

*WRC Social and Economic Consultants*

# Social Economy Programme

Measure 19 of the EHRDOP

Implemented by FÁS

## WIDER EQUALITY MEASURE STUDY

*Supported by*

**Equality Studies Unit, Measure 33A of the EHRDOP**



**THE EQUALITY AUTHORITY**  
**AN tÚDARÁS COMHIONANNAIS**

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# 1. Introduction

In the context of the Employment and Human Resources Development Operational Programme 2000-2006 (EHRDOP), the Equality Authority is implementing Measure 33a: Technical Assistance – Equality Studies Unit (ESU). The ESU is mandated to examine labour market inequalities and their implications for labour market policy. Its focus is exclusion and discrimination in the labour market as covered by equality legislation and for four groups named in the EHRDOP (i.e., older workers, people with disabilities, minority ethnic groups in particular refugees, and, members of the Traveller community). These four groups are also the reference groups for the Wider Equal Opportunities Principle (WEOP). The WEOP is concerned with understanding, monitoring and supporting the participation of people from the four groups covered by the principle in the measures of the EHRDOP. Following on from the mid-term review of the EHRDOP, 10 measures are now required to identify and report on the actions they are taking to apply the WEOP (see Annex I for a list of measures).

In this capacity the Equality Authority is implementing a rolling programme of Measure Studies. These studies seek to identify and promote changes required in the planning, design and delivery of the measures comprising the EHRDOP to enhance their capacity to promote equality and accommodate diversity. In order to accomplish this, measure studies are designed to a standard that challenges.

Measure studies draw on the analysis developed in the ESU publication *'Accommodating Diversity in Labour Market Programmes'*. Specifically the programme of measure studies seeks:

- to support new learning on the promotion of equality and the accommodation of diversity in labour market measures. It achieves this by seeking out good practice while also examining gaps, deficiencies and other issues;
- through the manner in which it is implemented, to build the capacity of implementing agencies to identify and engage in actions to effectively promote equality and accommodate diversity; and,
- to agree recommendations for priority actions for promoting equality and accommodating diversity in the measures examined and in the broader work of the implementing agencies.

In seeking to support a process of change the measure studies require the full engagement of those responsible for the design and delivery of the measure concerned. To this end, the measure studies are undertaken in a way that achieves ownership of the process by the relevant implementing agency. The measure studies are, therefore, pursued on the basis of a partnership approach between the Equality Authority and the organisation responsible for the measure. Within the partnership:

- the Equality Authority leads in relation to standards for the study. Terms of reference need to be established and then agreed within the partnership. These must ensure measure studies are challenging, stimulate change and extract learning;
- the Equality Authority leads in relation to quality control for the measure study. In particular, ensuring the terms of reference are applied and convening a meeting of the partnership to discuss the action plan arising out of the measure study;
- the organisation responsible for the measure leads in relation to implementation of the measure study. The final outputs of the study are subject to the decision of the implementing agency. This includes actions to enhance the capacity of the measure to promote equality and accommodate diversity. The study is therefore owned by this organisation.
- the Equality Authority will lead in relation to assessing the progress made in implementing agreed recommendations.

- the Equality Authority will lead in relation to dissemination of learning, in particular through the framework of the EHRDOP. This will require electronic publication of the studies, development of synthesis reports that draw from a number of measure studies, and other activities.

This report presents the findings of the measure study of the Social Employment Programme (SEP) implemented by FÁS. The programme seeks to support social economy enterprises and provide employment opportunities for the long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged groups.

A number of points need to be noted at the outset regarding the programme. The SEP was introduced in September 2000 and FÁS was given responsibility for its management and administration. Following the establishment of a number of structures to assist in implementing the programme (these are described in Section 4.5); the SEP was rolled out over 2001. It reached an operational peak during 2003 when over 330 enterprises were funded and almost 2,400 grant-aided employees were supported. Following an evaluation of the SEP in late 2003 the status of the programme has been under review. Activity during 2004 was slightly down on the previous year, with 313 enterprises being funded employing 2,060 employees. The budget for the programme in 2004 was just under 40 million. Activity levels and budgets for 2005 are being maintained at 2004 levels. Pending the final outcome of the ongoing review of the programme, which involves the possibility that responsibility for programme implementation will move from FÁS, no new enterprises are being accepted for funding though employees leaving enterprises can be replaced.<sup>1</sup>

It should also be noted that since the beginning of 2005 the Social Economy Monitoring Committee has ceased to meet, pending the outcome of the review of the SEP. Also, reflecting the transitional status of the programme, the Local Social Economy Working Groups established to assist in implementing the programme, have ceased activity. Thus, some of the detail provided in relation to how the SEP is implemented in later sections of this report refers largely to the situation prevailing up to early 2004.

Finally, since late 2004, FÁS has been engaged in developing its 2006-2009 Strategy. This process concluded in October 2005 with the publication of *Building on Our Vision: FÁS Statement of Strategy 2006-2009*. As the period during which this study was being undertaken coincided with the period during which future strategy was being decided, many of the commitments now present in respect of actions to promote equality will not have been in operation. These commitments and associated actions are noted in Section 3.2.

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<sup>1</sup> Since completing this measure study departmental responsibility for the Social Economy Programme has transferred from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment to the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

## 2. Methodology

The core methodology for the measure studies involves:

- collecting and reviewing documentation on programme design (e.g., eligibility criteria, recruitment processes, supports to participants etc) and implementation procedures (e.g., roles and responsibilities of various personnel);
- collecting and reviewing any previous studies / reports on the measure;
- obtaining and analysing data on programme participants particularly with reference to the four groups covered by the Wider Equal Opportunities Principle (WEOP) – older people, people with disabilities, members of minority ethnic groups and members of the Traveller community;
- reviewing data collection and programme monitoring procedures;
- obtaining and reviewing documentation on policies, practices and initiatives in the area of equality and promoting diversity; and,
- meeting with personnel responsible for programme delivery to discuss the above and tailor the actual design of other aspects of the measure study.

The second round of measure studies placed importance on obtaining representative data on the experiences, views and practices of personnel in the organisation responsible for delivering the measure being studied. To this end, interviews / surveys of personnel responsible for the actual delivery of the measure are included. In the case of this measure study of the SEP, in addition to the core methods described above, two additional methods were used. The first of these was a secondary analysis of data collected for the purpose of evaluating the SEP. The secondary analysis examined the extent to which the enterprises funded under the SEP had equality policies in place and the profile of participants on the SEP.

The second method involved undertaking a survey of all Employment Service Officers (ESOs). The rationale for focusing on ESOs derives from their role as the gateway to all FÁS services, including the SEP. This survey looked at their involvement in training related to promoting equality, their perceptions of the barriers to participation in the SEP and other FÁS programmes, and their involvement in actions seeking to promoting equal opportunities. In all 308 ESOs were surveyed. Fifty-six completed questionnaires were returned, corresponding to a response rate of 18.2%. With regard to the latter, it should be noted that the low response rate is not a reflection of the lack of support for the objectives of the survey from FÁS: full support and assistance with survey administration was provided by FÁS particularly from the Social Economy Unit. Also, despite the low response rate, there is agreement that the findings are of interest and relevance to the challenge of accommodating diversity and promoting equality in FÁS programmes and to supporting ESOs play a role in meeting this challenge. The survey findings are presented in Section 7 of this report.

Finally, in addition to the above, the methodology involved a level of on-going contact with the Manager of the Social Economy Unit and the Director of Social Inclusion in FÁS and making a presentation to a meeting of FÁS Community Services Managers.

## 3. Implementing Body

### 3.1 Role and Organisational Structure

FÁS (the National Training and Employment Authority) was established in January 1988 under the Labour Services Act 1987 to provide a wide range of services to the labour market in Ireland. Its functions as laid down in the Act are:

- training and re-training;
- designated apprenticeships;
- recruitment service;
- employment schemes;
- placement and guidance services;
- assistance to community groups ;
- advice for people returning to Ireland and those seeking employment elsewhere in the EU; and,
- consultancy and human resource related services, on a commercial basis, outside the State (through FÁS International Consulting Ltd.).

The statutory functions of the organisation also include the collection and publication of information relating to the labour market and the provision, to the Minister of State for Labour Affairs and the Minister for Enterprise Trade and Employment, of information, reports and other documentation on matters within FÁS' remit. Responsibility for vocational training and employment in the open labour market for people with disabilities transferred from the Department of Health and Children to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in June 2000 as part of the Government's policy to mainstream services for people with disabilities. Resulting from this, vocational training and employment services formerly administered by National Rehabilitation Board on behalf of the Department of Health and Children, are now administered by FÁS.

The organisation has its headquarters in Dublin but operates through a regional structure (8 regions) throughout Ireland in which there is a total of 20 Training Centres and 62 Employment Offices.

In 2004, approximately 71,500 persons completed FÁS programmes. FÁS expenditure in 2004 amounted to €816.56 million, of which 80% was devoted to programme expenditure. Expenditure on the SEP – which largely takes the form of wage support to managers of SEP enterprises and enterprise employees – at €39.5 million corresponds to approximately 5% of organisational expenditure in that year. FÁS currently employs approximately 2,300 staff, the largest proportion of which is concentrated in Training Services.

