Annex 16. Summary of European Social Fund contribution in Poland in 2004-2006

I. INTRODUCTION

The assessment of the impact of intervention programmes co-financed under the European Social Fund in 2004-2009 on the level and quality of employment in Poland is not easy. There are several key factors therefore.

First of all, the 2004-2006 financial perspective was the first period of EU funds implementation in Poland after the accession. In the absence of tangible experience with the implementation of financing instruments under the EU Cohesion Policy, it was mainly a period of collecting new and often quite innovative experiences and developing solutions – both relating to the content and to management - in the fields of labour markets and active employment policy, development of education and trainings as well as activities related to social inclusion. At the same time, much effort has been put into the process of building structures and mechanisms for the management of funds from the ESF, as well as building institutional and human resources systems to support management and governance. Success of the ESF implementation in Poland would not be possible if the institutions involved in the implementation process were not previously prepared and provided with adequately educated and trained personnel.

It should also be taken into account that the structures of European Social Fund implementation system in the years 2004-2006 were not uniform, since in that programming period the ESF measures were dispersed between three very different operational programmes, which were characterised by quite different methods of management and varying systems for implementing measures. The structure of the ESF assistance implementation was thus much more complex than is the case in the present financial perspective, where the single-fund rule has been imposed.

Taking into account all the above factors, the effects of ESF assistance implementation in 2004-2009 in Poland seem satisfactory. civilization leap has been achieved allowing Poland to overcome significant discrepancies between Poland and EU-27 States in the area of economic and social policy. This leap translates both to the growth of external convergence of Poland as compared to the European Union countries, as well as to the increase in the level and quality of employment - taking account of the requirements of the knowledge-based economy, which was the main objective of the *National Development Plan 2004-2006 (NDP).* Enormous progress was made in the implementation of new methods and procedures for the implementation of projects benefiting from public support, as well as changing social attitudes towards the effective operation and use of EU funds.

In assessing the intervention of the European Social Fund in Poland in 2004-2006, its crucial role in creating and providing new opportunities for national and regional development, social groups and individuals needs to be stressed in particular. Programmes and projects funded under the European Social Fund resulted not only in changes among the individual project participants, but also initiated a national debate on new, important topics such as pre-school education, women's employment growth, employability of people in the 50+ age group, integration of the disabled, migration policy, etc. EFS has broadened the scope and initiated new trends in social and labour market policies and it has brought a major qualitative change in the functioning of State structures, as well as in the professional life of individuals.

At the same time, it appeared that the implementation of the ESF at regional and local levels proved most effective. Projects implemented in the regions effectively responded to the local market needs. This resulted from the fact that the district administration was able to adapt activities to the socio-economic situation of the region, labour market conditions and the needs of small and medium enterprises. As a result, assistance offered through projects was better adapted to the actual needs in local communities.

The analysis of the ESF intervention in 2004-2009, which is presented in this summary, provides evidence of the overall increase in employment and improved opportunities for its maintenance, strengthening the economic and social cohesion and reducing regional disparities in development of different areas - in particular, between urban and rural areas. Based on the effects of the implementation of programmes co-financed under the ESF, it highlights the key influence on the socio-economic development in Poland, reflected both in the improvement of macroeconomic indicators (e.g. level of employment, greater access to education and training) and improving the quality of social life, better functioning of public administration and mechanisms of social participation which are the foundation of civil society development.

II. AIMS OF THE OPERATIONAL PROGRAMMES CO-FINANCED UNDER THE ESF

The primary task of the **SOP HRD 2004-2006** was to develop a modern, knowledge-based society by providing adequate access to education, training and employment, thereby creating suitable conditions for the development of human resources. Other objectives of the program focused on supporting the active forms of counteracting unemployment, creating favourable conditions for business development or presenting initiatives to counter the social exclusion of the unemployed.

SOP HRD beneficiaries included mainly public administration units, entrepreneurs, NGOs and socio-economic partners. Extensive support was aimed at both the institutional modernisation of systems (including the labour market, educational system and public administration) and direct skills and competence development of the ultimate beneficiaries of the Programme.

