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COM(2020) 277 final

2020/0132 (NLE)

Proposal for a

**COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION**

**on A Bridge to Jobs - Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee**

**and**

**replacing Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee**

{SWD(2020) 124 final}

## EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

### 1. CONTEXT OF THE PROPOSAL

#### • Reasons for and objectives of the proposal

The proposal for a Council Recommendation on “**A Bridge to Jobs - Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee**” responds to a political commitment of Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and was announced in the Communication "A Strong Social Europe for Just Transitions" of 14 January 2020<sup>1</sup>. It is an important contribution to the ongoing implementation of the **European Pillar of Social Rights** strengthening principle 4 “active support to employment”. It is part of a series of measures proposed by the Commission to boost youth employment, presented in the Communication on “Youth Employment Support: A Bridge to Jobs for the Next Generation”<sup>2</sup>.

The **Council Recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee** was adopted in 2013 in response to the last economic crisis and the resulting youth unemployment rate (among those aged 15-24) which increased to a very high level of 24.4% in the EU on average and over 50% in some Member States. In addition to youth being unemployed, 6.5 million young people (aged 15-24) were neither in employment, education or training (NEET).

Seven years after its launch, the **Youth Guarantee has become a reality across the EU though challenges remain**. Every year, more than 3.5 million young people receive a Youth Guarantee offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship. The Youth Employment Initiative 2014-2020 (in total almost EUR 9 billion of EU contribution<sup>3</sup>), together with additional European Social Fund investment, has been a **key EU financial resource** to support its implementation. Rates of youth unemployment and young NEET decreased substantially. Before the COVID-19 crisis the youth unemployment rate (15-24) was down to 14.9% on average compared to its peak of 24.4% in 2013. The improving macro-economic context has certainly played a role, but a recent study suggests that the Youth Guarantee coupled with European funding has created opportunities for young people and has triggered structural reforms in Public Employment Services and education systems in the Member States.<sup>4</sup>

However, the **COVID-19 pandemic** and its economic impact will jeopardise this positive development. The Commission’s Spring 2020 Economic Forecast indicates that the EU economy will shrink by 7.4% in 2020, the deepest recession in its history and young people entering the workforce at this time will find it harder to secure their first job<sup>5</sup>. Earlier crises show that young people are indeed likely to be hit hardest. They are usually the first ones to be laid off. They work more often in the informal economy or in non-standard forms of employment, with no or little social protection. They are over-represented in sectors ravaged by the pandemic (e.g. tourism, accommodation, seasonal agricultural work, wholesale and retail where women are also overrepresented) where teleworking may not be an option.

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<sup>1</sup> Communication from the Commission “A Strong Social Europe for Just Transitions”, COM(2020) 14 final.

<sup>2</sup> Communication from the Commission “Youth Employment Support: A Bridge to Jobs for the Next Generation”, COM(2020) 276 final.

<sup>3</sup> Comprising of YEI specific allocation and ESF matching component, in line with Article 22 of the ESF Regulation – EU 1304/2013.

<sup>4</sup> Study for the Evaluation of ESF Support to Youth Employment – Final Report, March 2020.

<sup>5</sup> European Economic Forecast, Spring 2020. Institutional paper 125, May 2020. European Commission.

Moreover, some of them are still suffering from the previous economic recession and are now facing the risk of being hit again by a worldwide economic crisis.

It is therefore important to reinforce the Youth Guarantee at this very moment to help alleviating the impact of the COVID-19 crisis and preventing another youth unemployment crisis. The proposal builds on the **experience and lessons learnt of 7 years implementation** of the 2013 Youth Guarantee and integrates the **changing realities of the labour market as well as the twin digital and green transitions**.

As part of the lessons learnt, the Youth Guarantee has to **reach out to a wider target group** and become **more inclusive**. Aggregate results for the EU indicate that, taken together, Youth Guarantee schemes do not yet reach a majority of young people who become NEETs and, for many of those who are registered, it takes longer than the foreseen four months to start their offer. Too many still struggle to make ends meet or face barriers to employability. Many young people, often from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, do not have access to quality education and training or face barriers in their transition from school to work. Gains in employment have not been evenly distributed among Member States and regions,<sup>6</sup> and certain groups of the young population are at a disproportionate disadvantage (e.g. those with low skills, living in rural areas or remote areas<sup>7</sup>, young people with disabilities, migrant backgrounds or belonging to racial and ethnic minorities, for example Roma).<sup>8</sup>

While the rate of young unemployed decreased on average until early 2020, the **rate of inactive young people remained stable or even increased in most Member States**. Unlike unemployed young people, inactive young people are not even seeking employment because of, for instance, their own illness or because of barriers encountered by young persons with disabilities, their caring responsibilities for children or dependent adults or other personal or family responsibilities.

Amongst NEETs, the **gender gap** has somewhat increased during these years. On average across the EU, the gap was 3.2 percentage points in 2013 and amounted to 3.8 percentage points by 2019<sup>9</sup>. Inactivity is also more common among female NEETs.<sup>10</sup> As a consequence,

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<sup>6</sup> Taken individually, some Member States are performing better (e.g. in ten countries more than half of young NEETs aged 15-24 are registered in the Youth Guarantee). Differences are related to different macroeconomic conditions, labour market institutions and the performance of the public employment, education and social protection systems. They may also be partly linked to the fact that Member States' Youth Guarantee schemes have tended to focus on the easier to reach and activate NEET and that data reported by Member States does not necessarily cover all of the young people being supported. Besides, NEETs are a heterogeneous group and some of the young people within the group are changing at a rapid rate (time between jobs or before settling for a job after finishing their studies).

<sup>7</sup> In particular the situation of young people in the EU outermost regions is challenging: these regions have much higher rates of youth unemployment and NEETs than the rest of the European Union and fewer prospects.

<sup>8</sup> More detailed information and data on the situation of young people (including with a migrant background) in the labour market in the different Member States can be found in the Staff Working Document; SWD(2020)124.

<sup>9</sup> The NEET rate remains 10 p.p. higher for non-EU born youth relative to native youth and the NEET rate of non-EU born young women is more than twice the rate of native young women. See SWD (2017) 286 final/2, Roma integration indicators scoreboard (2011-2016). The rate of Roma 6-15 year olds attending segregated classes (where 'all classmates are Roma') increased from 10 to 15%.