The organisational structure of FÁS comprises seven Assistant Directors General (ADGs) reporting to its Director General across a range of headings, for example: Corporate Services; Employment Services; Regions; Training Services; Services to Industry; HR Development/Finance; Community Services). A number of Directors report, in turn, to the ADGs. For the purposes of this study, the most important of these is the Director for Social Inclusion who reports to the ADG for Employment Services and the ADG responsible for Community Services.

### 3.2 Equality Policies and Practices

FÁS does not have a stand-alone, over-arching Equality Statement. Instead, its commitment to equality policies and practices is expressed through a range of corporate documentation (e.g., Customer



Charter, Strategy Documents, and its Quality Assurance Policy currently in development). Also, as noted in the introduction, 2005 saw considerable development in relation to FÁS policies in the area of equality. These developments are reflected in the conclusion of a pilot programme on Equality Proofing in FÁS Employment Services, the publication of a Statement of Strategy 2006-2009, incorporating Social Inclusion, Equality and Diversity as one of the eight high priority goals of the organisation, and on-going work on the development of a Quality Assurance Policy.

### 3.2.1 Code of Practice

The Code of Practice for staff emphasises the following core values without expressly mentioning equality:

- Flexibility;
- Professionalism;
- Caring;
- Proactive;
- Trustworthiness.

The guiding principles for all staff are given to be: honesty; integrity; and public accountability.

### 3.3.2 Customer Charter

In its Customer Charter, FÁS states it “cares about its customers” and that it is “responsive and flexible” vis-à-vis their needs. Specifically in relation to equality it says it will:

*“Provide [its] services to all customers in a courteous, fair and impartial manner and in full compliance with all equality legislation. Facilitate access to FÁS services for people with disabilities.”*

### 3.2.3 Annual Report 2004

The commitment of FÁS to equality is documented under Statutory and Other Notices sections of its most recent annual report:

*“FÁS is committed to a policy of equal opportunity and adopts a positive approach to equality in the organisation. FÁS develops and implements appropriate policies and programmes that address the labour market needs of socially excluded people and incorporates a pro-active equality perspective into all FÁS services and programmes.”*

### 3.2.4 Equality Matters in Data Collection Procedures

FÁS has regularly been thanked for the quality of the data it produces for the Monitoring Committee meetings of the EHRDOP, including equality related data. Supporting the capacity of FÁS to provide such data is its client registration form and its Annual Follow-Up Surveys of programme participants.

The registration form asks individuals to state their gender, age, whether or not they are a Traveller, and whether or not they have a disability. Registrants are also asked if they have refugee status, leave to remain in Ireland, and whether or not they are a citizen of the European Economic Area, and, if relevant, to confirm that they have documentation regarding their right to work and undertake vocational training.

A data monitoring plan for the Social Inclusion Unit has been developed and reports on “specific client groups” will be prepared on a regular basis.

Based on discussions with FÁS personnel, there is an acknowledgement that the number of clients from particular groups – notably, members of the Traveller community and people with disabilities –

may be under-represented in its data records. This results from the non-declaration by clients on registration. As elaborated in (Section 6), the findings of this study of the SEP confirm this assertion in relation to members of the Traveller community. That is, the number of Travellers on the SEP based on registration data is just three. However, analysis of data on actual social economy enterprises being funded by the SEP shows that there are three enterprises catering for the employment of members of the Traveller Community (i.e., Cara Park Community Services in Cabra (Dublin), Wicklow Travellers / Shuttle Knit, and Rainbow Dry Cleaning in Ballina. A total of 13 grant-aided employment places for Travellers are provided by these three enterprises.

### **3.2.5 Equality Proofing Pilot Project**

FÁS has carried out an Equality Proofing Pilot Project in its Employment Services division with the support of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. Beginning in late 2002, the project was planned with the Social Inclusion and Equality Unit to assist FÁS to proactively enhance its capacity to be the leading Irish state agency in achieving equal access, participation and outcomes for the nine groups covered by equality legislation.

One of the key concerns of the pilot project was to determine the actions required by service providers to overcome past and current obstacles to participation for groups covered in the equality legislation and experiencing disadvantage in the labour market. The final report on the project was presented to the Equality Proofing Steering Group in February 2005. Action Plans will subsequently be developed for equality proofing within Training Services and Services to Businesses modelled on that experience. There is a commitment in the new FÁS Statement of Strategy 2006-2009 (see Section 3.2.6) to implement the lessons and recommendations of the Equality Proofing Pilot Project, as is illustrated by:

*The recommendations of the Equality Proofing Report will be implemented, including the establishment of an Equality Proofing Monitoring Committee and the updating of Best Practice Guidelines. (p. 46)*

Through its intranet system, FÁS provides Good Practice Guidelines on Equal Opportunities aimed at supporting its personnel in their dealings with clients from an equality perspective and explaining their responsibilities under the equality legislation. In addition, equality has been incorporated into on-going staff training and development, for example in the inclusion of Equality Matters into the Certificate in Training and Continuing Education provided through NUI Maynooth. FÁS, in association with NUI Maynooth, has also developed a Certificate in Equality Studies in Training and Development.

FÁS has also been active in providing its staff with various types and levels of training designed to enhance the organisation's capacity to deliver services to people with disabilities, including providing a one day disability awareness training programme for all personnel, a training programme on disability etiquette, and training in occupational guidance for people with disabilities for personnel in Employment Services.

### **3.2.6 Strategy Statement 2006-2009**

Prior to the publication of its recent strategy statement, explicit commitments to promoting equality tended to focus on gender equality and the development of capacity to provide services for people with disabilities. More generally, commitments were made in respect of the need to provide employment and training opportunities for persons experiencing disadvantage in the labour market: as, for example, is illustrated in the following quote from its Statement of Strategy 2003-2005:

*“generate employment opportunities for all, paying particular attention to those who are socially disadvantaged, such as early school leavers, long-term unemployed people, those with literacy and numeracy difficulties, ethnic minorities and travellers. Part of this approach, to tackling inequalities, includes a co-ordination of efforts between all relevant state agencies.”*

In Section 4.12 of the Strategy Statement (Internal Analysis, HR Development) it is noted that:

“FÁS will deliver all of its programmes and services in a fair and equitable manner and will also continue to ensure that equality of opportunity is available for all, by a specific focus on special target groups of people, where necessary, and the promotion of more non-traditional training and employment opportunities for women.”

The publication *Building on Our Vision: FÁS Statement of Strategy 2006-2009* acknowledges the “barriers to labour market equality” faced by particular groups of people in the labour market and goes on to state that it is the intention of FÁS:

“To promote the removal of barriers, and help provide supports which ensure access to programmes services and employment for individuals and groups experiencing exclusion, discrimination and labour market disadvantage.”

The actions that FÁS is planning to undertake to achieve this goal, together with the performance indicators identified to measure progress in achieving this goal, are summarised in Box 3.1.

### **Box 3.1 Actions to Achieve Social Inclusion, Equality and Diversity (Including Performance Indicators)**

Analyse and highlight the barriers preventing individuals from taking up training and employment opportunities.

Work with other agencies and Government departments to review policies and practices that act as barriers and assist with developing new policies to enable access and participation in the labour market.

Implement programme and service changes within FÁS to address identified training and employment barriers and gaps in provision.

Develop and promote supports and incentives for employers to recruit marginalised individuals.

Promote specific employment measures and career progression supports for people with disabilities and other groups experiencing inequality across the nine grounds covered by equality legislation.

Raise awareness among employers of the contributions that persons from diverse backgrounds can make to their enterprise.

Develop positive action measures, as allowed under equality legislation, for specified target groups.

Provide the necessary training, development and supports to enable staff to champion social inclusion, equality and diversity.

Implement the FÁS Equal Status Framework.

Equality-proof all FÁS Programmes and Services to embed inclusiveness, equality and diversity in the development and delivery of programmes.

Set targets for participation of specific groups within FÁS Programmes and Services.

Promote a policy of mainstreaming marginalised people in the labour market.

#### **Performance Measurement**

Number of Programmes and Services Equality Proofed.

Levels of participation and outcomes for targeted groups on FÁS Programmes and Services.

FÁS Equal Status Framework developed and implemented.

*From Building on Our Vision: FÁS Statement of Strategy 2006-2009, p. 67.*

As well as including equality among its high level goals for the coming planning period, FÁS has also committed itself to more active consultation with persons experiencing labour market inequalities regarding the design of programmes and services from which they may benefit.

### **3.3 Overall Equality Context Within FÁS**

It is clear from the foregoing sections that FÁS is currently committed to implementing a wide range of specific actions to accommodate diversity and promote equality over the coming three years. The successful rolling out of these actions will result in considerable change in the organisational context of all FÁS services and programmes.

## 4. The Social Economy Programme

As noted in the introduction the SEP is currently under review. Arising from this, activity in the programme is currently confined to enterprises that have been approved for entry to the programme during the period up to the end of 2003. As no new enterprises can enter the programme at present, the operation of a number of the structures established to support the implementation of the SEP has been largely curtailed. Information provided on these structures below is therefore largely “historical” pending the full outcome of the review of the SEP.

Also, it should also be noted that the SEP not one of the 10 measures of the EHRDOP that were required to specifically address the WEOP arising from the recommendations of the NDP/CSF Review of the Relevance of the Horizontal Principles.