Implementation of SOP HRD has proven to be effective and produced set many objectives before it contributed to the strategic objective of the NDP, which was to develop a competitive knowledge-based economy and entrepreneurship, capable of sustainable and harmonious development, providing growth of employment, as well as to achieve cohesion with social, economic and spatial aspects of EU policies on regional and national level. SOP HRD, along with other operational programmes, has become an effective instrument of achieving policy cohesion and by directly affecting the socio-economic reforms of the country contributed to the improvement in the quality of life of its inhabitants.

The Programme was broken down into 3 Priorities divided into 13 Measures.

The second programme co-financed under the European Social Fund - ***Community Initiative Programme EQUAL*** **(CIP EQUAL)** was a kind of laboratory for employment policy - testing and promoting new, innovative ways of combating all forms of discrimination and inequality in the labour market. The EQUAL initiative in Poland, was pursued by Development Partnerships, selected by means of a contest. EQUAL provided examples of good practices and innovative solutions, which (thanks to international cooperation and effective publicity actions) can be implemented in

many EU States, including Poland. The most important elements of the EQUAL Programme were: thematic approach, partnership, involvement of the discriminated groups in the actions of the partnerships (empowerment), transnational cooperation, innovativeness and mainstreaming.

Implementation of the CIP EQUAL in Poland was carried out through three separately funded Actions:

- Action 1 - *Setting up Development Partnerships and transnational cooperation* - during the implementation of the Action, Development Partnership worked on determining the final composition of the Partnership, to develop strategies and programme of Action 2, including the preparation and signing of the Partnership and Development Agreement on Transnational co-operation with at least one of DPs from another EU Member State (107 partnerships);
- Action 2 - *Implementation of the work programmes of Development Partnerships* - during the implementation of the Action, Development Partnership implemented the tasks specified in the contract for the Development Partnership and in Transnational Cooperation Agreement (99 partnerships);
- Action 3 - *Thematic networking, dissemination and mainstreaming*- implementation of Action 3 contributed to the dissemination and incorporation of results developed by the Development Partnership in the course of Action 2 implementation to policies and practices of institutions and organisations in the field of labour market policy and social inclusion (77 projects).

The scope of the EQUAL Community Initiative in Poland included five themes:

- *Theme A: Facilitating access and return to the labour market for those who have difficulty in being integrated or reintegrated into a labour market which must be open to all*(37 partnerships);
- *Theme D: Strengthening the social economy (the third sector), in particular the services of interest to the community, with a focus on improving the quality of jobs* (24 partnerships);
- *Theme F: Supporting the adaptability of firms and employees to structural economic change and the use of information technology and other new technologies* (24 partnerships);
- *Theme G: Reconciling family and professional life, as well as the reintegration of men and women who have left the labour market, by developing more flexible and effective forms of work organisation and support services* (11 partnerships);
- *Theme I: Supporting the social and vocational integration of Asylum-Seekers – seekers* (3 partnerships).

The largest programme in terms of allocation and the only one, co-financed under 2 different structural funds (ERDF/ESF) was the **Integrated Regional Operational Programme (IROP).**

The aim of the IROP was to create growth conditions for the competitiveness of regions and preventing the marginalisation of certain areas, so as to foster the economic development of the country in a long term perspective. The programme was financed by the European Regional Development Fund under the Priorities 1, 3 and 4 and by the European Social Fund under Priority 2.

The main objective of the Priority 2. *"Strengthening the human resources development in regions"* was to create conditions for the development of human resources at local and regional level and to improve the ability to programme and

plan implementation in the development of human resources at these levels. Of particular importance was the implementation of actions aimed at reorientation of professional workers at risk of unemployment and at retraining persons leaving the sector of agriculture.

Measures implemented focus especially on the areas at risk of marginalization, mainly in rural areas and on the restructuring of industry sectors. In these areas public financing has been allocated to the specific needs of regions and targeted to complement the national programmes to support the development of employment and education. Public aid included the following tasks:

- Greater flexibility and increased mobility of human resources, including an increase in the level of knowledge and professional skills of people, in particular, among residents of areas at risk of marginalization, especially rural areas as well as the restructuring of industry sectors,
- Increasing the possibility to change employment for workers switching from agriculture, business and industry, restructured through retraining,
- Improving access to upper secondary education and higher education for students from rural areas and the restructuring of industry sectors,
- Supporting the creation of regional innovation systems based on the cooperation of the regional R&D sector with local businesses, promoting entrepreneurship through a comprehensive support for business activity.

