Piloting Youth Guarantee partnerships on the ground

An executive summary of the report on the European Parliament Preparatory Action (EPPA) on the Youth Guarantee

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Background

In 2012, the European Parliament asked the European Commission to set up a Preparatory Action to support the Member States in the building of Youth Guarantee partnerships and trialling associated services among young people. The rationale was to collect experiences that could provide Member States with practical recommendations for launching and implementing larger Youth Guarantee schemes and related actions. A total of *18 pilot projects in seven countries* (Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Spain and the United Kingdom) were launched in 2013, with each delivered over a 12-month period.

The chosen pilots were located in *regions and localities with higher than average youth unemployment rates*. Some projects tested the Youth Guarantee model in a comprehensive manner while *most focussed on trialling specific aspects* of it.

Projects supporting positive post-school outcomes and preventing early school leaving

The **Alba County** project (ROMANIA) was set up to prevent early school leaving and improve employability and labour market readiness of students through job clubs.

The **Croydon** project (UNITED KINGDOM) sought to improve the capacity of schools and businesses to work together to improve labour market responsiveness of learning and prepare students for the school-to-work transition.

The **Hartlepool** project (UNITED KINGDOM) developed a mentoring model to support the transition of at-risk final year students into next level of education/training.

The **Lazio** project (ITALY) was established to facilitate transitions from school to work by providing job counselling, careers events and company visits.

The **Legnago** project (ITALY) was set up to prevent early school leaving among 15-18 year old students who were at high-risk of dropping out through motivational workshops and improved collaboration between schools, parents and social (and other support) services.

The **Neamt County** project (ROMANIA) was established to provide careers advice, mentoring and work experience for young people leaving the state care system.

The **Miechów** project (POLAND) sought to bridge the gap between local schools, training institutions and companies and prepare secondary school students for transition to employment.

The **Pembrokeshire** project (UNITED KINGDOM) aimed to get unemployed and inactive youth as well as those at risk of becoming unemployed, re-engaged through work tasters / placements, employer events / presentations and subsidised employment.

Projects working primarily with unemployed and inactive youth

The **Aragón** project (SPAIN) designed and piloted a dual education model of combining periods of workplace and school-based training.

The **Avilés** project (SPAIN) established a coaching scheme through which young people were provided with the individual and collective support they needed to enter the labour market, including work placements and sector-specific training.

The **Ballymun** project (IRELAND) developed and piloted a Youth Guarantee scheme in one of the most socially disadvantaged areas of the country, including trialling of all services associated with the Youth Guarantee process.

The **Cartagena** project (SPAIN) set up a new Youth Guarantee network which worked together to integrate unemployed young people into employment, education or training within four months of leaving school or becoming unemployed/inactive.

The **Galicia** project (SPAIN) sought to support the labour market integration of young people from rural areas by promoting entrepreneurship through training, guidance, mentoring and work placements.

The **Gijón** project (SPAIN) set up a "Youth Employment and Activation Agency" as a hub for services for 15-30 year olds unemployed and inactive youth so as to ease their access to workplace training, employment, education and training.

The **Tuscany** (ITALY) project was established to reduce the number of unemployed and inactive youth in the region by obtaining a better understanding of the scale of the problem, designing and piloting new tailored services and supporting the improvement of public employment services for young people.

The **Valencia** project (SPAIN) established a comprehensive four-step programme to provide young people with the entrepreneurial skills and tools needed to set up own business.

The **Veneto** project (ITALY) sought to build a network of experts inside the Veneto Lavoro Observatory in charge of coordinating youth employment policies and actions, and trial services with both students and unemployed youth.

The **Vilnius** project (LITHUANIA) developed a three-part preparation/motivational seminar series combined with a work placement as a way of integrating unemployed youth into employment.

Participants

The Preparatory Action *directly involved 3,300 young people mainly from disadvantaged backgrounds* in a range of activation measures aiming to support their transition to positive post-school outcomes or helping them to access employment. A further 1,600 young people benefited from the supporting activities, such as career and job fairs and needs assessments.