### 4.1 Aim of the SEP

The SEP is located in the Entrepreneurship Pillar of the EHRDOP. Its overall aim as stated in its Programme Complement is:

*“To support the development and operation of enterprises that engage in economic activity between the private and public sectors in order to meet social objectives and in so doing create sustainable employment. The Programme will seek to develop the entrepreneurial and business potential of such enterprises and will be particularly targeted at disadvantaged communities, communities of interest and long-term unemployed persons.”*

Under the measure locally based groups and organisations are funded to develop a business plan and, if approved, provided with financial support to appoint a manager, recruit and train employees.

### 4.2 Description of the SEP

The Social Economy Framework Document published in August 2000 by FÁS laid out the main objectives of the SEP and identified the structures through which it would be implemented. It identified the distinguishing feature of the social economy as:

*That part of the economy, between the private and public sectors, which engages in economic activity in order to meet social objectives. (p. 2)*

A working definition of the sub-set of the social economy that would be the focus of the SEP was provided:

- *ownership within a community or among people with a shared interest, responding to market needs, regardless of income;*
- *focus on the economic and social development of a community or community of interest;*
- *operation benefiting both the community and individual members;*
- *providing for employment experience and employment opportunities which are sustainable, but which might nonetheless be dependent on state support. (p. 2)*

A typology of the enterprises expected to benefit from funding under the SEP was adopted from the Report of the Partnership 2000 Working Group on the Social Economy (see Box 4.1). Social economy enterprises found within the typology presented in Box 4.1 are seen as generating a wide range of benefits, including:

- *providing services that are not commercially viable or met by state or public bodies, in disadvantaged areas;*

- potentially empowering local communities to identify and respond to local needs;
- improving the quality of subsidised unemployment opportunities available to the long-term unemployed; and,
- providing a useful and appropriate route back into employment for women who may have spent time out of the formal labour force

#### **Box 4.1 Typology of Enterprises Funded Under the SEP**

**Community Businesses:** ultimately financed from trading income alone and which would be expected to move into self-sustaining viability in the medium term.

**Deficient Demand Social Economy Enterprises:** where the demand for particular goods and services within a community is not matched by resources to pay for these, due to disadvantage or low density of population.

**Enterprises Based on Public Sector Contracts:** which deals with the potential for subcontracting public sector expenditure in disadvantaged areas and communities to local Social Economy Enterprises.

Noting the role of the SEP in regenerating local economies within disadvantaged areas and within communities of interest experiencing disadvantage the objectives of the SEP were defined as follows:

- to promote the emergence and consolidation of the social economy;
- to maximise the potential of the social economy to generate employment that is sustainable and of high quality, subject to labour market constraints;
- to regenerate both urban and rural communities by providing urgently needed local services, employment opportunities and experience for people who have been distanced from the labour market;
- to promote equal opportunities between men and women. (p. 25)

### **4.3 Target Groups and Eligibility Criteria of the SEP**

Two target groups were identified: (i) social economy enterprises (falling within one of the categories identified in Box 4.1); and (ii) employment opportunities for the long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged groups. In operational terms the latter were defined by the eligibility criteria for grant aided employees (see Box 4.2).

#### **Box 4.2 Eligibility Criteria for Grant-Aided Employees Under the SEP**

1. Unemployed persons over 35 years of age in receipt of Unemployment Benefit, Unemployment Assistance or One Parent Family Payment for at least three years.

2. Persons in receipt of Disability Allowance, Invalidity Pension or Blind Persons Pension, and persons in receipt of Disability Benefit of six months or more who obtain approval from the Department of Social and Family Affairs to engage in employment of a rehabilitative nature.

3. A Traveller of any age in receipt of Unemployment Benefit / Unemployment Assistance or One Parent Family Payment for one year or more. In the case of Travellers under 18 years of age, a minimum of 12 months spent in a Traveller's Training Centre will suffice for eligibility.

4. Qualified Adults (Adult Dependents) over 35 years of age of long-term unemployed persons and persons over 35 years in receipt of the Widows / Widowers Contributory and non Contributory Pension, subject to application of a qualifying period for eligibility as with unemployed persons and lone parents.

5. There will be an exemption limit for other disadvantaged persons who do not meet the normal eligibility criteria including women in welfare dependent households. This can be up to 10% of the total number of grant-aided persons employed across Social Economy Enterprises.

### **4.4 Resources for Enterprises Funded under the SEP**

The SEP provides a package of grants payable for up to three years to enterprises successfully applying to the SEP (see Table 4.1 for a listing of these grants together with the amounts payable). Accessing

these grants is by way of formal application. Organisations interested in applying for funding – termed Proposer Groups – are initially encouraged to apply for the Social Economy Business Plan Grant (SEBPG). The purpose of this grant is to fund the cost of preparing a Social Economy Business Plan. The purpose of the plan is to commit applicants to clearly establish the nature of their proposed enterprise. It must also include a marketing plan and show how any products or services produced will support local economic and social development.

**Table 4.1 Maximum Levels of Social Economy Supports Available During 2003\***

	Number of Employees				
	3	5	7	9	11
Wage Grants for Employees	€ 41,919	69,865	97,811	125,757	153,703
Non-Employee Wage Grant (of which)	€ 37,595	45,725	53,855	61,985	70,115
<i>Managers Wages incl PRSI</i>	€ 25,400	25,400	25,400	25,400	25,400
<i>Financial Accountant &amp; Auditor</i>	€ 3,175	4,445	4,445	4,445	6,350
<i>Training</i>	€ 1,880	2,286	2,693	3,099	3,506
<i>Capital Costs</i>	€ 5,715	9,525	13,335	17,145	20,955
<i>Contribution to Overheads &amp; Set-up Costs</i>	€ 1,425	4,069	7,982	11,896	13,904
Total Grant Package	€ 79,514	115,590	151,666	187,742	223,818

\* Figures exclude the Social Economy Business Plan Grant (SEBPG) of €5,080. Also, enterprises may apply for up to €10,000 in grant aid toward the cost of business mentoring once they become operational.

All potential enterprises applying for the SEBPG must contact their local FÁS Community Service Unit (CSU). Here applications are received and checked for all essential information. Completed applications are presented to the Local Social Economy Working Group (LSEWG). The LSEWG may only *recommend* to approve or disapprove funding to potential applicants. The final decision remains with local CSU personnel, who consider the advice and recommendations of the LSEWG. CSU personnel inform the LSEWG of whether they have approved or disapproved each application and provide a detailed set of reasons for all unsuccessful applications. The SEBPG has a maximum level of €5,080 for those approved. It is not a requirement of the SEP that only Proposer Groups in receipt of a SEBPG can make a formal application for the full package of grant aid under the SEP.

Applications for Social Economy Enterprise Grant Support are processed in broadly the same manner as applications for the SEBPG. Following the submission of completed business plans to FÁS CSU personnel they are forwarded to the LSEWGs for their consideration. In considering business plans submitted to them one of the functions of LSEWGs is to consider such plans not only in terms of their adequacy / eligibility for support from the SEP but also in terms of their contribution to the priorities of the LSEWGs for the development of the social economy at local level.

## 4.5 Structures Involved in Implementing the SEP

The National Monitoring Committee, the Social Economy Support Unit (FÁS), FÁS Community Services Units, the Local Social Economy Working Groups (LSEWG), and FÁS Employment Services are the main structures involved in implementing the Social Economy Programme. These former two work at a national level with the latter three operating at a local level. Approval of recruitment of employees to enterprises funded by the SEP is largely by way of ESOs in Employment Services.

### 4.5.1 Local Social Economy Working Groups

LSEWGs were established through the work of local FÁS CSU personnel and Social Economy Development Officers (SEDOs) in consultation with Partnership Companies and other relevant groups. The geographical coverage of LSEWGs is based on the existing 38 “Partnership Areas” together with 16 areas in which an ADM or LEADER funded group operates. Membership of LSEWGs includes



representatives from FÁS, Partnership Companies, the social partners (i.e., ICTU, local employers, the community and voluntary sector, and farmer representation), and local health boards and local authorities.

The primary purpose of the LSEWGs is to promote a strong local network to aid the implementation of the SEP. This is achieved through partnership between statutory bodies, the social partners and local community/voluntary interests. The initial task of all LSEWGs was developing an agreed local strategy (including baseline data and local priorities) to guide the implementation of the SEP and also enable it to effectively aid in regenerating the local economy. While it was envisaged that the strategy development role of the LSEWGs would take place on an annual basis this has not been realised. As already noted, LSEWGs are engaged in aiding FÁS CSU personnel in the identification and selection of projects for grant-aid under SEP. The LSEWGs also assist in identifying local sources that can aid in the provision of technical and financial support to both proposer groups and enterprises established under the SEP. The promotion of the SEP within the community to both potential service users and employees is also a priority for LSEWGs. The LSEWGs are also seen as playing a role in monitoring the progress of the SEP at local level with this function being serviced by progress reports prepared by FÁS CSU personnel.