III. FINANCIAL ALLOCATION AND EXPENDITURE UNDER ESF

The European Social Fund planned allocation for Poland in the 2004–2006 programming period reached in total **EUR 2 042.4 million**. 3 different Operational Programmes (OPs) were co-financed under this amount:

- *Community Initiative Programme EQUAL (CIP EQUAL)* with the allocation of **EUR 133.9 million,**
- *Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development (SOP HRD)* with the allocation of **EUR 1 470 million**
- Priority 2 of *Integrated Regional Operational Programme (IROP)* with the allocation of **EUR 466.3 million**

In total, within 3 Operational Programmes co-financed under the ESF, which have been implemented in Poland, EUR 2 067.91 million was spent (without Technical Assistance).

In the five main areas for ESF in 2004-2009, under the three Operational Programmes, most expenditures were directed to support the labour market (EUR 825 435 403, which represents 40.5% of the total expenditures of the ESF) and education and the educational system (EUR 695 541 237, which represents 34.1% of the funding from the ESF). These expenses accounted for a total of about ¾ of ESF intervention in Poland, granted in the years 2004-2009. It should be noted that funding under these areas has resulted in financial assistance while achieving significant results.

Slightly smaller amounts, but also more difficult to spend, were allocated to support the target groups covered by the processes of adaptability (employees) and social integration (socially excluded and people from high risk groups). ESF resources expended in these areas amounted to, respectively – EUR 274 737 671 (13.5% of

total support) for adaptability and EUR 239 724 101 (11.7% of total expenditure by the ESF) in the area of social inclusion.

It is worth mentioning that some of these five areas were not supported simultaneously in all three programs. Specific, relatively new area of intervention by the EU, which was directly supported by the ESF only in the SOP HRD, was the support for administration (administrative capacity-building field), which has covered 16 projects (mainly training and consulting) worth of ESF funding – EUR 5 136 144 (0.3% of total spending by the ESF).

Graph 1. Total value of reimbursement (EUR) within ESF OPs (2004-2010)

IV. PHYSICAL PROGRESS OF OPERATIONAL PROGRAMMES COFINACED UNDER THE ESF

Overall, within the three Operational Programmes co-financed under the ESF during the 2004-2009 period, there were 8760 projects carried out, including the SOP HRD - 3938, Priority 2 of IROP - 4539, and CIP EQUAL – 283. Most of them were carried out in mazowieckie voivodeship - 1244, and the least in świętokrzyskie voivodeship – 260.

Graph 2. Number of projects completed within ESF OP's (2004-2010)

Approximately 2,817,300 ultimate beneficiaries received support from the ESF. The vast number of participants were supported within the framework of SOP HRD - 1,634,500. Under Priority 2 of IROP 1,134,000 people were supported and under the CIP EQUAL there were 48,800 recipients of support. This comparison however, should take into account the different (from 2 other Operational Programmes) nature of the CIP EQUAL, which was primarily devoted to testing and working out new and innovative solutions in the labour market, social integration and adaptability field, and thus support for the ultimate beneficiaries of this programme was a mostly indirect.

Graph 3. Number of participants in projects supported in ESF OPs

Within the framework of all implemented measures the following groups and institutions were supported:

SOP HRD

- 78.2 thousand unemployed and 15 thousand disabled people
- 69.7 thousand public schools and learning centres
- 30 thousand government educational institutions
- over 149.8 thousand teachers
- 13.9 thousand civil servants

IROP

- Over 840 thousand people covered by the trainings
- Scholarships offered to more than 700 thousand students
- 9.3 thousand micro-enterprises created

EQUAL

- 48,807 participants (47% female beneficiaries), including such groups of people as socially excluded, disabled, inhabitants of rural and deprived areas, 44+ employees, offenders and ex-offenders, juvenile delinquents, homeless, asylum seekers and migrants,
- 18,193 participants of Theme A (female beneficiaries - 34%, long-term unemployed who have received support, including the economically inactive

persons - 13%, participants continuing education concerning new technologies and techniques of information and communication - 14%),

- 8,500 participants of Theme D (female beneficiaries - 66%, long-term unemployed who have received support, including the economically inactive persons - 29.5%),
- 14,959 participants of Theme F (female beneficiaries - 43%, employees - 76%, participants continuing education in the field of new technologies and techniques of information and communication - 31%),
- 3,643 participants of Theme G (female beneficiaries - 92%, partnerships promoting flexible forms of employment and work organization - 99%, partnerships promoting child care / dependents services - 54%, partnerships promoting the maintenance of professional activity - 90.9%),
- 3,512 participants of Theme I (female beneficiaries - 41%, partnerships promoting the development of infrastructure, reception centre and residence permits for persons applying for refugee status - 66%).