<sup>10</sup> This is likely to be linked to the fact that inactive NEETs also comprise young people with caring responsibilities – those looking after children or adults, as well as those with other personal or family responsibilities – and women tend to be overrepresented in this subgroup. Caring responsibilities as a reason for inactivity is more than five times as prevalent among women (55.2%) than it is among men (10.6%).

the **gender dimension** will be strengthened. Specific awareness raising and communication campaigns can tackle gender stereotyping at a young age and encourage young women into a wider choice of education paths and occupations. Young women can be supported by making sure they understand not only their potential but also their rights, through counselling, guidance and mentoring. This comprises advocacy and addressing gender stereotyping in educational and career choices. In this regard, the preparatory phase is also underpinned by referrals to partners that provide supporting social services, such as childcare, healthcare and psychological support.

**Young people with disabilities** have considerably lower employment rates than those without disabilities and the employment gap in relation to young people without disabilities is increasing.<sup>11</sup> Inclusive education and training, ensuring accessibility and reasonable accommodation, and combating stereotypes around disability in the workplace can boost labour market participation of young people with disabilities.

Europe's **demography** is changing. Due to ageing, many rural areas in Europe are seeing their populations decline. While the twin transitions can bring opportunities, this will not happen automatically and they may not be enough on their own to bridge the gap between rural youth and their urban peers. Young people living in rural and/or remote areas, especially those already facing disadvantages on other fronts, will require targeted support, while infrastructure and access to services in these areas should be improved. These measures will provide opportunities in these areas and help avoiding brain drain and further population decline. Meanwhile, youth living in disadvantaged urban areas continue to face specific obstacles to their integration in the labour market<sup>12</sup>.

Moreover, the **world of work is changing**. On-going developments such as automation and digitalisation of production and services continue to reshape the labour markets. Job-to-job transitions are becoming more frequent and many young people shift between employment and unemployment or inactivity or are trapped in precarious non-standard forms of employment. In particular, young people are overrepresented in non-standard jobs such as platform or “gig” work, which may lack access to adequate social protection. Moreover, young people are at higher risk than others to lose their jobs to automation, as entry-level jobs tend to have a greater proportion of automatable tasks.

In addition, the broader twin transitions towards a **more digital and greener economy** will offer new opportunities as jobs are likely to be created in such sectors. However, this requires that young people have the right skills to adapt to evolving job requirements. Digital skills, skills needed for the green transition alongside soft skills, such as entrepreneurial and career management skills, are expected to grow in importance. Investing now in the human capital of young Europeans will help future-proof Europe's social market economies: an active, innovative and skilled workforce is also a prerequisite for Europe's global competitiveness.

Against this background, the current proposal aims at **revamping the policy framework** to better **support youth employability and avoid another youth unemployment crisis**. To achieve these objectives, the proposal:

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<sup>11</sup> According to ANED using Silc Data from 2016, the employment rate of young people with disabilities between 20 and 29 years of age was just below 45%.

<sup>12</sup> For example, neighbourhood based stigmatisation, limited access to public services or limited presence of companies. These obstacles are reinforced when people with migrant background constitute a large of these urban areas and strongly related to the challenges faced in the education system.

- ensures that **all young people under 30** receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. This **ambitious headline target** of the Youth Guarantee is maintained whilst **the age bracket is widened** to include young people aged 25-29.<sup>13</sup>
- This acknowledges that school-to-work transitions and a sustainable market integration are taking longer because of a changing nature of work and the skills in demand. The proposal also aligns with existing national practices: youth related measures and programmes are generally available for young people up to 29 years of age and the majority of Member States already consider young people aged 25-29 part of the target group<sup>14</sup>. Likewise, it recognises that during the economic downturn due to the COVID-19 pandemic a sizeable share of 25 to 29 year-olds may fall into unemployment and require support.
- includes a **distinction between temporary NEETs** (often higher educated, sometimes with work experience, perhaps laid off because of the COVID-19 pandemic, or newly entering the labour market during the crisis after finishing their education) **and longer-term NEETs** (often from vulnerable groups, with low education attainment, requiring extra efforts). This allows for a more individualised and targeted approach for both groups as the latter is likely to need more support.
- **reaches out and activates greater numbers of young people, in particular women, of all backgrounds**, making sure that none of them are left behind. This will be done by improved and more targeted awareness raising and communication campaigns, including by addressing the challenges of rural or more remote areas and most vulnerable social groups.
- strives to support young people in gaining work experience and developing the **right skills for a changing world of work**, in particular those relevant to the green and digital transitions and those that correspond to the needs on the job market. It is therefore important to adequately accompany and advise youth on professional prospects and needs on the labour market.

In particular, as over 90% of jobs today require already digital skills, the Commission proposes to assess the digital skills of all NEETs who register by using the European Digital Competence Framework (DigComp) and the available (self) assessment tools, ensuring that, on the basis of gaps identified, **all young people are offered a dedicated preparatory training to enhance their digital skills.**

More generally, it proposes **short and hands-on preparatory trainings, related to specific skill needs of a young person** as one of the key activation features during the preparatory phase before taking up an offer. A hands-on training can be a

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<sup>13</sup> Using annual averages for 2019 and taking into account that the majority of Member States have already adopted the 15-29 age bracket, the absolute number of NEETs targeted increases from about 8.2 million to 9.4 million, amounting only to an approximate 14% increase.

<sup>14</sup> The majority of the Member States launched their national Youth Guarantee schemes in January 2014. Adopting the option provided by YEI, a number of Member States expanded the scheme, either from the beginning or progressively, to also cover young people aged 25-29. Currently, the Youth Guarantee is limited to those aged 15-24 only in Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, France, Luxembourg, Hungary, the Netherlands, Austria, Romania and Sweden. In the other 17 Member States, it is open to the 15-29 cohort.

stepping stone towards a full vocational training course, a taster of the world of work, or supplement existing education or work experience before the start of the offer. The short-term, informal nature of such preparatory training, which should not prolong the duration of the four-month preparatory phase, distinguishes it from the actual offer.

- continues to **support the employability of young people in the short-term** through a number of measures: temporary short-time working arrangements, targeted wage subsidies and promotion of self-employment. **Apprenticeships** should also be supported as they train young people for jobs that are in high demand and thereby provide stable labour market integration. Their role during the economic recession needs to be strengthened so that more young people can take up such an offer. In addition, since early school leavers and low-skilled young people are at particular risk of becoming longer-term NEET, young people should be **encouraged to complete their education and training** and those who have left prematurely should be brought back to education or training. Less formal and more flexible forms of education and training can be useful in this case.
- safeguards the **quality** of offers by linking them to the European Pillar of Social Rights and the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships, Quality Framework for Traineeships, both of which have been developed since 2013, assuring, for instance, access to social protection, a reasonable duration of probation periods, a clear written contract or the definition of working and rest periods. This should help make the offers taken up more stable in the long run.<sup>15</sup>
- enhances the **prevention** of unemployment and inactivity of young people through better tracking and early warning systems, cooperating proactively with, among others, the education sector and youth organisations.
- improves **monitoring** and **data collection** through a stronger focus on post-placement support and a call for improving the follow-up of young people after having taken up an offer to ensure their sustainable labour market integration.

