



Updated position on the Implementation of the Youth Guarantee

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Background

Four years after all EU Member States committed to implementing the European Council Recommendation on the Youth Guarantee, the European Youth Forum still supports the purpose at the core of the initiative: easing young people's transition from education to employment.

The recognition of the Youth Guarantee as a right in the European Pillar of Social Rights¹ offers an opportunity to reflect on the implementation of the scheme so far, and take the necessary measures to improve its quality for the years to come.

The Youth Guarantee has encountered several obstacles that have hindered its impact on the ground. These shortcomings should be addressed in order to ensure the sustainability of the initiative.

The Youth Guarantee, however, still represents a key, direct investment in young people, which should continue and be strengthened, including by securing and increasing its funding beyond 2020, in the framework of the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework.

This document is the result of an online consultation with Member Organisations of the European Youth Forum who are following and monitoring the implementation of the Youth Guarantee at national level, and of face-to-face discussions held during a task force meeting in 2017. Based on this input, the European Youth Forum has updated its 2015 Board Position on the Youth Guarantee.²

Summary of the European Youth Forum's key recommendations

The European Youth Forum's key recommendations for an improved and more sustainable Youth Guarantee are:

1. Member States, by implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights, should recognise **the Youth Guarantee as a right for all young people.**

¹ European Commission, European Pillar of Social Rights, Principle 4. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en

² European Youth Forum, Two Years After: the implementation of the Youth Guarantee, 2015. Available at: <http://www.youthforum.org/assets/2014/04/Two-Years-After-The-Implementation-of-the-Youth-Guarantee1.pdf>

2. The European Union (EU) and its Member States should include the Youth Guarantee as part of a **wider, comprehensive strategy to increase youth employment and promote social inclusion**.
3. Member States should foster cross-sectoral cooperation to **implement a holistic and integrated approach to supporting young people facing multiple barriers to social inclusion**, beyond employment.³
4. The EU should establish a commonly agreed definition of young people grouped under the term NEET (young people Not in Education, Employment, or Training), based on a clearer understanding of the heterogeneity of their situations, and gather **more disaggregated data** on particularly vulnerable groups of young people for evidence-based policy.
5. Member States should strengthen the **involvement of youth organisations** in the design, implementation and monitoring of the Youth Guarantee.
6. The EU should define **clear quality criteria and standards** for offers of employment, training and education under the Youth Guarantee, in order to allow young people to access real opportunities and not just short-term experiences without further prospects.
7. The EU and its Member States should **ensure, monitor and evaluate quality at all levels**: quality of mentoring, placement and outcome.
8. At national and European level, **efficient monitoring systems** should be established, **involving all relevant stakeholders, including young people and youth organisations**.
9. The EU should ensure **continued and increased funding** for the Youth Employment Initiative, **including in the framework of the post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)**.
10. The EU should **simplify access to Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) and European Social Fund (ESF) funding** to strengthen **youth organisations'** capacity to support, monitor and report on the implementation of the Youth Guarantee.
11. Member States should adequately support **the implementation of the Youth Guarantee by allocating sufficient funding in national budgets**, particularly in countries not eligible for the YEI.

Purpose and scope of the Youth Guarantee

The European Youth Forum recognises the Youth Guarantee as an ambitious policy, with the potential to provide a response to youth unemployment. The implementation of the scheme can also play a key role in delivering the European Pillar of Social Rights.

According to the European Commission's report on the implementation of the Youth Guarantee, in 2016 14 million young people had entered the scheme, and around 9 million took up an offer of employment, training or further education.⁴ While these represent encouraging achievements, more must be done to increase the Youth Guarantee's outreach

³ European Youth Forum, 8 Standards for a quality youth policy. Available at: <http://www.youthforum.org/8-standards/>

⁴ European Commission, The Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative three years on, 2016.

and effectiveness, and ensure that it reaches its long-term goal: providing all young people under the age of 25 with a good quality offer of employment, training or further education within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.

The Youth Guarantee, on its own, cannot be the solution to youth unemployment or social exclusion in Europe. It must, therefore, be part of a broader and more comprehensive approach, tackling the root causes of social and economic exclusion.

The European Youth Forum recommends:

- Member States, by implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights, to **recognise the Youth Guarantee as a right for all young people**.
- Member States to foster cross-sectoral cooperation to implement a holistic and integrated approach to supporting young people facing multiple barriers to social inclusion, going beyond only looking at employment, and ensuring that the Youth Guarantee is part of a wider, comprehensive strategy to increase youth employment and promote social inclusion.
- Member States to encourage and support the involvement of youth organisations in the implementation of the Youth Guarantee, particularly in reaching out to the most vulnerable groups.
- Member States to reinforce the administrative capacity of Public Employment Services (PES), and train employees to interact with young people and build trust, also by increasing their knowledge of the environment in which young people and their families live.
- Member States to strengthen the cooperation between employment services and the educational system, including by encouraging PES, as well as trade unions and youth organisations, to train all educational actors on the Youth Guarantee, also by investing in initiatives to raise awareness on the programme among students. The latter should include school visits for PES to promote the scheme by speaking to students directly.