V. EFFECTIVENESS OF OPERATIONAL PROGRAMMES COFINACED UNDER THE ESF

To sum up the implementation of these three programs, it must be noted that despite some limitations arising from the fact that the years 2004-2008 were a period when Poland collected first experiences in the area of structural funds set up for all the actions of the Programme objectives and achieved significant added value in terms of improving the functioning of many mechanisms of socio - economic development.

Nevertheless, support provided through the European Social Fund has been highly appreciated by the recipients themselves, as well as by external evaluators, who conducted numerous horizontal and thematic evaluation studies that have proven the importance and added value of the ESF intervention in Poland on a basis of both qualitative and quantitative data (detailed results were presented in the report of the SOP HRD). It should be stressed, that no survey incorporating the overall impact of the ESF (for all ESF-co-financed Operational Programmes) have been completed under the 2004-2006 financial perspective. Data available in this area focuses primarily on results obtained in this regard under the SOP HRD ongoing support and concerns persons (both working and remaining unemployed).

Regarding the assessment of the effectiveness of the support, according to a survey[1] 42% of beneficiaries obtained employment, 16% led their own company, 14% do not have a permanent job, but continue education. In addition to the visible results in terms of increased number of jobs, higher professional qualifications or the number of persons completing training, the results obtained a number of "soft skills". With ESF jobs and opportunities have been significantly increased and nearly 80% of participants in activation of various types indicated that they felt more confident and it was easier for them to seek employment. Staff support provided to participants in the projects was positively assessed by 75% participants and almost all of them would recommend it to others (91%).

Ongoing support for employees also contributed to "better jobs" creation. Subjective Index measured by declaration of the use of knowledge acquired during project participation at work, has reached a value of between 681 and 726 thousand people.

[1] On the basis of the evaluation entitled *"Interviewing the ultimate beneficiaries of the HRD SOP 2004-2006".*

The same ratio, measured in a more objective way - such as income growth or job promotion, indicates a change in this area for around 224-263 thousand project participants.

After participating in the project almost ¾ ultimate beneficiaries (72%) operate with the same employer. The fact that a higher percentage of non-working women does not imply a greater risk of unemployment among women covered by the support should also be seen as positive. The study population is characterized by the same percentage of unemployed women and unemployed men (at the level of 2%).

Evaluation studies carried out under the SOP HRD also allow to refer to the effectiveness of ongoing support for the unemployed in the labour market. Conclusions allow to estimate that ESF support in this field helped 400 to about 440 thousand unemployed people to find a job. Analysis of the job sustainability aspect, supported within Measure 2.3 (the index should be understood as the work preserved for at least two years after participation in the training), shows that over 94 percent (96% of men and 93% of women) of the surveyed employees are still working, and only 2% are unemployed.

Implementation of SOP HRD enabled many people access to the modern informational technology and the Internet, which constitutes an essential part of the process of building the information society. Many schools and other educational establishments were equipped with computers with appropriate software. An increase in the level of qualifications of teachers was also noted. Organizing appropriate training for this professional group allowed the teachers to update and acquire knowledge in the area of ICT. An important result of the implementation of the ESF was to strengthen the capacities of members of the civil service, which is confirmed by the results of the evaluation. Those results show that over 90% of employees in government offices assessed the support as “good” or “very good”. An important part of the ESF intervention was directed to upgrading the education system, improving access and quality of educational services and its adaptation to the needs of the labour market. Implementation of ESF also contributed significantly to the development of new trends in education, including popularizing the idea of pre-school education and disseminating learning or improving skills in the ICT field.