The current proposal is structured around **four phases** (mapping, outreach, preparation and offer):

- In the **mapping** phase, a more profound knowledge of the NEET target group is transposed to the specific geographical context of the service provider. This is to identify individual NEETs and, crucially, those at risk of becoming NEETs. Through partnerships and early warning systems, young people could be supported before becoming unemployed or inactive, particularly when they are still in formal education and training.
- In the **outreach** phase, contact is made – and trust is built – with individual NEETs. The outreach phase comprises a comprehensive communication strategy to raise awareness among NEETs of the available support, and that pays due attention to the gender stereotypes and specific additional barriers to reach out to vulnerable groups.

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<sup>15</sup> Available data on outcomes, although still incomplete (the reason for leaving is unknown in a fifth of cases, 20%), shows encouraging results: on average just over half of the young people are still in employment, education or training six months after leaving the Youth Guarantee and these results are maintained through time (12 and 18 months after leaving).

- The **preparatory phase** runs from the moment of initial registration with the responsible service up to the actual start of an offer. The matching of needs and responses starts during this phase by tailoring individualised, holistic approaches that can cover a wide range of services depending on the young person’s situation. Most importantly, action plans comprise counselling, guidance and mentoring (including referrals to wider partners), additional upskilling where relevant and pay due attention to gender stereotypes and specific stereotypes linked to vulnerable youth.
- The fourth and final phase is the actual start of an **offer** of employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship. This represents an exit from the scheme.
- **Consistency with existing policy provisions in the policy area**

The proposal is consistent with and builds further upon the existing policies in the area of employment and skills.

As part of the Recovery plan for Europe<sup>16</sup>, Next Generation EU, through the **Recovery and Resilience Facility** (EUR 560 billion proposed) and **REACT-EU** (EUR 55 billion proposed) will provide additional financial support for youth employment measures. These efforts will be complemented in the 2021-27 financing period by the European Social Fund Plus, with a proposed budget of EUR 86 billion. The ESF+ will support the full range of employment, education and training measures included in this proposal. The European Regional Development Fund will contribute as well with future-proof investments in education and training aligned with the digital and green transitions. Member States will also be able to obtain support from the Technical Support Instrument in the preparation and implementation of structural reforms, notably in the field of education and training and labour market policies.

The 2019 **guidelines for the employment policies** of the Member States<sup>17</sup> call on Member States to continue addressing youth unemployment and the issue of young NEETs, including through the full implementation of the Youth Guarantee.

The Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on **key competences for lifelong learning**<sup>18</sup> calls upon Member States to support the development of basic digital skills and to increase the level of digital competences across the population. **The Commission Communication on the Digital Education Action Plan**<sup>19</sup> sets out 11 actions over a three-year timeframe (2018-2020) to help Member States make better use of digital technology for teaching and learning and develop digital competences and skills, improving education through data analysis and foresight. Moreover, the Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on **Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults**<sup>20</sup> recommends that people with a low level of skills, knowledge and competences be offered the opportunity to acquire a minimum levels of skills. The present proposal will complement this approach by offering targeted and tailored upskilling pathways to young people.

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<sup>16</sup> Communication “Europe’s moment: Repair and Prepare for the Next Generation”, COM (2020) 456 final, and Communication “The EU budget powering the recovery plan for Europe”, COM(2020) 442 final.

<sup>17</sup> Adopted by the Council in its Decision 2019/1181 of 8 July 2019, in particular guideline 6.

<sup>18</sup> OJ C 189, 4.6.2018, p. 1–13

<sup>19</sup> Communication from the Commission on the “Digital Education Action Plan”, COM/2018/022 final.

<sup>20</sup> OJ C 484, 24.12.2016, p. 1–6

The Council Recommendation of 15 February 2016 on the **integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market**<sup>21</sup> recommends that Member States provide particular support to long-term unemployed. The proposal will complement this approach by preventing long-term unemployment among young people.

**The 2016 Commission Communication on the Action Plan on the integration of third-country nationals**<sup>22</sup> recalled the vital importance of early activation and intervention of vulnerable NEETs, including young third country nationals, to ensure their swift integration into education, apprenticeships, traineeships or the labour market.

The Council Recommendation of 10 March 2014 on a **Quality Framework for Traineeships**<sup>23</sup> offers guidance on the provision of quality traineeships. Moreover, the Council Recommendation of 15 March 2018 on a **European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships**<sup>24</sup> identifies 14 key criteria that Member States and stakeholders should use to develop quality and effective apprenticeships. The proposal aligns traineeship and apprenticeship offers to the quality criteria laid out in these Council Recommendations.

The Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the **Validation of non-formal and informal learning**<sup>25</sup> invited Member States to have in place arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The proposal will complement this approach by promoting validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 on **policies to reduce early school leaving**<sup>26</sup> sets out a framework for coherent, comprehensive, and evidence-based policies on early school leaving. The ‘mapping’ phase of the proposal, including effective partnerships and early warning systems, closely follows this framework.

- **Consistency with other Union policies**

The Commission Communication **Europe’s moment: Repair and Prepare for the Next Generation**<sup>27</sup> stresses that the EU’s recovery plan must guide and build a more sustainable, resilient and fair Europe for the next generation and advocates pressing fast-forward on the twin green and digital transitions. It proposes a new **Recovery and Resilience Facility** to support Member States to implement investments and reforms that are essential for a sustainable recovery. A new initiative, **REACT-EU**, will provide a top-up for cohesion support to Member States. It will support workers and vulnerable groups, education and training measures, SMEs, health systems and the green and digital transitions and will be available across sectors. The present proposal will inform these investments by enhancing the employability of young people.

The **European Green Deal**<sup>28</sup> is the EU’s new growth strategy that aims to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy

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<sup>21</sup> OJ C 67, 20.2.2016, p. 1–5

<sup>22</sup> Communication on the “Action Plan on the integration of third-country nationals”, COM(2016) 377 final.