Making the Youth Guarantee more accessible to vulnerable young people

The Youth Guarantee has the ambition to reach out to those young people furthest away from society and the labour market. In many instances, however, the scheme does not succeed in this. While several different factors come into play, one of the main reasons for this is lack of information on the Youth Guarantee: indeed, even when information is available, it is often not accessible, or not easily understandable by all.

Insufficient remuneration also negatively impacts on the implementation of the Youth Guarantee, causing many young people in vulnerable situations to drop out of the scheme. Furthermore, for the Youth Guarantee to support young people who are furthest away from society, quality offers must be paired with preventive and supportive measures addressing their specific needs, beyond employment, education and training.

Lastly, while the Youth Guarantee explicitly targets young people in NEET situations (young people Not in Education, Employment or Training), this is a concept that covers an extremely heterogeneous population, which includes a variety of groups of young people, each encountering specific barriers to their participation in the labour market.⁵ In order to achieve its goal of decreasing the overall rate of young people in NEET situations, the implementation of the Youth Guarantee must be supported by a better understanding of the NEET population, and on the specific challenges they face.

The European Youth Forum recommends:

- The EU to clarify which groups of young people are covered under the term NEETs (young people Not in Education, Employment or Training), on the basis of a better understanding of the heterogeneity of their situations and the inherently diverse nature of this population.
- The EU and its Member States to gather more data on young people in NEET situations.⁶ Such data should be disaggregated according to the various sub groups forming the NEET population, in order to both gain a better understanding of the specific obstacles they have to overcome, and use it to implement outreach strategies and targeted measures based on the specific needs of each sub group.⁷
- The EU and its Member States to ensure that information on the Youth Guarantee and the opportunities it presents to the individual is available, accessible and understandable for all, also by using adequate communications tools and harnessing the expertise of youth organisations and youth workers to reach out to all young people.
- Member States to support the development of one-stop shops where all services and guidance are available to young people in one place, from counselling, financial guidance, information about healthcare services, to educational and employment opportunities. One-stop shops should be accessible to all, in terms of opening times, location welcoming atmosphere and accessibility of information.
- Member States to provide incentives for young people to stay registered in the PES by offering tailored services and guaranteeing minimum income support during transitional periods.⁸
- The EU to consider extending the 4 months timeframe foreseen under the Youth Guarantee, as targeting vulnerable young people might require more time to assess what measures are necessary to meet their specific needs beyond employment or training.

⁵Eurofound, Exploring the diversity of NEETs, 2016. Available at: https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef1602en.pdf

⁶ For example, in Croatia a “tracking system” for young people in NEET situation is currently being developed. The tracking system will combine data from education, training and employment systems to track what is happening to young people and identify which pockets of population are more at risk and therefore are more likely to need support.

⁷ European Court of Auditors, Special Report No 5/2017: Youth unemployment – have EU policies made a difference?, 2017. Available at: <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/Pages/DocItem.aspx?did=41096>

⁸ For example, by ensuring young people’s access to adequate minimum income schemes (no discrimination based on age). Such income schemes should ensure that the amount of income support received is actually enough to live a decent life.

Focusing on quality to positively impact on young people's lives

For the Youth Guarantee to result in concrete, positive outcomes for young people, ensuring and monitoring quality, and developing effective mechanisms to monitor it, must become a priority.

“Quality” must be interpreted as a broad concept. This starts with the specific characteristics of the offer, but also includes the need to support young people, particularly the most vulnerable, with adequate counselling, supervision and guidance before, during and after their placement. Placements must also match the needs, interests and competences of young people, leading to real opportunities.

Given the current lack of clearly defined quality standards, too many young people are offered one-size-fits all solutions, based on the misleading assumption that “any job is better than no job”. Moreover, the social and labour rights of young people participating in the Youth Guarantee scheme are often not respected or protected (e.g. young people receive lower salaries and do not have access to social protection).

Furthermore, quality is affected by lack of coordination between public authorities; lack of involvement of relevant stakeholders, such as youth organisations and young people; difficulties in reaching out to the most vulnerable; and lack of a long-term vision.

The European Youth Forum recommends:

- The EU to define clear quality criteria and standards for offers under the Youth Guarantee, including access to social protection, minimum income and employment rights. Criteria and standards should be defined together with social partners and civil society organisations.
- The EU and its Member States to ensure the respect and protection of the social and labour rights of young people taking part in the Youth Guarantee. Internships and apprenticeships under the scheme should comply with the European Youth Forum's European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships, for example.⁹
- The EU and its Member States to ensure, monitor and evaluate quality throughout the process: quality of the mentoring and coaching; quality and adequacy of the individual training, traineeship or job; and quality of the outcome.
- Member States to develop tools such as personal progression plans, to monitor quality assurance during and after a Youth Guarantee placement. Digital tools could be used to keep track of the progress of the young person participating in the scheme, with the possibility to gather data and evaluate the impact of the initiative in the long run.
- Member States to involve employers as key partners, together with education providers and PES, to achieve better quality of offers under the Youth Guarantee.
- The EU to increase the focus on quality of offers under the Youth Guarantee within the framework of the European Semester, and take advantage of the newly

⁹ European Youth Forum, European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships. Available at: http://www.youthforum.org/assets/2014/04/internship_charter_EN1.pdf

proclaimed Pillar of Social Rights to increase the number of Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs) on quality youth employment.