#### **4.5.2 National Monitoring Committee**

A National Monitoring Committee – under the chair of the DETE – oversees both the implementation and continued development of the SEP. This Committee was established before the launch of the programme and comprises representatives from the DETE, FÁS, the social partners, organisations involved in the social economy sector, and also organisations seen as potential players in the sector. Initially the Monitoring Committee was involved in developing the framework for establishing the SEP. In its current role of overseeing the continued development of the programme, it monitors policy and evaluates the performance of the programme. The monitoring role also extends to the quality of employment within enterprises funded under the SEP and dealing with issues relating to the access of target groups to subsidised employment. The Committee also provides policy advice to Government on the development of the social economy sector as a whole.

#### **4.5.3 Social Economy Support Unit**

The Social Economy Support Unit is located within FÁS head offices in Dublin. As with the Monitoring Committee it operates on a national basis. Its primary role is to co-ordinate and maximise the potential of the SEP in relation to its delivery of employment and services. This involves developing strategies to ensure equal opportunities in accessing employment and utilising services provided under the SEP. This may also entail advocating on behalf of specific groups to ensure their inclusion in the programme.

#### **Box 4.3 List of Performance Indicators for the SEP**

Type of Social Economy Business supported i.e. within three sub-sets
Legal Structure of Social Economy Enterprise
Nature of Project Sponsors and their gender balance
Area of economic activity of project
Level and sources of income generation, if any, from provision of services/product
Level of pay of persons in Social Economy employment
Levels of pay for persons by gender in subsidised employment
Nature/levels of grant support provided and other contributions
Cost per job supported by the Social Economy Programme (based on pro forma calculation for Social Economy support available)
Participation and support given by other Bodies in Social Economy Enterprises
Contribution of the Social Economy Programme to Local Development Strategy
Profile of persons in Social Economy employment e.g. gender, communities of interest, urban/rural, employment status
Gender balance of the Local Working Groups



The Social Economy Support Unit also aids programme implementation at a local level through the provision of training and support. It liaises with local FÁS CSU personnel and LSEWGs to assist in the development of local support networks and to ensure the dissemination of good practice within the programme. The identification of sources of support to enterprises funded by the SEP from public, private and EU sources is also part of its role. It feeds into the monitoring and development of the SEP by producing progress and performance reports as well as identifying policy implications arising from these reports. Currently, the information contained in its reports is based on data regarding a limited number of the performance indicators used in relation to the SEP (see Box 2.3).

#### **4.5.4 FÁS Community Services Unit**

FÁS Community Services Units are the main point of contact with the SEP for proposer groups and enterprises. Their role within the programme, as previously mentioned, is to analyse, assess and approve all potential applications. Once enterprises are established within the SEP, CSU personnel administer all funds to individual enterprises. They also provide technical support to enterprises in conjunction with ADM, community groups, and other local community groups involved in LSEWGs. In liaising with the Social Economy Support Unit local CSU personnel provide advice on improving the provision of technical support and grant allocation. They also aid in collecting information on each enterprise for use in progress and performance reports as well as highlighting potential policy implications for the programme.

#### **4.5.5 Employment Services**

Employment Service Officers (ESOs) act as the gateway to all FÁS services and programmes. They are the front line personnel with responsibilities for assisting clients make the best use of FÁS services and programmes. ESOs are also involved in interviewing and providing guidance to people referred to FÁS under the Employment Action Plan. Advertising of positions in SEP enterprises occurs in local FÁS offices and approval of grant-aided employees is undertaken by ESOs.

#### **4.5.6 Observations on Structures and Personnel Involved in Implementing the SEP from an Equality Perspective**

The range and varying functions of the structures and personnel involved in implementing the SEP highlight the many points at which issues related to promoting equality arise and need to be addressed in implementing the programme. Such issues concern the manner in which the selection and operation of enterprises can promote equality, the application of equality considerations in the recruitment of managers and employees, and the potential relevance of the services provided by enterprises in promoting equality.

While acknowledging the different organisational context regarding the promotion of equality prevailing in FÁS at the time the SEP was designed and implemented, it is evident that little formal consideration was given to how the SEP would accommodate diversity and promote equality for groups of people covered by the WEOP. Were such considerations to have arisen, it is clear that procedures would have been required to address them at all points along the operational chain of implementation. A key consideration in this regard is the approach to accommodating diversity and promoting equality at the level of the individual enterprises supported by the SEP. This issue is examined in the following section.

## 5. Equality Policies in Enterprises Supported by the SEP

The various guidelines in operation to support enterprises funded under the SEP did not explicitly require them to put in place equality statements or develop formal equality policies. However, reference is made in programme documentation to both the potential contribution of the enterprises to provide services for particular groups of people and to the social benefit arising from providing employment for people experiencing particular disadvantage on the labour market. Among the latter groups are older people, people with disabilities and members of the Traveller community.

The extent to which enterprises funded by the SEP had formal policies in the form of written equality statements was investigated in a survey of a random sample of one in four enterprises in 2003 (WRC Social and Economic Consultants, 2003). The reasons for not having such statements were also investigated.

The survey results showed that just over one third (34.3%) of the enterprises supported under the SEP had written equality statements. This did not vary across the three types of enterprises supported by the SEP. For comparative purposes, it is of note that this figure of 34.3% is substantially below that found in a recent nation-wide survey of over 5,000 employees in Ireland commissioned by the National Centre for Partnership and Performance and conducted by the ESRI (O’Connell and Russell, 2005) where it was found that 68% of employees report that there is a formal explicit policy on equal opportunities at their workplace. Almost one quarter (i.e., 23%) reported that there is no such policy and a further 9% said that they do not know whether such a policy exists at their workplace. However, the latter survey also found that small companies were less likely than their larger counterparts to have a formal equality policy: 43.1% in companies of less than 5 employees and 51.2% in companies with 5-19 employees. The latter are more relevant comparisons for enterprises funded under the SEP which typically have less than 10 employees.

**Table 5.1 Reasons for Absence of Formal / Written Equality Statement**

	%
Stated the presence of “informal” policies / practices	38.6
Not required for funding under the SEP	27.3
Absence of resources / skills to develop policy	13.6
Intend to put one on place in future	11.4
Had not considered the issue/ It never arose	9.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The low proportion of enterprises funded by the SEP with formal equality policies is somewhat surprising given the sector in which they operate, though perhaps understandable given their size. In this regard, the reasons for not having a formal written policy in place as presented in Table 5.1 are of interest. Over one third of enterprises without a formal / written equality policy stated that, while they did not have a formal / written policy, they did have “informal” policies in place (i.e., there was no formal documentation or specified procedures in place). If the stated presence of informal policies is taken into account then the proportion of SEP enterprises with an equality “policy” rises to 59.7%. Among enterprises funded under the SEP with no equality policies in place the main reasons stated for this, in order of frequency, are: not being required to do so under the funding requirements for the SEP, the lack of resources or skills to do this, the intention to put one in place at some future time, and the fact that they had not considered this an issue or that it never arose.

Given the stated position of FÁS in respect of incorporating “a proactive equality perspective into all FÁS service and programmes” it seems at least an oversight that greater attention and support was not provided to enterprises funded under the SEP either in the form of a requirement or guidelines

on this issue. This issue could usefully be addressed in the context of the recent requirement for enterprises funded under the SEP to provide a Social Benefits Report. The inclusion of equality as one dimension of this is warranted.

## 6. Profile of Employees in SEP Enterprises

Data on the demographic profile of employees in enterprises funded by the SEP are collected by FÁS through their registration form (see Section 3.2.4). This enables levels of participation by three of the four groups covered by the WEOP to be examined (data are not available in respect of members of minority ethnic groups). The analysis presented here is based on 2,060 employees in 313 enterprises funded under the SEP at the end of 2004. Given the current status of the SEP, there is likely to have been little change in the figures presented over the course of 2005.

Over one quarter (i.e., 28.1%) of employees are older persons (i.e., aged 50 years plus), 14.7% are persons with a disability (this being determined on the basis of being in receipt of a disability related welfare payment), and just 3 persons or .1% are members of the Traveller community. The gender breakdown of employees is 40% male, 60% female.

**Table 6.1 Employees in SEP Enterprises by Eligibility Category**

	Number	%
Unemployment Assistance	384	18.6
Unemployment Benefit	488	23.7
Adult Dependents	7	0.3
Widows	46	2.2
Disability	304	14.4
Loan Parents	448	21.7
Exemption Category	108	5.2
Supervisors	272	13.2
Travellers	3	0.1
	2060	100.0

A large proportion (i.e., 37%) of employment under the SEP is of a part-time nature. As can be seen from the breakdown of participants by eligibility category presented in Table 6.1, this is associated with a high level of participation by people with disabilities and lone parents.

A more detailed breakdown of the figures provided by FÁS shows the high proportion of employees with a disability in part-time employment. Overall, over three quarters (i.e., 78.7%) of employees with a disability are in part-time employment. This rises to 85.1% among female employees with a disability. The strong indication arising from these figures is that the high levels of participation by people with disabilities in the SEP is due to the possibility of accessing part-time employment in enterprises funded by the SEP.

The number of persons from minority ethnic groups is not available. In relation to this, data from the evaluation of the SEP previously referred to found that none of the employees in the enterprises responding to the survey were members of minority ethnic groups. Two main reasons were cited by FÁS personnel for the absence of members of minority ethnic groups as employees in enterprises funded by the SEP: the fact that many would not meet the eligibility criteria for the SEP and the possible absence of a social economy enterprise within travelling distance from their place of residence.