However, the impact of ESF intervention is visible not only under the SOP HRD. The effectiveness of support offered under the Priority 2 of IROP was also confirmed by the results of research. Participation of ultimate beneficiaries of the Priority 2 of IROP, which have found new employment grew by 12%.[2] . The gender structure was as follows: 57% of women and 43% of men. The share of people who found new jobs outside of the industries / sectors / companies under restructuring (Measure 2.4) reached 18%. Among farmers and households who have benefited from projects under Measure 2.3, 12% found new jobs outside agriculture. In addition, ultimate beneficiaries were appreciated far above their skills after the training in relation to the assessment of these skills prior to training. Almost 80% of respondents believed that through training they have increased their professional qualifications[3], such as computer literacy, foreign languages (67%), acquired specialized knowledge useful in their profession (43%) or obtained new qualifications confirmed by a certificate (37%).

The adequacy and appropriateness of aid scholarships can be assessed as satisfactory as well. The completed projects of scholarship supported over 700

[2] On a basis of a survey of ultimate beneficiaries of Priority 2 of IROP

[3] Evaluation on the effect of training projects implemented under the Action 2.1, 2.3, 2.4 of IROP to meet the needs of local and regional labour markets

thousand students (60% of them were women). Significant proportion of them were from rural areas (82%). The aid significantly contributed to the growth of their key competences and individual skills, thereby increasing the chances at the labour market. Overall, 64,435 students from 64 secondary schools in rural areas and 12 990 students coming from urban areas benefited from the scholarships. Slightly modified scholarship programs implemented under the Measure 2.2 of IROP are continued in HC OP (Priority IV, Submeasure 4.1.2. and Priority IX, Submeasure 9.1.3).

It should be noted that 42% of final beneficiaries of *Measure 2.3* were the persons who attempted to raise their professional qualifications and, consequently, improve labour market opportunities. Most of the ultimate beneficiaries of *Measure 2.3* (65%), prior to participating in the project had clear expectations. The most common were: the desire to raise the qualifications (as in the case of farmers could relate to the profession learned or that you planned to get), and retraining. Women often self-awaited improvement and growth of self-confidence, while men more than women showed the desire to acquire a new profession. It should be noted that the vast majority of participants considered that the expectations with which they embarked on participation in the project, have been fulfilled, and expressed their willingness to participate in a similar venture in the future (70%).[4]

In turn, 40% of ultimate beneficiaries of *Measure 2.4* of IROP (people working in the restructured sectors of the economy) before participating in the project declared that they were to encounter various difficulties in carrying out such work, such as lack of specific, specialized skills, lack of job satisfaction and faith in own abilities. In the six months after participation in the project, 18% of respondents changed their jobs.

Evaluation research on activities carried out under the *Measure 2.5* indicates that 68% of all micro-enterprises established with the assistance remained in the market for a period of 1.5 years. Within the framework of projects aimed at developing entrepreneurship advice, more than 15.5 thousand people participated, while the in training projects: approximately 17.3 thousand people. There were almost 7 thousand beneficiaries of one-off grants. 9323 new micro-enterprises were created under the projects. The support provided was not only the creation of new enterprises but also to develop existing ones. In this area, share of enterprises which have introduced innovations in the 18 months after completion of projects in the total number of enterprises participating in the projects amounted to 43.29%. This demonstrates the strong impact of the ESF on the modernization of the Polish economy at the micro level. At the same time Regional Innovation Strategies have been developed. RSI projects were joined by more than 3.5 thousand people benefiting from scholarships and 1.6 thousand people taking part in the internships projects.

According to the research, projects under *Measure 2.6* of *IROP* have so-called “soft character”. The most significant were: the projects leading to the formation of partnerships, networks of economic and scientific cooperation, institutionalized monitoring instruments, RIS and dissemination network of field units devoted directly to the issues of innovation in the test gminas.[5] In the opinion of those participating in the survey, completed projects had a positive effect on the development of innovation and removing barriers to the promotion of development and innovation on a regional scale. survey participants listed as the most beneficial effect of projects completed e.g. the reduction of communication barriers, creation of platforms leading to the

[4] Evaluation on ultimate beneficiaries of the Priority 2 of Integrated Regional Operational Programme
[5] Analysis of the impact of projects under the Measure 2.6 of IROP for the potential growth of regions to innovate.

establishment of closer contacts between different communities, especially the business community and scientific institutions; earlier contacts of this type are always difficult but play an important role in creating a positive climate for the innovation and its support at the regional level. The particularly positive assessment of the projects of academics and employment of graduates in companies and projects clustered is due to the highly practical nature of these projects, including their contribution to the activation process of diffusion of innovation (design internship) and to the establishment of practical economic cooperation between business and R&D institutions (clusters).

