



Press Release

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Long-term unemployment in the EU requires more specific action

Long-term unemployment can have severe consequences, both for unemployed people and for growth and public finances, but, according to a report published by the European Court of Auditors, the action taken against it is not targeted enough. Through the European Social Fund (ESF), the EU funded several measures to promote access to employment since 2014. However, these ESF measures were not always adapted to address the specific needs of long-term unemployed people. The auditors recommend that the European Commission should insist that Member States use an individualised approach to help long-term unemployed people through the new ESF+ which will cover the 2021-2027 period. They also recommend that the Commission should evaluate the effectiveness of “access to employment” measures which target the long-term unemployed.

“Long-term unemployment affects our social fabric. Jobless people are at a higher risk of poverty, social exclusion, and even health problems.” said Lazaros S. Lazarou, the member of the European Court of Auditors responsible for the report. *“We have found that EU-funded measures so far have reached many long-term jobseekers, but were not specifically designed with them in mind. The COVID-19 pandemic may exacerbate the problem of long-term unemployment. In our view it would be better to apply an individualised approach to all long-term unemployed as part of national active labour-market policies”.*

People who remain unemployed for longer periods face more problems finding work because they lose motivation, confidence, and skills. According to the latest annual data available, in 2020 35 % of the EU’s 15 million jobseekers (5.3 million people) had been unemployed for at least 12 months. The economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic could exacerbate the issue.

In the EU, Member States are responsible for labour-market policies. The ESF is the EU’s main financial instrument for supporting Member States’ active labour-market measures. During the 2014-2020 period, around €11.4 billion was allocated to addressing “access to employment”. The auditors found that these ESF “access to employment” measures financed different interventions during the 2014-2020 period that benefited many long-term jobseekers. However, they were not specifically targeted. Instead, they were treated as part of a larger group containing all unemployed

The purpose of this press release is to convey the main messages of the European Court of Auditors’ special report. The full report is available at eca.europa.eu.

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or “disadvantaged” groups. Moreover, the ESF measures did not necessarily reflect the scale of the issue in some Member States.

The auditors also noted that although some public employment services applied the individualised approach for individual long-term unemployed as part of their national active labour market policies, there was no clear link between ESF “access to employment” support and actions addressing the specific needs of the long-term unemployed. Moreover, the auditors found it difficult to monitor what results the ESF had achieved for the long-term unemployed. This also because of weaknesses in its monitoring and evaluation framework: the lack of a specific category of expenditure for different target groups (such as the long-term unemployed) makes it difficult not only to identify how much EU funding has been allocated to such measures, but also to evaluate its results and impact on the target group.

The rules for the new “ESF+” instrument for the 2021-2027 period introduce a number of steps forward, such as arrangements for profiling jobseekers and assessing their needs. However, the auditors call on the Commission to insist that, when implementing the new measures under the ESF+, Member States apply an approach targeted specifically to long-term unemployed people and their needs where the issue is particularly acute, since there are great disparities at national and regional level. In addition to that, the auditors recommend that the Commission should evaluate the effectiveness of “access to employment” measures which target the long-term unemployed.

Background information

Since 2011, the European Commission has been reviewing Member States’ labour market policies through the European Semester process. Based on the Commission’s analysis, the Council has adopted a number of country-specific recommendations asking the Member States concerned to take specific measures against long-term unemployment, including an individualised approach. In 2016, this approach was endorsed by a Council Recommendation on long-term unemployment.

Special report 25/2021: “*ESF support to combat long-term unemployment: Measures need to be better targeted, tailored and monitored*” is available on the [ECA website](#) in English; other language versions will follow shortly.

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