Effective and participatory monitoring processes

In order to improve the implementation of the Youth Guarantee on the ground, it is fundamental to establish clearly defined monitoring processes, where gaps can be highlighted and promptly addressed as necessary.

Effective monitoring mechanisms, moreover, must be paired with stronger efforts to involve all relevant stakeholders in the process, particularly young people and youth organisations.

Indeed, so far the Youth Guarantee has suffered from a lack of transparency on how the initiative is implemented at national level, making it hard for stakeholders such as youth organisations and young people themselves to assess the quality of the opportunities offered through the scheme and to have independent monitoring.

The European Youth Forum recommends:

- The EU and its Member States to develop efficient monitoring systems to ensure that the implementation of the Youth Guarantee is analysed and evaluated both from a quantitative and qualitative perspective, including the number and quality of the offers; number of young people actually reached, particularly among the most vulnerable; and quality of the outcomes.
- Member States to involve young people in monitoring processes.¹⁰ As beneficiaries, they can act as “quality inspectors” and provide valuable feedback on the offer they received.
- Member States to involve youth organisations in the monitoring of the Youth Guarantee.¹¹ This can be achieved through the establishment of formal structures at national level bringing together all relevant stakeholders from Ministries, to employers, trade unions, youth organisations, and PES, to strengthen the implementation of the partnership principle. These structures should follow all the stages of the Youth Guarantee, and hold regular meetings.

Continued and increased funding for the Youth Employment Initiative

For social inclusion and social rights to become a reality for all, policies must be matched with adequate financial resources, to ensure their long-term sustainability and impact.

EU support through the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) represents a clear added value in combating youth unemployment, as many initiatives and schemes could not have been implemented without the allocation of specific EU funding. With the youth unemployment

¹⁰ For example, in Slovenia young people were trained to become “inspectors” and ensure the quality of the offers under the Youth Guarantee.

¹¹ For example, in Slovenia a “coalition” involving all relevant stakeholders was created to monitor the implementation of the Youth Guarantee. Members of the coalition include youth organisations, student organisations, trade unions, Ministries involved in the implementation of the initiative and PES. The coalition holds regular meetings and can make recommendations.

rate still at 16.6%,¹² and 14.8% of 15 to 29 year olds still not in employment, education or training (NEETs);¹³ the Youth Guarantee must continue to be supported through the YEI.

To this end, the European Youth Forum strongly calls for funding for the Youth Guarantee, as a scheme targeting young people specifically, not only to continue but also to be significantly increased through the YEI and the European Social Fund (ESF). Negotiations for the post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) should lead to renewed and strengthened investments to ensure that the Youth Guarantee evolves from an emergency initiative to address the impact of the economic crisis, and instead becomes a more permanent measure to tackle youth unemployment and foster social inclusion.

EU funding alone, however, is not sufficient: EU Member States are primarily responsible for tackling the obstacles to young people's participation in the labour market and therefore national budgets must adequately support these efforts.

The European Youth Forum recommends:

- The EU to ensure continued funding for the YEI as the main financial instrument supporting the implementation of the Youth Guarantee, including a significant increase in the YEI allocation in the post-2020 MFF to support continuation of the Youth Guarantee.
- The EU to allocate specific funding in the post-2020 MFF to tackling youth unemployment and promoting the social inclusion of young people.
- Member States to increase national budgets to implement the Youth Guarantee and needed structural reforms, including in countries not eligible under the YEI; and the EU to better monitor compliance with the additionality principle under the ESF, according to which Member States should match EU funds with adequate investment at national level.
- The EU to change the rule allowing only Member States with a youth unemployment rate above 25% to access YEI funding, which penalises local realities where youth unemployment is particularly high.
- The EU to simplify access to funding and reporting requirements under the YEI and ESF to ensure that youth organisations can benefit from EU funding and take an active role in implementing and monitoring the Youth Guarantee.
- The EU to better monitor the use of YEI and ESF funds, to ensure that they are allocated to actions that really allow access to employment and training for young people, and, more broadly, foster their social inclusion.

¹² Eurostat, News release – euro indicators, October 2017. Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/8357265/3-31102017-CP-EN.pdf/cc23432e-f918-4f93-9fe7-0c03badb9792>

¹³ European Parliament, Briefing – NEETs: who are they?, March 2017. Available at [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/599360/EPRS_BRI\(2017\)599360_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/599360/EPRS_BRI(2017)599360_EN.pdf)

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