rising prices and the expiry of the exceptional NextGenerationEU stimulus. Maintaining the ESF+'s capacity requires comparing resources in real terms, distinguishing grants from loans and ensuring that funding addresses the same needs. A similar nominal allocation spread over more activities would likely leave fewer effective resources for existing social programmes.

In this context, budgetary protection of current social priorities is particularly important; incorporating new investment needs and the growing weight of objectives such as defence, security or competitiveness can increase competition for limited resources. If, at the same time, the ESF+ thematic reserves were weakened, actions aimed at vulnerable groups would be more exposed to reassignment decisions; it is not a question of demonstrating a future reduction in these items, but of recognising that the budgetary flexibility proposed by the Commission unequally distributes the ability to defend each priority. For groups with less influence on political negotiation, binding reserves are a guarantee of continuity. Financial adequacy and thematic protection should therefore be preserved together.

The second risk we observe is the loss of guarantees for specific groups. An aggregate social minimum does not reproduce the thematic reserves for inclusion, childhood, youth or material deprivation. Even if meeting the general threshold, funding for some of these areas could be reduced if expenditure is concentrated on other objectives considered social. The protection of each priority then depends to a greater extent on the budgetary negotiation and political preferences of each moment.

This possibility is worrying in the light of the Spanish diagnosis. The high vulnerability of children, youth unemployment and the barriers faced by persons with disabilities or severely excluded do not disappear when government priorities change. Thematic reserves guarantee continuity to persistent needs and reinforce the position of groups with less influence. Replacing them with a generic obligation would weaken such protection, without any evidence to date that it is necessary to do so in order to improve enforcement.

The third risk concerns territorial governance and social participation. Chapter 2 highlights the value of regional adaptation and collaboration with specialised organisations for the proper development of ESF+ programmes. A single National Plan can facilitate coordination, but also increase the weight of central negotiation and hinder the preservation of local priorities. Formally maintaining shared management does not ensure that the autonomous communities, the social partners and the third sector retain an equivalent capacity to plan, implement and monitor actions.

The breakdown of territorial governance and social participation would have negative practical consequences. Entities accumulate knowledge of recipients, trust relationships and professional teams that are not rebuilt immediately after a financial interruption. A reform that increases the uncertainty of the calls or subordinates social routes to other decisions of the plan could deteriorate capacities whose effectiveness is already documented in this report. It is an institutional risk that must be prevented, even if it is not an inevitable result of any integration.

The fourth risk relates to how results are measured; using milestones and targets can improve accountability by recognising the diversity of interventions; however, a centralised implementation focused on quick and easily accountable results could favour the selection of participants with lower barriers. The advances of a homeless person, a young person without support or someone with a complex disability are not always reflected in an immediate employment contract. Properly financing these processes requires recognition of intermediate improvements and prolonged trajectories.

The fifth argument concerns macroeconomic and fiscal effects. Weakening the ESF+ would limit social support and could reduce investment with a substantial capacity to generate economic activity and public revenue. The estimated GDP multiplier of 1.32 and fiscal return of about 42 cents per euro invested indicate that these policies can support productive activity, employment and the sustainability of public finances. These results do not mean that every item of ESF+ expenditure is superior to every alternative; they show that the Fund should not be treated simply as a cost.

Social investment contributes both to sustaining demand and to the conditions necessary for the productive, labour and personal transformation of the participants. Training, retraining and accompanying access to employment allow more people to participate in technological and sectoral changes. From this perspective, coordinating the ESF+ with industrial and innovation policies can strengthen its effectiveness, provided that it retains its capacity to cater for those facing the greatest barriers. A competitiveness strategy that focuses support on better-placed enterprises, territories and workers could miss out on skills and widen inequalities. The orientation of the ESF+ towards vulnerable groups brings a dimension – social and territorial cohesion – that must be preserved within this coordination.