<sup>23</sup> OJ C 88, 27.3.2014, p. 1–4

<sup>24</sup> OJ C 153, 2.5.2018, p. 1–6

<sup>25</sup> OJ C 398, 22.12.2012, p. 1–5

<sup>26</sup> OJ C 191, 1.7.2011, p. 1–6

<sup>27</sup> Communication Europe's moment: Repair and Prepare for the Next Generation, COM (2020) 456 final

<sup>28</sup> Communication from the Commission “The European Green Deal”, COM/2019/640 final.



where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use. It puts sustainability and the well-being of our citizens at the centre of our action. The **Circular Economy Action Plan**<sup>29</sup> for a cleaner and more competitive Europe sets out actions to achieve the decoupling of growth from resource use by, inter alia, placing a strong focus on the need to acquire the right skills, including through vocational education and training. The transition to a clean and circular economy is an opportunity to expand sustainable and job-intensive economic activity, thus supporting recovery. Given that the greening of the economy is shaping skill requirements in multiple ways, it is crucial to put in place policies that will support young people in harnessing the new opportunities. The proposal will complement this approach by promoting skills needed for the green economy.

The opportunities and challenges of the ongoing digital transformation and Europe's policy response have been outlined in the strategy **Shaping Europe's Digital Future**<sup>30</sup>, which highlights the need to invest in education and training and digital skills for all Europeans. The Commission adopted a **New Industrial Strategy for Europe**<sup>31</sup> to support industry to drive Europe's competitiveness at a time of increasing global competition and to ensure it leads the twin green and digital transitions. There is a strong focus on unlocking the investment, innovation and skills needed for the twin transitions. The twin transitions will provide job opportunities that will also be of benefit for implementing the present proposal.

The **SME Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe**<sup>32</sup> highlights how an increasing number of SMEs is confronted with the challenge of finding the necessary skilled staff. The skills shortage is particularly acute for digitalisation and new technologies. The Strategy stresses that the EU can further help address these challenges, facilitating access to training, and helping match the demand for talents from SMEs with labour market supply. Entrepreneurial education and training that enhances business knowledge and skills play a key role in making SMEs fit for the single market. The proposal will complement this approach. Young people can be offered a preparatory training to enhance their entrepreneurial skills using the tools and modules developed under the Entrepreneurship Competence Framework (EntreComp).

The **Common Agricultural Policy** supports young people who would like to engage in the agricultural sector and young people who launch an activity in rural areas. It provides to young people training, advisory services, setting up and investment supports. The proposal's skills dimension, in particular entrepreneurial skills, will complement this approach.

In addition, the **Gender Equality Strategy**<sup>33</sup> aims to close the gender gaps in in the labour market and increase effective access to fairly paid quality and sustainable employment for women.

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<sup>29</sup> Communication from the Commission "Closing the loop - An EU action plan for the Circular Economy", COM/2015/0614 final.

<sup>30</sup> Communication from the Commission "Shaping Europe's digital future", COM/2020/67 final.

<sup>31</sup> Communication from the Commission "A New Industrial Strategy for Europe", COM/2020/102 final

<sup>32</sup> Communication from the Commission "An SME Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe", COM/2020/103 final.

<sup>33</sup> Communication from the Commission "A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025", COM/2020/152 final.

## **2. LEGAL BASIS, SUBSIDIARITY AND PROPORTIONALITY**

### **• Legal basis**

The proposal is based on Article 292 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), according to which the Council adopts recommendations acting on a proposal from the Commission, in conjunction with Article 149 which foresees incentive measures designed to support the action of Member States in the field of employment.

Title IX TFEU defines the EU's remit regarding employment policies in particular Article 145 on developing a coordinated strategy for employment and Article 147 on contributing to a high level of employment by supporting and complementing the action of Member States. Low labour market performance at national level in terms of youth unemployment and inactivity may have negative economic impact and undermine social and economic cohesion across the EU, including when low performance is mainly related to sub-groups of the NEET population that are in a vulnerable situation.

Thus, the proposal will contribute to the objectives of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), notably promoting full employment, non-discrimination, equality between women and men, social inclusion and social cohesion (Article 3 TEU).

### **• Subsidiarity (for non-exclusive competence)**

In its work towards developing a strategy for employment, the EU has the competence to coordinate, encourage cooperation and support the Member States' actions. While respecting the competence of the Member States, the proposal gives concrete content to this ambition in particular by capitalising on seven years of implementation of the Youth Guarantee. The proposal aims at improving the implementation of the already existing Youth Guarantee schemes in Member States, building on successful practices and lessons learnt. A continued EU intervention to tackle youth unemployment and inactivity based on a more future-proof and inclusive common policy framework should provide improved policy guidance to the Member States and can contribute to increasing activity rates and upskilling of the workforce in the EU, while avoiding the very high economic and societal costs of having young people not in employment, education or training.

The proposal will also help Member States to make best use of the ESF+, in order to address youth unemployment and inactivity.

In line with the principle of subsidiarity, the proposal makes recommendations to improve the implementation of Member States' Youth Guarantee schemes fully respecting the competence of the Member States in the field of employment as well as their internal division of competences. The proposal recognises that different situations in individual Member States (or at regional or local level) can lead to differences in how the recommendations are implemented.

### **• Proportionality**

The actions proposed are proportional to the objectives pursued. The proposal supports the Youth Guarantee schemes launched by Member States and complements Member States' efforts in the area of youth unemployment and inactivity. The proposed action respects Member States' practices and the diversity of systems. It accommodates a differentiated approach reflecting Member States' different economic, financial and social situations, the diverse labour market conditions and the heterogeneity of situations leading to youth

unemployment and inactivity. It recognises that different national, regional or local situations could lead to differences in how the proposed recommendation is implemented.

### **Choice of the instrument**

The proposed instrument is a proposal for a Council Recommendation, which respects the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. It builds on the existing body of European Union law and is in line with the type of instruments available for European Union action in the areas of employment. As a legal instrument, it signals the commitment of Member States to the measures laid down in this Recommendation and provides a strong political basis for cooperation at European Union level in this area, while fully respecting Member States competence in the field of employment policies. Once adopted, the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee would be replaced.

### **3. RESULTS OF EX-POST EVALUATIONS, STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS AND IMPACT ASSESSMENTS**

- **Ex-post evaluations/fitness checks of existing legislation**

Not applicable.

- **Stakeholder consultations**

As explained above, the proposal builds on the 2013 Council Recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee<sup>34</sup>. Since 2014, the implementation of the Recommendation has been monitored within the context of the **European Semester**. Reviews of the implementation for all Member States are carried out within the Employment Committee (EMCO) every two years. In addition, quantitative monitoring of national schemes, based on a commonly agreed Indicator Framework<sup>35</sup>, is carried out annually. Youth Guarantee coordinators from all Member States meet regularly to discuss progress in implementation, ongoing policy reforms and relevant projects, and participate in mutual learning activities.

