

EN  
E-004653/2018  
Answer given by Ms Thyssen  
on behalf of the European Commission  
(10.12.2018)

The economic and social situation is improving throughout the EU, including in Italy. However challenges and regional divergences remain.

To address these challenges, in the context of the European Semester, Italy was recommended, among others, to step up implementation of the reform of active labour market policies and to foster research, innovation, digital skills and infrastructure through better-targeted investment and increase participation in vocational-oriented tertiary education.

Sicily is one of the least developed Italian regions and is still affected by the consequences of the crisis; for example the employment rate in 2017 was less than 50%, among the lowest of the EU<sup>1</sup>. The EU supports regional development in Sicily over the period 2014-2020 through the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund.

The European Regional Development Fund for 2014-2020 foresees around EUR 457 million to finance the Research and Innovation interventions. A share of these resources will be devoted to initiatives on the life sciences industries and the pharmaceutical, medical devices and biotechnology in the framework of the regional smart specialisation strategy<sup>2</sup>.

The European Social Fund operational programme for Sicily, with a budget of EUR 820 million<sup>3</sup>, prioritises investments in projects to boost people's chances of getting work through better skills and qualifications, in social inclusion measures and in improvements in education and training systems.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Smarter,\\_greener,\\_more\\_inclusive\\_-\\_indicators\\_to\\_support\\_the\\_Europe\\_2020\\_strategy](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Smarter,_greener,_more_inclusive_-_indicators_to_support_the_Europe_2020_strategy)

<sup>2</sup> Regional Act N° 18 of 18 February 2015.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.sicilia-fse.it/Uploads/Temporaneo/PO-FSE-SICILIA-2014-2020.pdf>