Spain should therefore defend an identifiable ESF+, adequately endowed in real terms, with binding thematic reservations and effective participation by territorial administrations and social partners. If their integration into broader National Plans were to prosper, protected social allocations, cost traceability and safeguards would be necessary to prevent them from emptying priorities through reallocations. The results of this report support improving the instrument and expanding its scope; they do not justify weakening the architecture that sustains its redistributive function.

There is also a clear institutional precedent for retaining an autonomous ESF+ with its own budget and protected thematic objectives. In its resolution of 11 March 2025, adopted by 432 votes to 155 with 82 abstentions, the European Parliament advocated a strong, separate ESF+ with adequate resources and a social focus [10].

10. European Parliament (2025), resolution of 11 March 2025 on the European Social Fund Plus after 2027, P10_TA(2025)0027, procedure 2024/2077(INI).

The ESF+ should remain the EU's main instrument for supporting Member States, regions and local communities in strengthening Europe's social dimension. Reform should therefore address the following points:

1. To maintain the ESF+ as an independent fund, so that it can maintain its ability to meet the objectives of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Any redesign should not divert the fund from its main purpose.

2. Strengthen its budget by increasing its resources to address social vulnerability, poverty, exclusion, disability, unemployment or lack of skills commensurate with the current needs of the labour market.

3. Preserve shared management. ESF+ governance should ensure the participation of the Commission, Member States, regions, local authorities and social actors. Shared management helps programmes reach people and places, adapt to local conditions and remain effective.

4. Retain and increase thematic earmarking. Current ESF+ ring-fenced allocations should be protected. In line with the European Parliament's position, the minimum for combating child poverty could rise to at least 5%, the Youth Guarantee allocation above the current 12.5%, and social inclusion beyond the current 25%. Funding for food and basic material assistance for the most deprived could rise to 5%.

Appendix. Formal description of the model

To estimate the impact of activities financed by the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), we use a variant of the open Leontief model (Leontief, 1941; Miller and Blair, 2009), which underpins the multisectoral supermultiplier model (Dejuán, 2023; Wirkierman, 2022; Febrero and Bermejo, 2024).

The Leontief model can be written as follows:

$$\mathbf{A} \cdot \mathbf{q} + \mathbf{y} = \mathbf{q} \qquad (1)$$

A is the square matrix of technical coefficients, q is the column vector of gross output and y is the column vector of final output, surplus or final demand. The term A · q represents inter-industry flows of intermediate inputs of a circulating nature [11].

The first extension to the quantity system in (1) adds fixed capital. It is assumed to be in place at the start of each production process and is combined with circulating capital and labour. At the end of the process, the stock is one year older (the production period is assumed to be one year) and appears alongside the gross output specific to each sector. Formally:

$$\mathbf{K}_t \cdot \mathbf{q} + \mathbf{A} \cdot \mathbf{q} + \mathbf{y} = \mathbf{q} + \mathbf{K}_{t+1} \cdot \mathbf{q} \qquad (2)$$

K_t is a square matrix. Each element indicates the quantity of asset i used as fixed capital to produce one unit of product j in period t, at the normal rate of utilisation. K at t + 1 is the system's fixed capital per unit of output remaining at the end of the production process.

The second extension concerns the final demand vector y. We apply the Keynesian principle of effective demand: the vector is broadly determined by how much firms expect to sell at normal prices, which cover costs and provide an acceptable return on investment. Aggregate demand comprises autonomous and induced components. The distinction is whether the expenditure depends on income generated during production. Induced expenditure includes part of private-sector workers' consumption and investment in productive capacity needed to maintain a capital stock commensurate with market demand for output (investment determined by the accelerator).

11. Once y has been determined in accordance with the principle of effective demand, the sectoral gross output vector is given by $q = [I \ A]^{-1} y$, which follows directly from (1).

Autonomous expenditure includes exports, residential investment, public expenditure, expenditure financed by transfers such as pensions and unemployment benefits, public-sector employees' consumption, and consumption financed by credit.

