



# **First Results of the Implementation of the Youth Employment Initiative**

## **Executive Summary**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### INTRODUCTION

The global financial and economic crisis brought with it a significant rise in youth unemployment rates across Europe. The Youth Employment Initiative (hereafter YEI) launched in 2013<sup>1</sup> provides targeted funding of €6.4 billion to support youth employment by targeting young people aged below 25 years (or below 29 in some Member States) who are not in employment, education or training ("NEET") and who reside in the regions of the European Union which are particularly affected by this challenge.

The study 'Analysis of the first results of the implementation of the 2014-2020 Operational Programmes supported by the YEI and related YEI and ESF youth employment actions in the Member States' provides an overview of the implementation progress of the YEI from September 2013 to the end of November 2015 across the 20 eligible Member States (BE, BG, CY, CZ, EL, ES, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LV, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK). The report focuses on the 2014-2020 programming period and 22 operational programmes<sup>2</sup> supported by the YEI, as well as actions targeting youth employment supported by the European Social Fund (Investment Priority (IP) 8.ii) as part of the same programmes.

The analysis presented in this report is based on evidence collected using a mixed-method approach, which included: a desk review of programming documentation; an online survey of 22 Managing Authorities; additional interviews with various national stakeholders (e.g. Managing Authorities, implementing bodies/major YEI beneficiaries and YEI evaluators) in 10 selected Member States; and the analysis of the 19 evaluations submitted by 18 out of the 20 Member States eligible for the YEI by March 2016 in accordance with Art.19 (6) of Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013 of the ESF.

### KEY FINDINGS

The study finds that considerable progress has been achieved by the end of 2015 in the implementation of the YEI with a large number of young people already having benefited from the support. However the study also points to a lack of evidence of progress in implementation from certain Member States and indicates some implementation challenges which should be addressed for the YEI to achieve its full potential. Some Member States were already in the process of addressing these.

Up to the end of November 2015, close to 320,000 young people had been included in actions supported by the Youth Employment Initiative and 18 out of 22 Member States had launched actions under the YEI. Larger Member States and some of the main recipients of the YEI (EL, FR, IT, PT) had already managed to engage large numbers of young people. The total number of young people engaged in YEI actions was likely to be even higher than 320,000 since data for many Member States, including the large beneficiary Spain, was not yet available at the time of reporting.

A range of measures funded through the YEI had been set up in most countries, offering a 'menu of support' for NEET young people with the overarching objective to integrate them into employment, education or training. There was a strong focus on

<sup>1</sup> European Commission, (2013a), Youth employment initiative, COM(2013) 144 final, Brussels

<sup>2</sup> This only included national level OPs. In total 34 OPs contain YEI funding, which includes 12 OPs for France implemented at regional level.

the provision of qualification and work experience type activities, such as the provision of first job experience (implemented in 81% of cases where implementation had started), traineeships and apprenticeships (71%) and high quality VET courses (65%). All countries developed personalised action plans when young people took part in YEI activities, although to varying degrees. In some Member States this policy practice was a novelty.

Based on the available data, the YEI more frequently reached those aged 15-24 (rather than those aged 25-29), females (rather than males) and the unemployed (rather than inactive). YEI provision primarily targeted NEET young people with upper secondary and tertiary education. At this early stage of YEI implementation, results data was limited and only available for a small number of Member States and often for individual interventions only. The annual implementation reports to be submitted by the end of May 2016 should provide further evidence on the results of the YEI.

As regards the financial implementation, 28% of the available YEI funding had been committed by the end of November 2015, 20% had been contracted out to beneficiaries and 5% had been paid to beneficiaries. Three Member States had not yet committed any funding by the end of November 2015 (ES, IE, UK-Scotland). The €930 billion additional YEI pre-financing paid by the Commission in 2015 had a positive impact for half of the Managing Authorities, who were able to commit more funds and/or launch more projects.

The implementation of other ESF IP 8.ii interventions dedicated to youth employment in the 22 programmes analysed was less advanced overall. This was partially due to the fact that the ESF funding is often programmed to finance the continuation of YEI activities after 2018. Overall, there is a high degree of complementarity between the YEI and other ESF interventions under IP 8.ii programmed in the same OPs.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND LOOKING AHEAD**

The majority of MAs were confident that the objectives of the YEI will be met. In some countries, the YEI was perceived as key to the rapid introduction of the Youth Guarantee, despite its relatively narrow scope of action, limited resources and additional monitoring requirements. In a small number of Member States, national evaluations highlighted that the YEI had led to a shift to demand-based delivery of active labour market policies for young people, with a much stronger focus on individualised assistance for the young people themselves.

Some important implementation challenges for the YEI remain:

- Financial implementation progress is less advanced than had been intended with the front-loading of funding in 2014 and 2015, largely due to the late set-up of programme implementation arrangements on the ground. It will be crucial to ensure that the funding available will be fully used in order to tackle the continuing challenges of high youth unemployment and NEET rates. Member States should be called upon to speed up financial implementation, taking into account the learning on effective measures which has taken place during the first phase of implementation.
- During the first stages of YEI implementation Member States have tended to focus for the most part on highly educated young people NEET instead of those low-skilled. A 'creaming effect' seems to have been observed in the early phases of delivery in some Member States. Some Member States have started to put into

place additional measures to identify and engage vulnerable target groups. This issue should be addressed where it occurs.

- Issues with regard to the effectiveness of the services delivered have been raised in some Member States, and the national evaluation reports in particular have highlighted where there are shortcomings to certain provisions. Member States should make changes where necessary to current service delivery.
- Finally, the absence of fully functioning integrated monitoring systems in several countries by the end of 2015 (e.g. CY, CZ, ES, HR, HU, IT) raises concerns in some cases regarding the completeness and quality of data collected.

In light of the ongoing youth employment crisis in Europe, it will be essential to ensure that the YEI is implemented effectively over the remaining time period through close monitoring and, where necessary, support for implementation in the Member States.



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