Overall, these figures point to the comparatively high levels of participation by older people and people with disabilities in the SEP, the absence of participation by members of minority ethnic groups, and a very low level of participation by members of the Traveller community.

As indicated earlier however (see Section 3.2.4), figures on the participation of members of the Traveller community in the SEP, as in other FÁS programmes, may be under-estimates due to the non-

disclosure of Traveller status on the FÁS registration form. In the case of the SEP, data on the individual social economy enterprises being funded by the SEP show that there are three enterprises catering for the employment of members of the Traveller community (i.e., Cara Park Community Services in Cabra (Dublin), Wicklow Travellers / Shuttle Knit, and Rainbow Dry Cleaning in Ballina. A total of 13 grant-aided employment places for Travellers are provided by these three enterprises. However, what is also indicated by these figures is that the accommodation of members of the Traveller community on the SEP is mainly, if not solely, on the basis of enterprises dedicated to the employment of members of the Traveller community. This finding is broadly consistent with the findings of other measure studies in pointing to a pronounced tendency to accommodate members of the Traveller community on programmes and projects in which all or the majority of participants are Travellers.

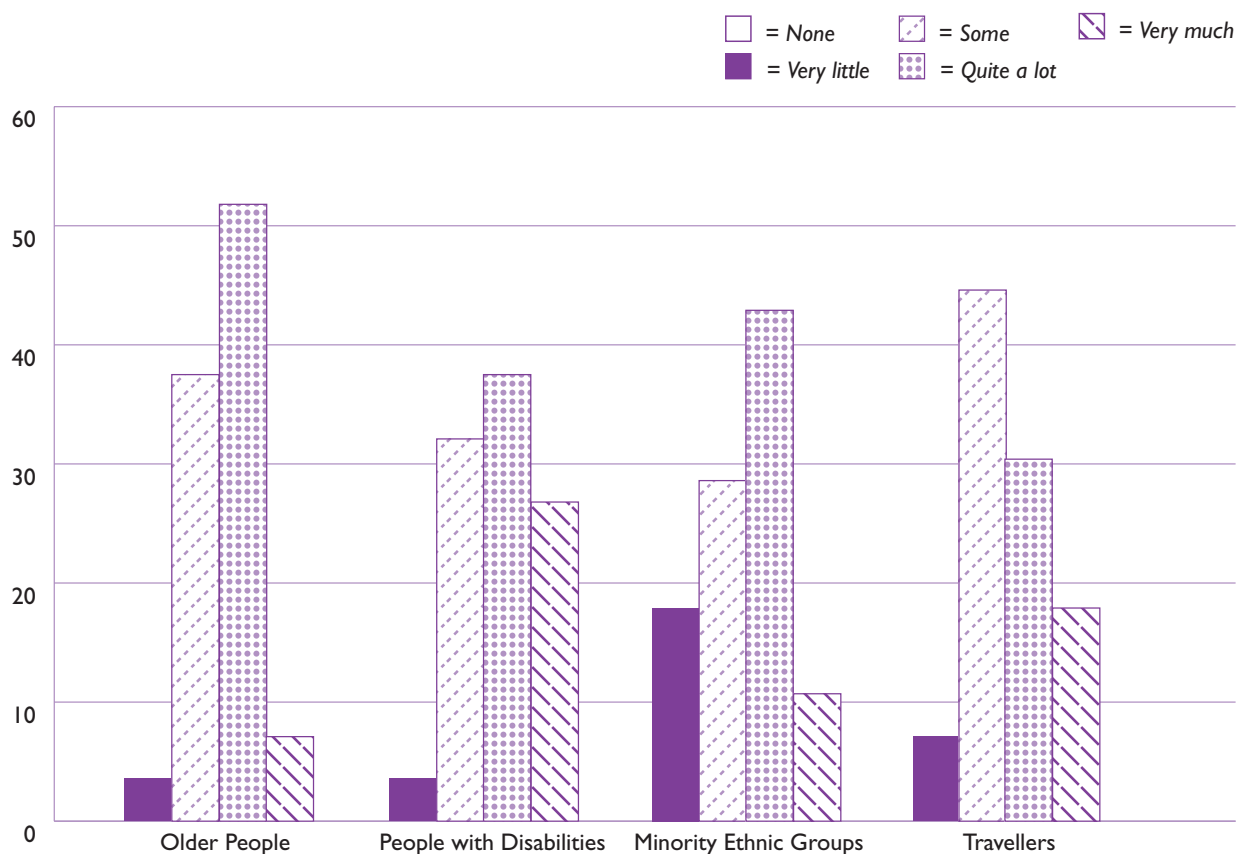
## 7. Experience and Views of Employment Services Officers Regarding the Participation of Groups of people Covered by the WEOP

As indicated above, at the level of individual employees, ESOs are the interface between persons qualifying for the programme and seeking to become employees in enterprises funded by the SEP. A survey of ESOs was undertaken with a view to understanding the pattern of participation in enterprises funded under the SEP and to obtain the views and experiences of ESOs in relation to possible barriers arising for different groups of people in accessing employment in enterprises funded under the SEP. To place the specific interaction of ESOs with the SEP in context, the survey also sought additional information regarding ESOs participation in training related to equality matters, their perceptions of FÁS in promoting equal opportunities for the four groups covered by the WEOP, and their levels of interaction with clients from the four groups covered by the WEOP.

### 7.1 Levels of Interaction with Clients from the Four Groups Covered by the WEOP

Overall, just over one third (i.e., 37.5%) of the ESOs responding to the survey reported that they had little or no interaction with clients from the four groups covered by the WEOP in the context of the SEP. This was due mainly to there being no SEP supported project in their locality and because of the virtual absence of recruitment to the programme over the past year or so. However, when the scope of the question of contact is widened to include the general work of ESOs, it is clear that, with the exception of a small proportion (i.e., 7.1%) of ESOs stating that they had no contact with members of the Traveller community, all other ESOs had varying degrees of interaction (see Figure 7.1).

Figure 7.1 Levels of Personal Contact by ESOs with Persons from the Four Groups Covered by the WEOP



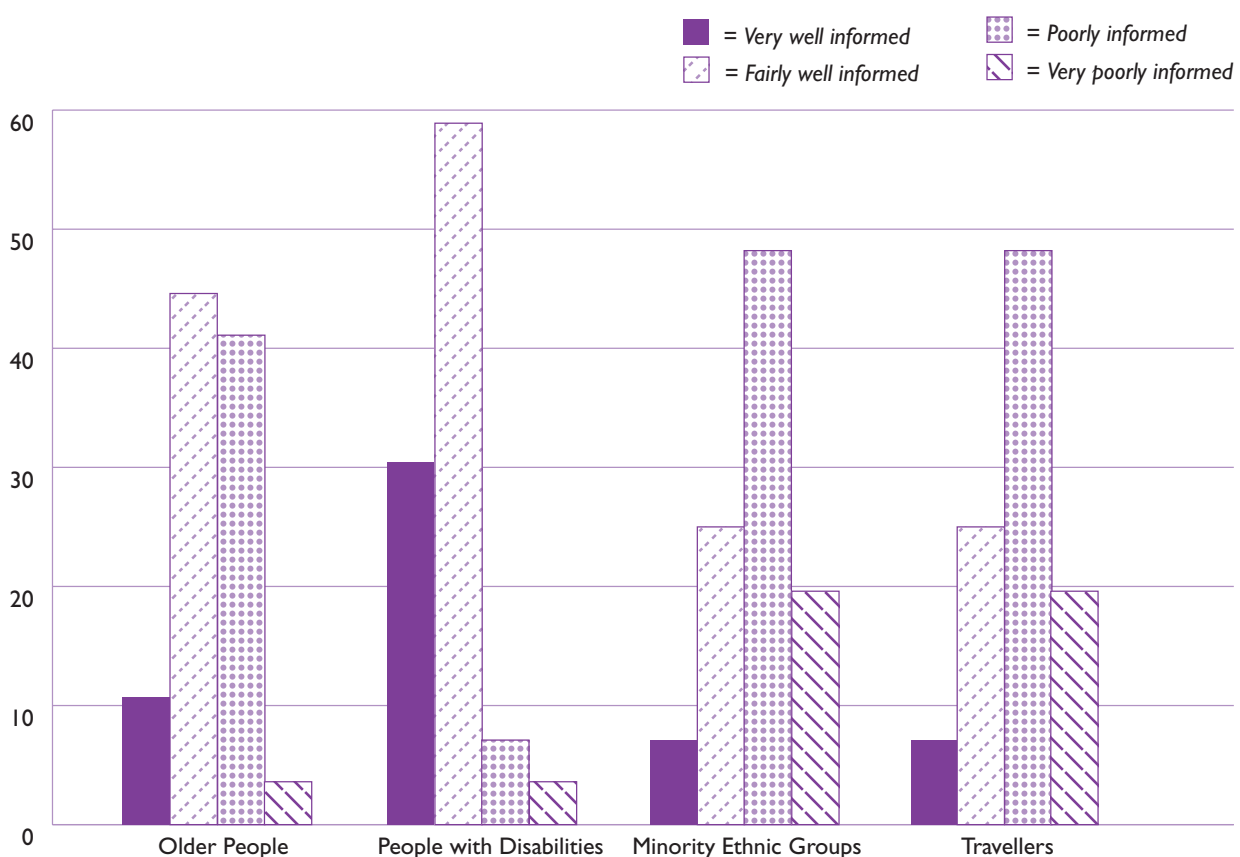
Analysis of the main trends concerning the extent to which ESOs had personal contact with clients from each of the four groups covered by the WEOP shows that it is with people with disabilities that the highest level of interaction takes place. That is, almost two thirds (i.e., 64.3%) of ESOs reported that they had “quite a lot” / “very much” contact with people with disabilities in the course of their work. The comparable percentages for people from the other three groups are: older people (58.9%), members of minority ethnic groups (53.6%) and members of the Traveller community (17.9%).