For simplicity, we specify induced consumption as follows:

$$\mathbf{c}_i = \mathbf{b} \cdot \mathbf{a}_{npv} \cdot \mathbf{q} \qquad (3)$$

The column vector b contains induced consumption per unit of labour. The row vector a (npv) gives direct private-sector labour per unit of output.

Induced investment is specified as follows:

$$\mathbf{i}_{\boldsymbol{i}} = (\mathbf{K}_{\boldsymbol{t}} + \mathbf{A}) \cdot \mathbf{q} \cdot g \qquad (4)$$

g is the expected growth rate of the economy.

For the moment, all autonomous expenditure can be represented in a single vector z:

$$\mathbf{y} = \mathbf{c}_{\boldsymbol{i}} + \mathbf{i}_{\boldsymbol{i}} + \mathbf{z} \qquad (5)$$

Under the assumption of balanced growth, the matrix of fixed capital consumption per unit of output can be defined as the amount of the capital stock depreciated in each production process, as follows:

$$\mathbf{D} = \mathbf{K}_{\boldsymbol{t+1}} - \mathbf{K}_{\boldsymbol{t}} = \mathbf{K}_{\boldsymbol{t}} \cdot \widehat{\mathbf{T}}^{-\mathbf{1}} \qquad (6)$$

T with a circumflex is a diagonal matrix of the useful lives (in number of periods) of the fixed assets.

Using (3)–(6), we can rewrite (2):

$$\left[(\mathbf{K}_{\boldsymbol{t}} + \mathbf{A}) \cdot g + (\mathbf{A} + \mathbf{D}) + \mathbf{b} \cdot \mathbf{a}_{\boldsymbol{npv}}\right] \cdot \mathbf{q} + \mathbf{z} = \mathbf{q} \qquad (7)$$

It follows that:

$$\mathbf{q} = \left[\mathbf{I} - (\mathbf{A} + \mathbf{D}) - \mathbf{b} \cdot \mathbf{a}_{\boldsymbol{npv}} - (\mathbf{K}_{\boldsymbol{t}} + \mathbf{A}) \cdot g\right]^{-\mathbf{1}} \cdot \mathbf{z} \qquad (7.bis)$$

The total output of each sector (given by vector q) depends directly, indirectly and 'hyper-indirectly' on autonomous demand through the supermultiplier, defined by the inverse matrix to the right of equality in (7.bis). In other words, each sector has to produce the goods included in the autonomous demand, plus the intermediate inputs needed to obtain these goods, plus the goods necessary to replenish the depreciated fixed capital in the production process, plus the consumer goods of the workers involved in the production process, plus the goods necessary to maintain productive capacity (fixed and circulating capital) in proportion to GDP, which expands at a secular rate.

Here we wish to determine how much output and employment depends on the ESF+ in 2021–2027. The calculation distinguishes the three channels covered by the specific objectives: government demand met by private-sector production, government demand met directly by public-sector production, and household spending financed by ESF+ transfers. Where goods or services such as training are produced by the private sector, the following equation applies to the vector of government demand met by the private sector:

$$\mathbf{q}_{\boldsymbol{pr}}^{\boldsymbol{FSE+}} = \left[\mathbf{I} - (\mathbf{A} + \mathbf{D}) - \mathbf{b} \cdot \mathbf{a}_{\boldsymbol{npv}} - (\mathbf{K}_{\boldsymbol{t}} + \mathbf{A}) \cdot g\right]^{-\mathbf{1}} \cdot \mathbf{z}_{\boldsymbol{pr}}^{\boldsymbol{FSE+}} \qquad (8)$$

Where the public sector produces the goods demanded by the government through the ESF+, the relevant vector is z^{pc} (ESF+):

$$\mathbf{q}_{pc}^{FSE+} = \left[\mathbf{I} - (\mathbf{A} + \mathbf{D}) - \mathbf{b} \cdot \mathbf{a}_{npv} - (\mathbf{K}_t + \mathbf{A}) \cdot g\right]^{-1} \cdot \left(\mathrm{c} \cdot \mathbf{W}_{pc} + \mathbf{z}_{pc}^{FSE+}\right) \qquad (9)$$