Moreover, specific consultation activities took place in early 2020 and targeted stakeholders closely involved in designing and implementing the Youth Guarantee or benefiting from it. While all consultations preceded the COVID outbreak and the economic downturn that followed, the contributions focused on structural aspects and therefore remain pertinent.<sup>36</sup>

The proposal reflects to a large extent the views gathered during the targeted consultations. All stakeholders consulted, except for the employers – who advocated a closer follow-up of the implementation of the existing Council Recommendation, were in favour of reinforcing the Youth Guarantee by proposing a new Council Recommendation.

All stakeholders called for improving the ‘quality’ of the offers, proposing different approaches, which the proposal responds to by aligning offers to existing quality standards and principles. It also reflects the consensus on the need to strengthen the multi-stakeholder partnership-based and integrated approach.

- **Collection and use of expertise**

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<sup>34</sup> OJ C 120, 26.4.2013, p. 1–6

<sup>35</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=17424&langId=en>

<sup>36</sup> Detailed results of the targeted consultations with Member States and key stakeholders are described in the Synopsis report, which is part of the SWD which is published in parallel to the present proposal.

In addition to the use of consultation results, the proposal is based on a wide range of reports and studies as well as expertise gathered through peer learning activities and meetings of the Youth Guarantee coordinators.

Quantitative monitoring of national Youth Guarantee schemes, based on a commonly agreed Indicator Framework, is carried out annually. Macroeconomic indicators based on data from the EU Labour Force Survey (LFS) are used to monitor the general situation of young people in the labour market and therefore, indirectly, the impact of the Youth Guarantee and other measures that prevent young people from becoming NEETs. Implementation and follow-up (long-term outcome) indicators are derived from administrative data provided annually by Member States. They are based on data on the number of young people that have registered in Youth Guarantee schemes (how long they stay registered, where they go when they leave the registry and where they are sometime after leaving). Implementation indicators measure the direct impact of Youth Guarantee delivery while follow-up indicators are used to gauge the sustainability of labour market integration after provision of a Youth Guarantee offer.

Furthermore, Youth Guarantee coordinators from all Member States meet regularly to discuss progress and challenges in implementation, ongoing policy reforms and relevant projects. They also participate in mutual learning activities. The experiences and evaluations from the implementation at national level contributed to a series of reports published in 2018. The European Network of Public Employment Services (PES) is regularly reporting on the PES capacity to implement the Youth Guarantee via the biennial assessment reports. The EU funding side is closely monitored via the ESF monitoring committees and annual implementation reports and regularly evaluated.

- **Impact assessment**

The instrument proposed – a Council Recommendation – has the effect of offering guidance on the implementation of Youth Guarantee schemes, but it leaves Member States flexibility in designing and implementing measures. Therefore, an impact assessment is not necessary.

A comprehensive Staff Working Document<sup>37</sup> includes an overview of the most important lessons stemming from the aftermath of the previous economic recession and a comprehensive summary of the lessons stemming from the Youth Guarantee's 2013-20 implementation. These lessons originate from numerous monitoring and evaluation exercises at EU level but also from the feedback received during targeted consultations in early 2020, when the European Commission reached out to, among others, civil society, social partners, national stakeholders and young people themselves. Together, these lessons translate into a number of actions detailed in the proposal.

The Commission has evaluated the youth employment measures funded by the European Social Fund and the Youth Employment Initiative. The evaluation results and the preparatory work made in 2018 for the evaluation have been taken into consideration for the preparation of this proposal.

- **Regulatory fitness and simplification**

Not applicable.

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<sup>37</sup> Commission Staff Working Document which is published in parallel to the present proposal.

- **Fundamental rights**

Not applicable.

#### **4. BUDGETARY IMPLICATIONS**

The Recommendation does not require additional EU budget or staff resources.

#### **5. OTHER ELEMENTS**

- **Implementation plans and monitoring, evaluation and reporting arrangements**

It is proposed that the Commission continues to monitor the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in cooperation with the Member States in the context of the European Semester. Reviews of all Member States should be carried out within the EMCO every two years. Quantitative monitoring of national Youth Guarantee schemes, based on the commonly agreed Indicator Framework, should be carried out annually. Furthermore, Youth Guarantee coordinators from all Member States should continue to meet regularly to discuss progress and challenges in implementation, ongoing policy reforms and relevant projects, and participate in mutual learning activities.

- **Explanatory documents (for directives)**

Not applicable.

- **Detailed explanation of the specific provisions of the proposal**

§ 1 updates the headline target, widening the age bracket to include young people aged 25-29. This makes the proposal more inclusive and recognises that during the economic downturn due to the COVID-19 pandemic a bigger share of 25 to 29 year-olds will fall into unemployment and require support.

§ 2 to 4 recommend Member States to reinforce mapping systems and enabling prevention through tracking and early warning systems.

§ 5 to 7 include recommendations to Member States on raising awareness and targeting communication and stepping up the outreach to vulnerable groups. This could be achieved by adopting appropriate, youth-friendly information channels and by using a recognisable visual style for communication purposes.

§ 8 to 11 include recommendations to Member States on profiling, counselling, guidance and mentoring. Member States are invited to improve profiling and screening tools and individualised action plans that take into account a young person's preferences and motivation, barriers and disadvantages, and reasons for being unemployed or inactive.

§ 12 and 13 include recommendations to Member States on enhancing digital skills with preparatory trainings and on validation of learning outcomes. Member States are strongly recommended to assess the digital skills of all NEETs who register in the Youth Guarantee and ensure that, all young people are offered a dedicated preparatory training to enhance their digital skills.

§ 14 invites Member States to ensure that the preparatory phase facilitates upskilling and re-skilling geared towards the skills needed in a changing labour market and that are needed for the green transition as well as entrepreneurial and career management skills.

§ 15 to 19 recommend Member States to use targeted and well-designed employment and start-up incentives, align the offer to standards for quality and equity and expand post-placement support.

§ 20 to 26 include recommendations to Member States on partnerships, data collection and monitoring and the use of funds. Member States could strengthen existing partnerships and are invited to formalise protocols for cooperation between Youth Guarantee providers (including education and training institutions) and other social services (e.g. childcare, healthcare, social housing, accessibility services). In particular, it is important to ensure the active involvement of social partners at all levels. Member States are invited to further develop integrated service models, such as one-stop shops, joint case management or multidisciplinary teams. Member States are also invited to improve data on the sustainable labour market integration of young people and explore the potential of wider data sharing.

§ 27 to 31 welcomes the Commission's intention to strengthen the support for the quantitative monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes based on the commonly agreed Indicator Framework, explore the new possibilities yielded by upcoming improvements to the EU Labour Force Survey and the granularity with which the NEET target group can be assessed, and monitor the implementation of national schemes through the multi-lateral surveillance of the Employment Committee within the framework of the European Semester. The Commission is invited to report regularly to the Employment Committee on developments concerning the implementation and results of the schemes and support Member States' awareness raising and communication efforts while reinforcing at EU level the dissemination of results and good practice examples. Good practices help other Member States in taking over measures with a proven track record.