The training projects raised greatest interest among final beneficiaries - from the launch of the Programme, over 265 thousand people took part in such projects. They involved providing consulting to nearly 35 thousand of people. Training projects for the upgrading of skills among persons at risk of restructuring were attended by just over 42 thousand people. Greatest number of participants of such projects was noted in wielkopolskie (6200), lubelskie (5800) and podlaskie (nearly 5000) voivodeships. Projects for those working in agriculture, courses consisting in training and retraining to another profession were attended by about 49.1 thousand ultimate beneficiaries. 1,278 people took part in projects involving subsidized jobs.

Additionally, ESF support provided under the Priority 2 of IROP has triggered initiatives that are continued in the present programming period. The best examples (apart from scholarships and RSI networking activities mentioned before) are regional labour market observatories created and operated in malopolskie voivodeship (project launched by the Voivodeship Labour Office in Kraków in 2008) which implemented very successful analytical and scientific projects on a regional scale. This policy is currently continued under Human Capital Operational Programme projects. Observatories are present among others in zachodniopomorskie, podlaskie and pomorskie voivodeship. It should be noted also that activities related to the creation of the Labour Market Observatory have also been taken in lodzkie and mazowieckie voivodeships. An interesting initiative, supported by the Submeasure 2.1.2 of HC OP, is a Voivodeship Labour Markets Observatory, created by the Confederation of Polish Employers. The aim of the observatory is not only to provide employers with practical information about available resources and forecast data, but also to help to prepare and run active labour market policies.

Apart from SOP HRD and IROP, many interesting and innovative activities within the CIP EQUAL have been made. There were a lot of excellent examples of good practices and validated projects results that can be shown as a tangible output of ESF support. Exemplary effects of the CIP EQUAL implementation in Poland are:

- mainstreaming of the EQUAL main principles: innovation, transnationality and partnership in the ESF implementation system,
- adaptation of the EQUAL results to the national policies - the main results influenced for example the law (amendment of *Act on social enterprises*), helped to create instruments shaping governmental programme "*50+ Solidarity of generations"* (by implementing such models as: "*Intermentoring"*, "*jobcoaching"* "*e-learning for workers and managers"*, "*ICT training vortal aided by instrument for auto-diagnosis of IT skills"*); shaped recommendations of the Minister of Science and Higher Education, relating to the profession of *assistant for disabled people* and finally implemented in the *National Programme for Combating and Preventing Human Trafficking* the result of *social and vocational reintegration of women – victims of human trafficking,*

- defining innovative schemes for combating discrimination and inequality on the labour market e.g.: *Model of equal opportunities enterprise* based on Gender Index indicator (Theme G), *Locally Settled Social Enterprise model* (Theme D), *jobcoaching method* in a *Alliance for Work* project (Theme F), *Simulator of Benefits from Application of Flexible Forms of Employment* instrument in a project *Euroster – Partnership for development of adaptive abilities by shipping industry workers* (Theme F), model of *Multidimensional system of vocational training preparing prisoners to enter open labour market "Black sheep". Sentenced to nature protection* (Theme A); *The professional support of the Roma - the Roma in the labour market"* and *"Model of social and vocational activation of people with autism",*
- gender perspective as the effect of Theme G incorporated in all activities and projects of HC OP in terms of developing a "minimum standard"; Gender Index indicator is now being used by the public and private sectors (including projects for the modernization of the system management and improvement the competence of civil servants under the *Priority V, Measure 5.1*),
- models of support for people at risk of social exclusion through the social economy widely disseminated in the Priority VII of HC OP. The durability, dissemination and mainstreaming of EQUAL results in the field of social economy, ensured i.a. by *Team for the system solutions in social economy*,
- good practices such as *"E-barometer - SME credit rating system and warning of crisis"* and flexible forms of employment, like mentoring, jobcoaching, balancing the powers are to implement *Priority VIII*,
- good practice in promoting gender equality of treatment between women and men in access to employment and to reconcile work and family life are being taken into account during the implementation of the *Priority I* of *HC OP,*
- establishment of 67 social enterprises and 29 organizations founded to support development of the social economy sector,
- alternative form of childcare and help to reduce inequalities in the degree of dissemination of pre-school education.