In interpreting the figure for contact with members of the Traveller community a number of points should be noted. First, the number of members of the Traveller community in the 15 to 64 year age range - at 12,904 - accounts for a very small proportion - approximately 0.5% - of the population in the 15 to 64 year age range. However, even noting this, data from the FÁS Client Statistical Information - Interactive Database show that a total of 403 members of the Traveller community are registered with FÁS. This corresponds to 0.1% of all clients on the database, indicating the under-representation of members of the Traveller community among FÁS registrants. The latter figure, however, needs very cautious interpretation in the light of the possible non-disclosure of Traveller status on FÁS registration forms.

## 7.2 Training and Information Related to Promoting Equal Opportunities

Just over two thirds (69.6%) of ESOs reported that they had participated in education / training courses that covered the issue of promoting equal opportunities for some or all of the groups of people covered by the WEOP. For one third (32.1%) of these, the course attended was during the previous year, with a further one third (30.4%) stating it was within the past two to three years. The courses attended included, Disability Awareness, Diploma in Guidance and Counselling, BA Training and Education, Understanding Mental Illness, Equality and Disability, and Introduction to Management Skills. In most cases the courses were short, lasting between one and three days. Just over two-thirds (69.2%) of the courses focused solely on disability with the remaining one-third (30.8%) covering all four groups of people covered by the WEOP.

**Figure 7.2 Extent to which ESOs Consider Themselves Informed Regarding How Best to Promote Equal Opportunities for the Four Groups Covered by the WEOP**



Reflecting Figure 7.2, the group of people about whom ESOs were most informed regarding how best to promote equal opportunities are people with disabilities. Almost all ESOs (89.3%) stated that they were at least “fairly well informed” regarding how best to promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities. The corresponding figure for older people is 55.3%, that for minority ethnic groups is 32.1%, and that for members of the Traveller community is 30.3%.

Overall, almost all (i.e., 92.9%) ESOs indicated that they would like to receive more information concerning how best to promote equal opportunities for the groups covered by the WEOP. Reflecting the pattern above, the three groups in relation to whom additional information was desired were, in order of frequency, members of the Traveller community, minority ethnic groups, and older people. For each of these groups, approximately three quarters of ESOs stated they would like additional information. Just under half (i.e., 48.2%) of ESOs stated that they would like to receive additional information in relation to how best to promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities.

### 7.3 ESOs’ Views on the Barriers to Participation in FÁS Programmes and Services Experienced by Persons from the Four Groups Covered by the WEOP

Based on their experience, a substantial proportion of ESOs identified the presence of barriers to participation in FÁS programmes and services experienced by people from the four groups covered by the WEOP (see Table 7.1). Of the four groups in question, higher proportions of ESOs identified the presence of barriers in relation to people with disabilities, members of minority ethnic groups and members of the Traveller community.

When asked more directly about barriers to participation in the SEP, it is clear that lower proportions of ESOs identified the presence of barriers in relation to participation in this programme, particularly in relation to older people. However, it is notable that there was little change in this regard with respect to members of the Traveller community. This is consistent with the very small representation of members of the Traveller community in the SEP based on the figure reported above in Section 6.

More generally, there is good deal of consistency to be found between the proportion of ESOs indicating the presence of barriers and the actual level of participation by members of the four groups covered by the WEOP in the SEP.

**Table 7.1 Proportion of ESOs Identifying the Presence of Barriers to Participation in FÁS Programmes and Services and the SEP**

	FÁS Programmes	SEP
Older People	46.2	8.7
People with Disabilities	66.1	26.1
Minority Ethnic Groups	77.7	33.3
Travellers	72.2	66.6

A summary of the barriers to participation in FÁS programmes and services identified by ESOs is presented in Table 7.2. For the most part the barriers identified concern attributes of the person or their circumstances. That is, the predominant view among ESOs would appear to be that it is factors related to clients’ circumstances, their personal situations and attitudes that are seen as constituting barriers to participation. In a previous report on this issue, these barriers are referred to as dispositional barriers (WRC Social and Economic Consultants, 2003). This is particularly the case in respect of older people and members of the Traveller community where lack of confidence, lack of interest, low literacy and “poor social skills” were cited.

The range and types of barrier identified in relation to people with disabilities covered a wider set of issues. Here, barriers arising due to difficulties of physical access and the absence of provision of personal assistants were cited. Also, “creaming” was cited both in relation to participation in FÁS



programmes and services generally, and the SEP specifically. The main issue being identified in respect of the latter is the reluctance of SEP sponsors to take on people with disabilities when they have available to them employees without a disability.

In addition to citing dispositional barriers in relation to members of the Traveller community, ESOs also identified the lack of financial incentives (to participate in training), the lack of work experience, and the absence of trust on the part of sponsors of SEP programmes as factors influencing their low level of participation in the SEP.

The main barrier identified in respect of members of minority ethnic groups is the absence of language skills. Also, in respect of the SEP particularly, ESOs cited the likely inability of many to meet the qualifying conditions for the SEP.

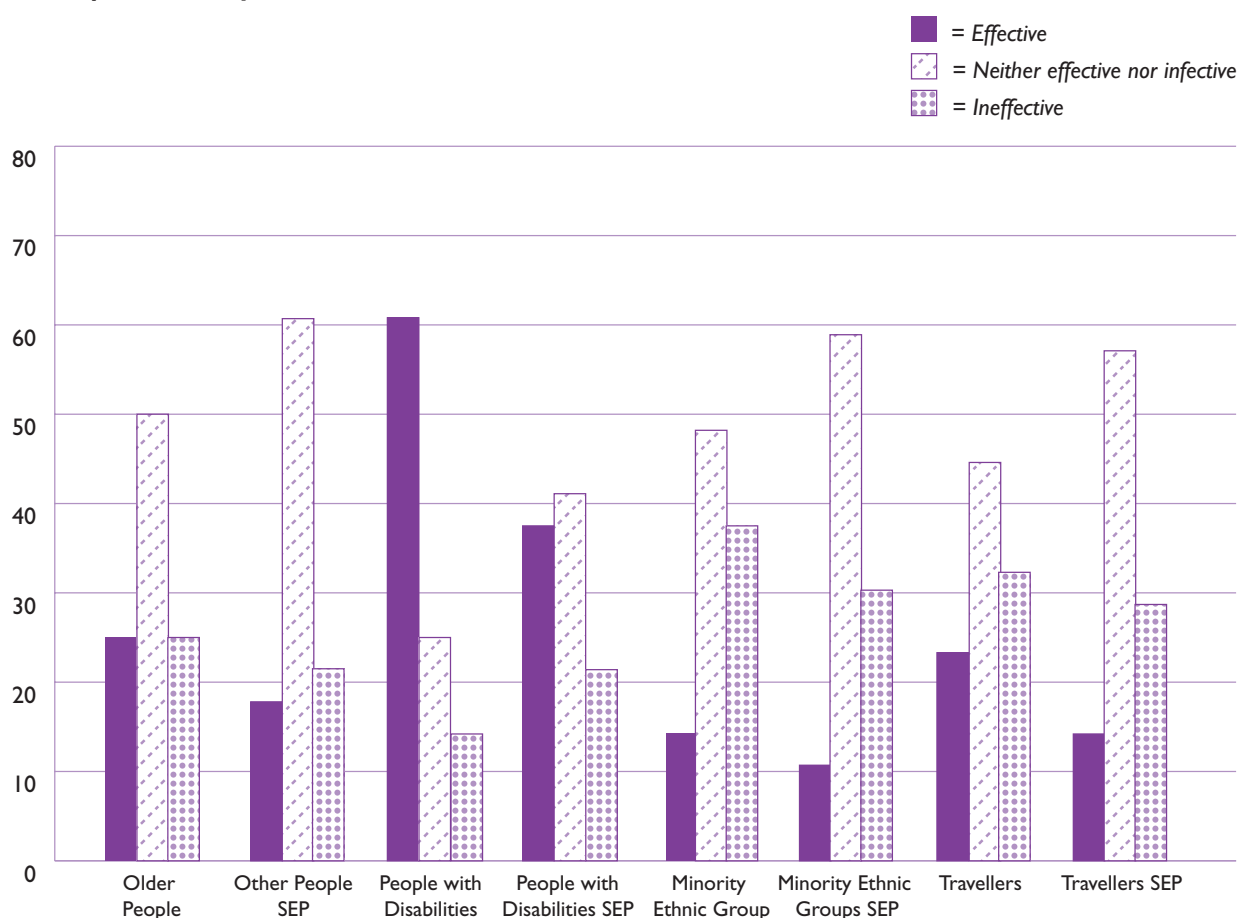
## 7.4 Ratings of the Effectiveness of FÁS in Promoting Participation by Persons from the Four Groups Covered by the WEOP in its Programmes and Services

As part of the survey ESOs were asked to rate the effectiveness of FÁS - as an organisation – in promoting participation by people from the four groups covered by the WEOP in its programmes and services. Figure 7.3 summarises the findings.