Proposal for a

**COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION**

**on A Bridge to Jobs - Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee**

**and**

**replacing Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee**

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Article 292, in conjunction with Article 149 thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission,

Whereas:

- (1) In November 2017 the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission proclaimed the European Pillar of Social Rights, setting out 20 principles and rights to support well-functioning and fair labour markets and welfare systems. It sets out the right to fair and equal treatment regarding working conditions, access to social protection and training. It also states that probation periods should be of reasonable duration and prohibits the abuse of atypical contracts. Principle 4 “active support to employment” states that “young people have the right to continued education, apprenticeship, traineeship or a job offer of good standing within 4 months of becoming unemployed or leaving education”.
- (2) The guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States, adopted by the Council in its Decision 2019/1181 of 8 July 2019<sup>38</sup>, and in particular guideline 6, call upon the Member States to continue to address youth unemployment and the issue of young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) through prevention of early school leaving and structural improvement in the school-to-work transition, including through the full implementation of the Youth Guarantee.
- (3) The Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the Validation of non-formal and informal learning<sup>39</sup> sets out elements and principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning which enable individuals to have knowledge, skills and competences which have been acquired through non-formal and informal learning validated and to obtain a full qualification, or, where applicable, part qualification.
- (4) The Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults<sup>40</sup> recommends that adults with a low level of skills, knowledge and competences be offered the opportunity, according to their individual

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<sup>38</sup> OJ L 185, 11.7.2019, p. 44–45

<sup>39</sup> OJ C 398, 22.12.2012, p. 1–5

<sup>40</sup> OJ C 484, 24.12.2016, p. 1–6

needs, to acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital competence; and/or acquire a wider set of skills, knowledge and competences.

- (5) The Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning<sup>41</sup> calls upon the Member States to support the development of basic digital skills and to increase and improve the level of digital competences across all segments of the population.
- (6) The Council Recommendation of 10 March 2014 on a Quality Framework for Traineeships<sup>42</sup> offers guidance on the provision of quality traineeships and includes quality elements that relate in particular to learning content, working conditions, and transparency regarding financial conditions and hiring practices.
- (7) The Council Recommendation of 15 March 2018 on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships<sup>43</sup> identifies 14 key criteria that Member States and stakeholders should use to develop quality and effective apprenticeships to ensure both the development of job-related skills and the personal development of apprentices.
- (8) Regulation (EU) 2019/1700 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 October 2019<sup>44</sup> provides a common framework for seven previously independent data collections, among which the EU Labour Force Survey. The Integrated European Social Statistics (IESS) yields more granular cross-EU comparative data, which will enable a better understanding of young people's transition from school to work, capturing more accurately their learning and working experience, but also their individual background characteristics.
- (9) In its conclusions of 15 December 2016 the European Council calls for the continuation of the Youth Guarantee. In its conclusions of 15 June 2017, the Council reaffirms that tackling youth unemployment and inactivity remains a policy priority, considers that the Youth Guarantee and the Youth Employment Initiative have provided a strong impetus for structural reforms and policy innovation and underlines that reaching out to NEETs requires strong and persistent efforts of national authorities and cross-sectoral cooperation.
- (10) In its resolution of 18 January 2018 on the implementation of the Youth Employment Initiative in the Member States, the European Parliament calls on the Member States to establish appropriate and tailored outreach strategies to reach all NEETs and to take an integrated approach towards making more individualised assistance and services available to support young people facing multiple barriers. The European Parliament emphasises the need to improve the quality of offers under the Youth Employment Initiative and Youth Guarantee and calls for a future discussion about the eligible age bracket.
- (11) The European Green Deal<sup>45</sup> is the EU's new growth strategy that aims to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use.

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<sup>41</sup> OJ C 189, 4.6.2018, p. 1–13

<sup>42</sup> OJ C 88, 27.3.2014, p. 1–4

<sup>43</sup> OJ C 153, 2.5.2018, p. 1–6

<sup>44</sup> OJ L 261I, 14.10.2019

<sup>45</sup> COM/2019/640 final



- (12) To help repair the economic and social damage brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, kick-start the European recovery, and protect and create jobs, the European Commission has proposed a major recovery plan for Europe and the instrument ‘Next Generation EU’ based on harnessing the full potential of the EU budget<sup>46</sup>. These resources will be crucial to support, among other areas, short-term measures to support employment, including youth employment, as well as investments in longer-term policy reforms related to the labour market, social and education and training systems.
- (13) In 2013, during the previous economic recession, the youth unemployment rate (15-24) was 24.4% in the EU and over 50% in some Member States, and there were 6.5 million NEETs aged 15-24. In response, the Council Recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee was adopted in April 2013<sup>47</sup> – a major coordinated active labour market policy intervention at the EU level.
- (14) The COVID-19 pandemic has spiralled the EU into an unprecedented economic recession, which is likely to bring back dramatically high youth unemployment and NEET rates. The EU economy is expected to shrink by 7.4% in 2020, the deepest recession in its history and young people who were already in a precarious situation in the labour market will suffer most while those entering the workforce at this time will find it harder to secure their first job. It is therefore necessary to reinforce the Youth Guarantee in the light of the present crisis.
- (15) Young people may have difficulties in the labour market because of the transitional life periods they are going through, their limited or lack of professional experience. As past recessions show, young people are hit harder than older, more experienced workers. During the previous crisis youth unemployment went up from 16.0% in 2008 to a peak of 24.4% in 2013. Young women are also more likely to become inactive due to caring responsibilities (those looking after children or dependent adults, as well as those with other personal or family responsibilities). Caring responsibilities as a reason for inactivity is more than five times more prevalent among young women than it is among young men. This can lead to an increase in the gender employment gap with lasting consequences throughout the life of women.
- (16) Youth unemployment and inactivity can result in permanent scars, such as an increased risk of future unemployment, reduced levels of future earnings, loss of human capital and intergenerational transmission of poverty. These translate into individual hardship and bear direct and indirect costs for society at large. They also add to regional inequalities, with young people for instance unable to secure a sustainable labour market integration in rural or remote areas and trying to find opportunities elsewhere.
- (17) On-going developments such as automation and digitalisation of production and services continue to reshape the world of work. Young people are overrepresented in non-standard jobs such as platform or “gig” work, which may lack access to adequate social protection. Young people are at higher risk than others to lose their jobs to automation, as entry-level jobs tend to have a greater proportion of automatable tasks. At the same time, digital technologies create new jobs and increase the demand for skills needed for the digital transformation in many sectors of the economy.