In the second case, the supermultiplier is applied to government demand and to the expenditure of public-sector workers involved in production. The row vector c · W (pc) covers public-sector workers only: c is their average propensity to consume and W (pc) is the public-sector wage bill. Unlike equation (8), autonomous demand now includes not only the production of goods by the public sector but also consumption by the public-sector employees who produce them. For further details, see Serrano and Pimentel (2019) and Labat and Summa (2024).

Finally, household spending financed by ESF+ transfers is estimated using the following expression:

$$\mathbf{q}_{tf}^{FSE+} = \left[\mathbf{I} - (\mathbf{A} + \mathbf{D}) - \mathbf{b} \cdot \mathbf{a}_{npv} - (\mathbf{K}_t + \mathbf{A}) \cdot g\right]^{-1} \cdot \mathbf{z}_{tf}^{FSE+} \qquad (10)$$

Once the output vectors for private-sector production, public-sector production and household transfers have been obtained, the resulting value added and total employment can be calculated directly:

$$\mathbf{VA}^{FSE+} = \mathbf{va} \cdot \left(\mathbf{q}_{pv}^{FSE+} + \mathbf{q}_{pc}^{FSE+} + \mathbf{q}_{tf}^{FSE+}\right) \qquad (11)$$

$$\mathbf{L}^{FSE+} = \mathbf{a}_n \cdot \left(\mathbf{q}_{pv}^{FSE+} + \mathbf{q}_{pc}^{FSE+} + \mathbf{q}_{tf}^{FSE+}\right) \qquad (12)$$

We complete the description of the model to use with additional information.

- The matrices to be used (A, D, K, b, z) refer exclusively to domestic production; the demand met with imports is left out as it does not affect production in Spain. Matrix A and the direct work vector an are provided by the INE. The K and D matrices are obtained from information provided by the Valencia Institute of Economic Research (IVIE) and the BBVA Research Foundation, as well as the Tax Agency (duration of the service life of fixed capital assets).
- For computations, the supermultiplier of 2024, combined with the amount of funds corresponding to each of the years of the period 2021–2027, shall be used.

This evaluation is designed to measure the volume of activity, income and employment attributable to ESF+-funded expenditure (i.e. a model designed to measure the impact of the ESF+ on the demand side). By the very nature of the main objectives pursued by the Fund, the capacity of this model is limited to measuring the impact of spending on the means and instruments developed for the achievement of these aims (social integration, improvement of training, reduction of poverty, reduction of unemployment of certain groups, etc.) on the Spanish economy, and not so much the achievements of those main objectives.

This procedure yields a different estimate of the impact on the Spanish economy from alternatives based on a neoclassical approach (Casas et al., 2025; European Commission, 2026). Those evaluations use RHOMOLO, a general equilibrium model in which the

causal sequence runs from factor markets to the goods market. Factor markets first determine employment and investment, which expands the existing capital stock. The available labour and capital then determine output through a production function. The model assumes that all of that output finds buyers, in accordance with Say's Law, under which supply creates its own demand.

RHOMOLO has also been used to estimate the impact of the ESF+. The estimates indicate that the Fund increases employment and that beneficiaries become more productive, allowing them to earn wages higher than their unemployment benefits (Blanchflower and Oswald, 1994). The estimates also assume that the gap between vacancies and unemployed people closes, raising output, although part of the ESF+ effect dissipates over time. Casas et al. (2025, p. 20) estimate that GDP in 2030 would be 1.256% higher than it would have been without the ESF, REACT-EU and the YEI.

In the authors' view, the limitation of that method is that it cannot guarantee that supply-side effects will be accompanied by rising demand over time. The method used here measures the effect on GDP of ESF+-financed expenditure over seven years.

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