In the new programming period, under Human Capital OP, there are at least 144 projects being implemented that use results developed under the CIP EQUAL. The most commonly used are the following results of EQUAL:

- *"Model to create a village theme",*
- *"Streetworking - the first step towards social and professional integration of the homeless"*
- *"Model of vocational activation of people at risk of social exclusion",*
- *"Empathy - the local model",*
- *"The support system of social economy initiatives, including the active participation of the unemployed and marginalized implemented in three local communities: the rural commune, municipality and provincial large city",*
- *"Coaching as a method of vocational and social activation in the three sectors of the economy",*
- *"Working model maker - a guardian of people at risk of social exclusion",*
- *"Model of Intermentoring",*
- *"Model of activation of a balanced work-family partnerships for local people caring for dependents".*

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Public intervention by the ESF under the three Operational Programmes discussed above, were an effective tool for implementing cohesion policy reform which directly affected the socio-economic reform of the country. Operational Programmes funded under the ESF not only contributed to economic growth, but also improved the quality of life of Polish citizens and helped to create new, effective instruments of action within the national public policies (especially in employment policy, social policy, education policy, business development), that contribute to further development of Polish.

Financial support obtained from the European Social Fund was a huge incentive for faster economic growth of Poland and changes in the structure of the economy. The use of ESF support undoubtedly resulted in increased production and employment, and consequently contributed to GDP growth, thus reducing the distance separating Poland from the EU average The result of the implementation of the ESF was a visible improvement in the labour market, which is expressed by an increase in employment and quality of jobs created, as well as positive changes in employment structures (decrease in the share employed in agriculture with the growth of the service sector and industry). At the same time, despite the considerable migration of Polish citizens to other EU countries, the activities financed by the ESF under the NDP in Poland had contributed to the fact that the unemployment rate continued its moderate trends. The registered unemployment rate in 2005-2008 significantly decreased. The percentage of unemployed persons (below the EU average) decreased significantly, especially in the 15-24 age group (decrease from 23.0% in 2005 to 6% in 2008). The biggest impact of the ESF is visible in improving the socio-economic situation of persons with disabilities (employment rate of disabled persons in working age increased from 17.7% in 2004 to 19.6% in 2008)

Financial support from the ESF has helped to improve the functioning of the education system and public administration. It also improved the competence of the public service. Thanks to funds from the ESF , perceptible progress in improving the quality of human capital in Poland could be observed in the 2004-2008 period . It should also be underlined a significant increase in the level of education and improvement of professional competence for a large part of society.

Thanks to the ESF intervention on the Polish labour market in 2004-2009, new models, instruments and patterns of professional activation and social integration of the most difficult groups, such as long-term unemployed, socially excluded people and people with high risk groups (people with disabilities, homeless, persons with addictions, former convicts or refugees) were developed. Most effective solutions and results of projects co-financed under the ESF in 2004-2009 which pertained to the labour market policy, social integration, education and adaptability are currently applied within the framework of the Human Capital Operational Programme.

It is worth noting that most objectives and significant added value - seen as an improvement of the economic and social life's mechanism - have been achieved. Additionally, it is necessary to underline that the experience gained during the *SOP HRD*, *CIP EQUAL* and *Priority 2. of IROP* implementation, significantly influenced the programming process of *Human Capital Operational Programme 2007-2013* - both at the strategic and operational level. Specific system solutions that were introduced in each priority axis and the delivery system of the Programme are in many cases results of experiences and effects achieved during the 2004-2006 period. The most important examples of this influence would be: development of the range of support

(e.g. employment services, social welfare, public administration), development of coordination mechanisms to support the employment and social integration, through a combination of both areas within the same Priority; implementation on a wider scale the horizontal policies of equal opportunities between women and men; introducing the possibility of applying for funds directly by entrepreneurs; simplifying procedures and requirements for projects; incorporating on a wider scale principles of EQUAL: innovation and partnership transnationality, mainstreaming, empowerment, gender equality and many others.