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<sup>46</sup> COM(2020) 441 final/2; COM (2020) 456 final; COM (2020) 442 final.

<sup>47</sup> OJ C 120, 26.4.2013, p. 1–6.

- (18) Investing now in the human capital of young Europeans will help future-proof Europe's social market economies to cater for demographic shifts while fully embracing the digital age and the growth of jobs in the green economy. The Union will be able to reap the full benefits of an active, innovative and skilled workforce while avoiding the very high costs of having young people neither in employment, education or training.
- (19) A reinforced Youth Guarantee can contribute to create youth employment in recovering from the economic impact of the pandemic and help harness the opportunities arising from the digital and green transitions. It can help reducing persistent scarring effects from the severe slowdown by encouraging firms to hire unemployed youth and by providing training that eases the matching of unemployed and inactive youth to vacancies.
- (20) A reinforced Youth Guarantee should ensure that all young people receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. To achieve this ambition, it should provide young people with a path towards a stable labour market integration in times of crisis and reach out and activate greater numbers of young people regardless of their background, making sure that none of them are left behind. It should strive to support young people in gaining work experience and developing the right skills for a changing world of work, in particular those relevant to the green and digital transitions. Apprenticeship play an important role in this respect. There is a need to boost their supply and quality in order to strengthen their role in the recovery phase. Apprenticeships prepare young people for jobs that are in high demand and thereby offer them a path towards stable labour market integration also at a local level.
- (21) In the 2013 Council Recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee Member States committed to ensure that all young people under the age of 25 years receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. Widening the age bracket to include young people aged 25-29 acknowledges that school-to-work transitions and a sustainable market integration are taking longer because of the changing nature of work and the skills in demand, recognises that during the economic downturn due to the COVID-19 pandemic a bigger share of 25 to 29 year-olds will fall into unemployment and will need support. It also aligns with Member States youth related measures and programmes, which are generally available for young people between 15 and 29.
- (22) NEETs are a heterogeneous group. For some young people being a NEET can be a symptom of multiple and engrained disadvantages and may indicate a longer-term disengagement from society. Some young people are especially vulnerable for example because of their inadequate education or training, their often limited social protection coverage, restricted access to financial resources, precarious work conditions or because they suffer from discrimination. For others, being a NEET is likely to be a temporary status since they face low barriers to labour market entry and have no inherent vulnerabilities (e.g. high-skilled young people or those already with significant and still relevant work experience). A reinforced Youth Guarantee should recognise that some NEETs may require a lighter approach compared to the more intensive, lengthy and comprehensive interventions that other, more vulnerable, NEETs are likely to necessitate to prevent a disproportionate negative impact on vulnerable youth.

- (23) More than one in five young people fail to reach a basic level of digital skills across the EU, with low educated young people more than three times more likely to underachieve in digital skills than their higher educated counterparts<sup>48</sup>. With the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis accelerating the digital transition, the digital skills gap becomes a key determinant in the employability of young people and their ability to seize the opportunities stemming from this transition. Targeted upskilling helps young people respond to the growing demand for digital skills.
- (24) Preparatory training during the first phase before taking up an offer, related to specific skill domains such as digital or green skills, should be part of a reinforced Youth Guarantee. This hands-on training can be a stepping stone towards a full vocational training course, a taster of the world of work, or supplement existing education or work experience before the start of the Youth Guarantee offer. The short-term, informal nature of such preparatory training, which should not prolong the duration of the four-month preparatory phase, distinguishes it from the offer.
- (25) Effective coordination and partnerships across policy fields – employment, education, youth, social affairs, etc. – are crucial in terms of boosting quality employment as well as education and training opportunities, apprenticeships and traineeships. Integrated services (such as one-stop shops or other models) offer easier access to services and benefits, and can more easily provide tailor-made, flexible and more responsive solutions for young people with multidimensional problems. Integrated services require a change in working culture, putting young people at the centre of the interventions and breaking up administrative silos.
- (26) The reinforced Youth Guarantee should be implemented by a scheme consisting of supportive measures, and should be geared to national, regional and local circumstances. Such schemes should take into account the diversity of the Member States as regards the levels of youth unemployment and inactivity, institutional set-up, and capacity of the various labour market players. They should also take into account different situations as regards public budgets and financial constraints in terms of allocation of resources and be continuously monitored and improved.
- (27) Supportive measures can be financed by the Union funds. The Youth Employment Initiative 2014-2020 (almost EUR 9 billion of EU contribution), together with additional European Social Fund investment, has been a key EU financial resource to support the implementation of the Youth Guarantee. As part of the Recovery plan for Europe and the instrument ‘Next Generation EU’, the Recovery and Resilience Facility and REACT-EU will provide additional EU funding for youth employment measures. These efforts will be complemented in the 2021-27 financing period by the European Social Fund Plus which will support the full range of employment, education and training measures of the reinforced Youth Guarantee.

**HEREBY RECOMMENDS THAT MEMBER STATES:**

- (1) ensure that all young people under the age of 30 years receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education, in line with Principle 4 of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

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<sup>48</sup> Annual 2019 averages from the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI). The figures concern the 16 to 29 age bracket.

The starting point for delivering the Youth Guarantee offer to a young person should be the registration with a Youth Guarantee provider.

Youth Guarantee schemes should be based on the following guidelines, which are structured around four phases (mapping, outreach, preparation and offer), and organised in accordance with national, regional and local circumstances, paying attention to the gender and diversity of the young people who are being targeted:

## **Mapping**

### *Identifying the target group, available services and skills needs*

- (2) reinforce mapping systems to enable a more profound understanding of the diversity of NEETs, including the temporary NEETs negatively affected by the economic recession, as well as the longer-term NEETs who may belong to vulnerable groups;
- (3) map the services available for different support needs, while using local skills forecasts (e.g. informed by big data labour market intelligence) to identify skills demanded on the labour market, with particular attention to regional labour market specificities and the barriers faced by young people living in rural, remote or disadvantaged urban areas;

### *Enabling prevention through tracking and early warning systems*

- (4) strengthen early warning systems and tracking capabilities to identify those at risk of becoming NEET, while contributing to preventing early leaving from education and training (through e.g. more flexible learning pathways and more work-based learning), in cooperation with the education sector, parents, and local communities, and with the involvement of youth policy, social and employment services;

## **Outreach**

### *Raising awareness and targeting communication*

- (5) adopt modern, youth-friendly and local information channels for awareness raising activities among both temporary and longer-term NEETs, using online and offline opportunities, while ensuring the involvement of young people and local youth organisations;
- (6) use a recognisable visual style for all communication, based, where relevant, on guidelines made available by the Commission, while ensuring accessible and easily understandable information on all types of support available, for instance through a single web portal in the language(s) of the country;