**Table 7.2 Barriers to Participation in FÁS Programmes and Services Identified by ESOs**

	FÁS Programmes	SEP
<b>Older People</b>	Literacy Issues Low Education Lack Confidence	Lack Confidence Lack of Transport
<b>People with Disabilities</b>	Access Issues No Personal Assistant Provided Reluctance to Engage with Mental Health Issues Fear of Low Progression Rates Lack of Information on Needs Creaming by Sponsors	Access Issues Lack of Transport Creaming by Sponsors Financial Disincentive
<b>Minority Ethnic Groups</b>	Language	Language Not Meeting Eligibility Criteria
<b>Travellers</b>	Low Social Skills Literacy Issues Low Education No Financial Incentive	Low Social Skills Lack of Information Insufficient Work Experience Lack of Trust on Part of Sponsors Lack of Interest

**Figure 7.3 ESOs' Ratings of the Effectiveness of FÁS in Promoting Participation by People from the Four Groups Covered by the WEOP**



**Table 7.3 Difference Between Proportion of ESOs Rating FÁS Rating as “Effective” and “Ineffective” in Promoting Participation by People from the Four Groups Covered by the WEOP**

	Difference Between Proportion of ESOs Rating FÁS Rating as “Effective” and the Proportion Rating FÁS as “Ineffective”
Older People	0.0
Older People SEP	-3.7
People with Disabilities	46.6
People with Disabilities SEP	16.1
Members of Minority Ethnic Groups	-23.2
Members of Minority Ethnic Groups SEP	-19.6
Members of Traveller community	-9.0
Members of Traveller community SEP	-14.5

The most notable feature of ESOs' ratings of the effectiveness of FÁS is the substantial proportion of ESOs choosing the response “neither effective nor ineffective”. One interpretation of this is that a substantial proportion of ESOs see FÁS as acting neutrally in respect of persons from the four groups covered by the WEOP. Noting this finding, Table 7.3 presents the difference between the proportions of ESOs rating FÁS as “effective” and the proportions rating FÁS as “ineffective”. A negative value here indicates that the proportion of ESOs rating FÁS as “ineffective” is higher than the proportion rating FÁS as “effective”. The absolute number indicates the size of this difference.

The figures in Table 7.3 indicate that, on balance, ESOs see FÁS as being effective in promoting equal opportunities for people with disabilities in FÁS programmes and services. In the case of older people,

the ESOs are broadly equally divided between seeing FÁS as “effective” and “ineffective”. However, with respect to the two other groups of people covered by the WEOP, an excess of ESOs rate FÁS as being “ineffective”.

## 7.5 Involvement by ESOs in Initiatives to Promote Equal Opportunities

Before looking at ESOs’ views on what could be done to address the barriers to participation they identified, we look briefly at the extent and nature of actions taken by individual ESOs themselves.

Almost all (i.e., 92.9%) ESOs stated that they had personally taken or been involved in an initiative to promote equal opportunities for clients from the four groups covered by the WEOP. For over half (57.7%) of ESOs taking an initiative, this initiative was taken in relation to people with disabilities. Almost one in five (i.e., 19.2%) indicated that they had been involved in an initiative to promote equal opportunities for members of the Traveller community, just over one in ten (i.e., 11.5%), in each case, had been involved in initiatives to promote equal opportunities for older people and members of minority ethnic groups.

The range of initiatives in which ESOs were involved included, arranging access to training, referral to another agency, engaging in case conferencing, participation in the Workway Initiative for people with disabilities, involvement in the Jobs Initiative for Older People, being a representative on groups working with people with disabilities, networking, and working with the local area based partnership company.

When ESOs were asked the narrower question of whether they had been personally involved in any initiative to promote participation by people from the four groups covered by the WEOP in the SEP, over half (i.e., 57.1%) replied positively. Again, the majority (i.e., 53.1%) of ESOs so involved reported that the initiative they were involved in focused on people with disabilities. One in five (i.e., 21.9%) reported taking an initiative to promote participation by older people in the SEP, and one in eight (i.e., 12.5%), in each case, had been involved in an initiative to promote the participation of members of the Traveller community and members of minority ethnic groups in the SEP. The main initiatives reported were placing a priority on assisting older clients, referring clients to SEP promoters, and assisting in securing an employment adaptation grant.

## 7.6 Addressing the Barriers to Participation in FÁS Programmes and Services

The majority of ESOs indicated that, in their view, action could be taken by FÁS to improve participation by the four groups of people covered by the WEOP in its programmes and services (see Table 7.4). Somewhat surprisingly, this proportion was highest in relation to people with disabilities, the group in relation to whom ESOs rated FÁS as being most effective. This pattern of findings can be interpreted in the context of the transfer of responsibility for the delivery of vocational training and other labour market services to FÁS in line with Government policy to mainstream services for people with disabilities and the high proportion of ESOs reporting that they had received training in promoting equal opportunities for people with disabilities and that they were informed regarding how best to improve equal opportunities for people with disabilities.

**Table 7.4 Proportion of ESOs Stating that Action Could be Taken by FÁS to Improve Participation by People from the Four Groups Covered by the WEOP in FÁS Programmes and Services**

	FÁS Programmes	SEP
Older People	76.9	65.4
People with Disabilities	84.6	80.8
Minority Ethnic Groups	73.1	69.2
Travellers	73.1	73.0

When the actual nature of the actions identified was analysed, one theme emerged as an area of considerable agreement across ESOs and of relevance to all four groups covered by the WEOP. This theme is indicated in Table 7.5 as “Better Marketing”. While this heading covers a range of specific suggestions, the core proposition being put forward is that FÁS needs to market its programmes and services in a more active manner to

people from all of the groups covered by the WEOP. This active marketing involves promoting awareness of FÁS services and programmes, developing a positive image of FÁS, and ensuring that FÁS is “in tune with the needs of people from the four groups”. In particular, ESOs were emphasising the need for the “local” marketing of FÁS programmes and services. Elements of this include ensuring that the package of programmes and services on offer is matched to local needs, that active steps are taken at local level to make potential clients aware of the services on offer, and that local organisations are informed and engaged with as a means of recruiting persons covered by the WEOP into FÁS programmes and services.

Among the specific suggestions made to market FÁS to people from the four groups covered by the WEOP are using local media to publicise programmes and services, holding listening sessions to identify real as opposed to assumed needs, undertaking local market research to develop local profiles of clients’ needs, holding open days for particular groups of people in FÁS training centres and offices, networking with organisations involved with people from the four groups covered by the WEOP, and mounting promotional campaigns targeted at the four groups of people.

Reflecting the high proportion of ESOs indicating that they would be interested in receiving more information about how best to promote equal opportunities for the groups of people covered by the WEOP, increased access to training for FÁS personnel in the area of equal opportunities was also seen as a proposition that would improve participation levels. As stated by one respondent:

*Firstly, of course, we all need information. Employment Services need to be fully trained not only in awareness of the needs of the four groups mentioned but trained in knowledge of all our programmes and supports available. We have so many now its difficult to keep up to date but we need to have access to correct and up to date information on programmes, supports and initiatives for marginalised groups. Secondly, you cannot underestimate the need for professional training for staff particularly in area of career guidance. Lastly – time and resources. In order to fully assist, guide etc a client from one of the above groups we need time. Otherwise the person’s real needs may not be addressed. Time to listen, encourage, research options, assess abilities, language needs etc and to build up trust to encourage client to access a programme.*

**Table 7.5 Actions Identified by ESOs that would Increase the Capacity of FÁS to Promote Equal Opportunities for the Four Groups of People Covered by the WEOP**

	FÁS Programmes	SEP
<b>Older People</b>	“Better Marketing” “Personnel Training” Setting Targets “Return to Work Programmes” for Over 50s More Part-time Programmes	“Better Marketing” “Return to Work Programmes” for Over 50s Longer Contracts for Older People Setting Target Numbers for Over 50s
<b>People with Disabilities</b>	“Better Marketing” “Personnel Training” Provide Personal Assessments Promoting Awareness of Supports to Employer More Part-time Programmes Speed Up Exemption (DSFA) Procedures	“Better Marketing” Ring Fencing a Proportion of Places “Disability Training” for Sponsors
<b>Minority Ethnic Groups</b>	“Better Marketing” “Personnel Training” Language Training Pre-Mainstream Training / Orientation Programmes	“Better Marketing” Language Training
<b>Travellers</b>	“Better Marketing” “Personnel Training” Direct Contact With Traveller Groups More Tailored Training Provision	“Better Marketing”

In addition to this general theme a number of other actions were identified in relation to each of the page 27

four groups of people covered by the WEOP. For older people and people with disabilities, the issue of setting targets and ring-fencing paces was cited. Greater availability of part-time programmes was also cited as relevant to older people and people with disabilities. The availability of “Return to Work” programmes was seen as addressing the needs arising from the long durations without work experienced by many older long-term unemployed and building their confidence prior to assisting them enter employment programmes such as the SEP. For people with disabilities, attention was drawn to the need for FÁS trainers and sponsors of enterprises supported under the SEP to receive “disability training” and to be supported in their actions to improve equal opportunities for people with disabilities.