### *Stepping up the outreach to vulnerable groups*

- (7) strengthen the focus on longer-term NEETs (e.g. those belonging to vulnerable groups, including those with disabilities), using specifically trained mediators and complementary strategies such as youth work, young “ambassadors” and cooperation with partners that are in contact with (specific groups of) young people. Explore, for the hardest-to-reach, coordination with the provision of benefits, as well as the use of mobile units;

## **Preparation**

### *Using profiling tools to tailor individualised action plans*

- (8) improve profiling and screening tools and practices to match needs and responses, by adopting a multivariate, gender-sensitive approach to profiling and screening that

takes into account a young person's preferences and motivation, barriers and disadvantages, including reasons for being unemployed or inactive;

- (9) ensure that Youth Guarantee providers have adequate staff capacity, with specifically trained staff to operate and improve profiling and screening tools, and to develop individualised action plans that take into account person-centred needs and responses;

#### *Performing counselling, guidance and mentoring*

- (10) step up the preparatory phase with person-centred counselling, guidance and mentoring by trained advisors that responds to the needs of the individual concerned and pays due attention to gender bias and other forms of discrimination. Prepare NEETs for the changing nature of work, be it through career advice or entrepreneurship support, while adopting one-to-one support, motivational work, advocacy and/or peer support for longer-term NEETs;
- (11) allow for a more holistic approach to counselling, guidance and mentoring by referring young people to partners (e.g. education and training institutions, social partners, youth organisations, as well as supporting youth work and social services), who can help them overcome other barriers to employment;

#### *Enhancing digital skills with preparatory training*

- (12) assess the digital skills of all NEETs who register in the Youth Guarantee by using the European Digital Competence Framework (DigComp) and the available (self)assessment tools, ensuring that, on the basis of gaps identified, all young people are offered a dedicated preparatory training to enhance their digital skills;
- (13) safeguard the validation and recognition of (non-formal, informal) learning outcomes from the preparatory training by using validation arrangements embedded in education and training systems, existing tools such as Europass, as well as micro-credentials to enable a more modular approach to accumulating learning outcomes;

#### *Assessing, improving and validating other important skills*

- (14) ensure that the preparatory phase facilitates upskilling and re-skilling geared towards green skills, entrepreneurial skills and career management skills, using existing competence frameworks, (self)assessment tools and validation tools to help young people seize the opportunities of growing sectors and preparing them for the needs of the changing labour market;

### **Offer**

#### *Making employment and start-up incentives work during the economic recession*

- (15) use targeted and well-designed employment incentives – such as wage subsidies, recruitment bonuses, reduction of social security contributions, tax credits or disability benefits – and start-up incentives to create good-quality opportunities for the sustainable integration of young people into the labour market;

#### *Aligning the offer to existing standards to ensure quality and equity*

- (16) align employment offers to the relevant principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, assuring the right to fair and equal treatment regarding working conditions, access to social protection and training, reasonable duration of probation periods and prohibiting abuse of atypical contracts;

- (17) ease young people's way back into education and training by diversifying the continued education offer (with e.g. flexible learning pathways, work-based learning, bridging programmes and second chance programmes), ensuring the validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- (18) intensify support to apprenticeships and make sure offers adhere to the minimum standards laid out in European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships;
- (19) ensure that traineeship offers adhere to the minimum standards laid out in the Quality Framework for Traineeships;

*Providing post-placement support and implementing feedback*

- (20) expand continued post-placement support to adjust individualised action plans where needed, using the opportunity of post-placement feedback to ensure a quality offer was provided;

**Crosscutting enablers**

*Mobilising partnerships*

- (21) strengthen partnerships, across all levels of government, between Youth Guarantee providers and relevant stakeholders, such as employers, education and training institutions, social partners, youth work, providers of solidarity and civic activities, youth organisations and other civil society organisations; formalise protocols for cooperation between Youth Guarantee providers and other social services (e.g. childcare, healthcare, social housing, accessibility services);
- (22) promote the further development of integrated service models, such as one-stop shops, joint case management or multidisciplinary teams, which strengthen partnerships and enable a single point of contact for young people;

*Improving the data collection and monitoring of schemes*

- (23) step up efforts to enrich follow-up data by strengthening systems that allow young people to be tracked after taking up an offer, as well as after the offer concludes, in order to monitor long-term, sustainable labour market integration;
- (24) encourage, while respecting data protection rules, the wider sharing of tracking, profiling and follow-up data between Youth Guarantee partners to improve support, which is of particular importance for the success of interventions targeting vulnerable NEETs;

*Making full and optimal use of funds*

- (25) dedicate adequate national resources towards the implementation of the policy measures put forward by the reinforced Youth Guarantee ensuring that they are well targeted to the individual needs of any young person;
- (26) make full and optimal use of the current EU instruments under cohesion policy, notably the YEI, ESF and ERDF (2014-2020) and mobilise a significant share of the additional funds provided under REACT-EU, as well as the ESF+ and ERDF (2021-2027), to support youth employment, prevent unemployment and inactivity among young people and implement relevant policy reforms;
- (27) exploit the full potential of complementing national funding efforts with other EU funding sources that could contribute to implementing the reinforced Youth

Guarantee, notably the Recovery and Resilience Facility, EAFRD, InvestEU, AMIF, the Erasmus+ programme and the Technical Support Instrument;

HEREBY WELCOMES THE COMMISSION'S INTENTION TO:

*Improving the data collection and monitoring of schemes*

- (28) continue to support the quantitative monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes based on the commonly agreed Indicator Framework, proposing adjustments where appropriate in light of the current Council Recommendation;
- (29) improve, from 2022 onwards, the granularity with which the NEET target group is assessed, profiting from the improvements to the EU Labour Force Survey yielded by Regulation (EU) 2019/1700;

*Monitoring implementation*

- (30) monitor the implementation of Youth Guarantee schemes pursuant to this Recommendation through the multi-lateral surveillance of the Employment Committee within the framework of the European Semester;
- (31) regularly engage with Member States in the context of the European Semester to ensure monitoring of a continuous national investment in youth employment policies and programmes; address, where appropriate, country-specific recommendations to Member States;
- (32) report regularly to the Employment Committee on developments concerning the implementation and results of Youth Guarantee schemes;

*Raising awareness and targeting communication*

- (33) strengthen support to Member States' awareness raising and communication efforts and reinforce the dissemination of results and good practice examples among Member States.

The Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee is replaced.

Done at Brussels,

*For the Council  
The President*