For members of minority ethnic groups, language training and the provision of “pre-mainstream training” and “work orientation programmes” were identified as relevant actions.

Over and above the actions already cited, greater contact with groups and organisations working with members of the Traveller community and a more flexible and tailored approach to the provision of training and services for Travellers were the main actions identified to enhance the capacity of FÁS to promote equal opportunities for members of the Traveller community. With regard to the latter, emphasis was placed on developing flexibility in the location and timing of programmes and to building training content on and around the interests and work of Travellers (particularly Traveller men) in order to secure higher levels of participation by members of the Traveller community. The Special Initiative for Travellers currently being implemented by FÁS recognises these concerns and specifically provides for access to funding for individual training (as well as training for groups of Travellers) based on individual needs and interests and provides mentoring and support to individuals in that context.

**Table 7.6 Main General Lessons Regarding How Best to Promote Participation of People from the Four Groups Covered by the WEOP in the Programmes and Services Provided by FÁS**

<b>Older People</b>	“Better Marketing”	Return to Work Programmes, Individual Counselling, Part-time Programmes, Availability of Incentive for Employers
<b>People with Disabilities</b>	“Better Marketing”	Specialist ESOs, Case Conferencing, Promoting Employer Awareness, Liaison between ESOs and Training Services, Training for Training Services Personnel
<b>Minority Ethnic Groups</b>	“Better Marketing”	Liaise with Local Employment Services and Groups Working with Non-Nationals, Arrange for Language Training
<b>Travellers</b>	“Better Marketing”	Establish Positive Image of FÁS with Travellers, Information for ESOs on Traveller Culture, Open Days for Travellers

In addition to asking ESOs what, in their view, were the possible actions to address the barriers being experienced by the four groups of people covered by the WEOP, they were also asked to identify, on the basis of their experience, the main general lessons applicable to increasing the capacity of FÁS to promote equal opportunities. While there was some overlap in the responses to this question with the responses already summarised - especially the emphasis on “Better Marketing” - a number of additional suggestions were made. These are summarised in Table 7.6 above.

## 7.7 Conclusions from the Survey of ESOs

Based on the findings presented above a number of broad conclusions are drawn here. They are:

- in general, ESOs consider themselves well informed with regard to the promotion of equal opportunities for people with disabilities and, to a somewhat lesser extent, for older people. The two groups in relation to whom ESOs considered themselves less informed were members of minority ethnic groups and members of the Traveller community;

- while a high proportion (i.e., 69.6%) of ESOs report having participated in training relevant to promoting equal opportunities, a substantial proportion (i.e., 69.2%) of this training was solely concerned with promoting equal opportunities for people with disabilities. Ensuring that FÁS personnel have access to training to support the promotion of equality for members of minority ethnic groups and for members of the Traveller community is particularly relevant to underpinning capacity to promote equal opportunities for these groups and meeting commitments regarding equality in its recent strategy statement;
- in general, FÁS is seen as being more effective in promoting equal opportunities for people with disabilities and older people than it is relation to members of minority ethnic groups and members of the Traveller community. This finding is reflected in the actual pattern of participation of persons from the four groups covered by the WEOP in the SEP;
- ESOs views of the barriers to participation in FÁS programmes and services experienced by persons from the four groups covered by the WEOP mainly - though not exclusively - point to the presence of dispositional barriers on the part of people themselves. The main exception to this is people with disabilities, perhaps reflecting a greater awareness of the barriers faced by people with disabilities resulting from participation in training on this issue by ESOs; and,
- despite a focus on dispositional barriers, there is a strong consensus that the main area of action that would enhance equal opportunities for members of the four groups covered by the WEOP lies in area of addressing institutional barriers. That is, in the view of ESOs, “better marketing” of FÁS and of FÁS programmes and services to persons from the four groups covered by the WEOP is required. The strong message being delivered in relation to this is that the marketing of FÁS programmes and services needs a much stronger local dimension. The core proposition being put forward is that FÁS needs to market its programmes and services in a more active manner to people from all of the groups covered by the WEOP. This active marketing involves promoting awareness of FÁS services and programmes, developing a positive image of FÁS among persons from the four groups covered by the WEOP, and ensuring that FÁS is “in tune with the needs of people from the four groups”, particularly as these manifest themselves in specific locations around the country.

## 8. Conclusion

Despite having been developed at a time when the organisational context regarding equality in FÁS was less developed than it is at present, the manner in which the SEP was designed and implemented has proved conducive to participation by older people and people with disabilities. Indeed, with respect to the latter, the number of people with a disability employed in SEP enterprises is not far short of the number of people on the Employment Support Scheme - a dedicated programme supporting the employment of people with disabilities - at the end of 2004 (i.e., approximately 450). The design element that underlies the high level of participation by people with disabilities is the possibility of taking up part-time employment: over three quarters (78.7%) of employees with a disability in SEP enterprises are working part-time. This feature of the SEP is also associated with a high level of participation by women including lone parents (the majority of whom are women).

The SEP has been far less successful in accommodating members of the Traveller community and members of minority ethnic groups.

The main reasons cited by FÁS personnel for the low level of participation by members of the Traveller community are: poor social skills, lack of information about the SEP, insufficient / inappropriate work experience, the absence of trust on the part of sponsors of SEP enterprises, and a lack of interest on the part of Travellers in the SEP. At a more pragmatic level, is the possible absence of an SEP enterprise in localities containing sizeable populations of members of the Traveller community. It should be noted that no age restrictions apply to members of the Traveller community seeking to participate in the SEP. This, however, does not appear to have made the programme a source of employment for members of the Traveller community. An important issue in this regard, is the role of SEP supported enterprises. These for the most part have not recruited members of the Traveller community and where they have it is Traveller specific enterprises: that is, enterprises where all or the majority of employees are members of the Traveller community.

The main reasons cited for the absence of participation by members of minority ethnic groups in the SEP are not meeting the eligibility criteria and language difficulties.

A central feature of the design of the SEP - a feature shared with other FÁS programmes such as Community Employment - is that the actual employment provided under the programme and the conditions associated with this are for the most part administered and controlled by sponsor organisations. These sponsor organisations are mainly working in the community, voluntary and local development sectors. In effect, FÁS administers the programme while sponsor organisations deliver the programme and are the interface with programme participants. As part of its administrative activities, FÁS has issued guidelines in respect of many aspects of these conditions of employment, has requirements in relation to reporting on aspects of the enterprises' performance, and FÁS personnel make monitoring visits to enterprises supported by the SEP. To date, however, promoting equality has not been an important feature of its administrative activities in relation to the SEP. This is reflected in the low proportion of SEP enterprises that have formal equality policies in place and is also possibly reflected in the low proportion of members of the Traveller community employed in SEP enterprises. The issues arising in relation to this should be addressed in the context of the on-going review of the SEP.

In line with stated commitments in its current Statement of Strategy 2006-2009, a useful mechanism to explore the low participation of members of the Traveller community in the SEP would be to consult with members of the Traveller community and organisations representing / working with members of the Traveller community to determine what factors, in their view, are their reasons for non-participation. This would be particularly important if in the course of the on-going review of the SEP the programme were to be opened up to supporting the establishment of new enterprises.



Finally, though this measure study has focused on the SEP, the survey of ESOs conducted as part of the methodology has highlighted a number of areas that FÁS needs to address in the context of implementing the commitments contained in its recent strategy statement. Some of the areas highlighted are referred to in the strategy document itself, for example, training for personnel. What is underlined by the findings of the survey of ESOs is the need for effective local action if national level organisational commitments and objectives are to be achieved, particularly in the area of equality. Central to this local action is the marketing of FÁS, its programmes and services, to all potential clients, at local level in a manner that seeks to accommodate diversity and promote equality. In effect, national objectives and commitments need strong regional and local implementation plans that include commitments to and strategies to accommodate diversity and promote equality.



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## Annex I

### The 10 Measures of EHRDOP to which the WEOP Specifically Applies

Measure	Implementing Department	Implementing Agency
M3 Active Measure for the LTU and Socially Excluded	DETE	FÁS (with elements contracted to local bodies (e.g., in relation to implementing CE)
M4 Early Education	DES	St. Patricks and DIT (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education)
M9 Third Level Access	DES	HEA, Institutes of Technology, VECs
M11B Early School Leavers – Youthreach and Travellers	DES	VECs (in respect of out of school centres and Senior Traveller Training Centres)
M12B Sectoral Entry Training – Tourism	DAST	Fáilte Ireland
M13 Skills Training for the Unemployed and Redundant	DETE	FÁS
M15 Employment Support Services	DSFA	DSFA (Employment Support Service Unit with the DSFA)
M21 Lifelong Learning – Back to Education Initiative	DES	VECs, Non-VEC Schools, Community Groups
28B Training of Trainers	DETE	FÁS
32B Training Infrastructure	DETE	FÁS

## Equality Studies Unit

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