The great majority of the ***services were targeted toward at-risk groups***: young people at risk of exclusion. Many had been identified as being at risk of early school leaving and nearly half were either unemployed or inactive. A fifth of all participants were long-term unemployed. The majority of participants were low-skilled; nine percent held a tertiary level qualification. Several projects had specific targets and strategies for the involvement of hardest-to-reach members of their target groups.

Gender: Young males made up just over half of all participants (52%) while young females constituted 48%	**Age**: Nearly two-thirds (61%) were 15-19 years of age. The 20-25 year olds made up 38% of the participants and the remaining 2% were 25-29 year-olds
Labour market status: Half were still attending education or training (51%); the rest (48%) were classified either as unemployed or inactive.	**Skill background**: Half (50%) held an ISCED 1-2 level qualification (at most), while a further third (34%) had an ISCED 3-4 qualification.

The pilot projects ***performed well against their key performance targets*** related to the trialling of services among young people. Of the eighteen projects only four had a reach rate (the extent to which projects achieved their target number of participants) of less than 100%.

Outcomes

The Preparatory Action led to a positive outcome for the vast majority of participants. Nearly a quarter of participants of the projects which worked primarily with unemployed and inactive youth found a job in the open labour market (23%). In these projects, just over a third (36%) took up a place in education or training following their participation, 18% found a subsidised job or a work placement, and a further 4% had set up, or were in the process of setting up, their own business. The rest were not able to find a solution or their situation was unknown.

EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES	ENTREPRENEURSHIP OUTCOMES	EDUCATION OUTCOMES
• 331 young people mainly from disadvantaged backgrounds supported into employment • 255 young people supported into traineeships or subsidised work placements after participation in the pilot	• 22 new businesses set up by young people • 30 new businesses in the process being set up • 57 young people with an intention to set up a new business in the near or more distant future	• Over 1,700 young people supported into further education or training following participation in the pilot • Up to 480 potential cases of early school leaving prevented • Hundreds of young people better equipped for the school-to-work transition

The satisfaction of the participants was demonstrated by feelings of being more supported. They appreciated ***having someone who took time to listen, who cared about their situation, and gave them confidence that they were not alone.*** This was repeated by participants across all projects as the most valuable element.

PERSONAL QUALITIES	INTERPERSONAL AND LIFE SKILLS
Improved self-confidence and self-esteem Improved self-awareness of skills, strengths and weaknesses Enhanced motivation (i.e. to look for a job, to continue education, to prepare for exams) More positive attitude about future	Improved social skills (e.g. ability to initiate new relationships) New skills and willingness to communicate with those in position of authority Experience in communicating with employers How to manage finances and travel to different places to make most of opportunities
CAREER MANAGEMENT SKILLS	**NEW VOCATIONAL AND EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS**
Better understanding of careers and the labour market, including skills required, salary expectations, employment contracts, etc. Knowledge of how to prepare a CV, conduct yourself in interviews, change careers, etc.	New or enhanced sector specific vocational skills Employability skills (e.g. teamwork, time management)

The pilots which had the specific goal of testing the capacity to provide a good quality offer of employment (including subsidised employment), education, training or traineeship within four months, were able to make such **an offer to 83-98% of the participants within the defined time period**. Many participants required **more than just one offer** and in many such cases the offers were a start of an integration process, not the end.

The profile of **offers tended to reflect the background of the participants**, with many of the low-skilled being guided toward work placement and training options. The profile of offers to the higher educated members of the client group featured much higher rates of employment and further education and training offers.

The main difficulties relating to securing offers related to the need to increase the volume and range of options available to meet the disparate needs of the client base and finding the right offers of education and training due to the inflexibility of education systems to accept new students throughout the year. Furthermore, practical barriers in accessing employment support schemes (such as age limits) and a lack of job and work placement opportunities - which prompted many pilot partnerships to undertake proactive work with employers to identify such opportunities – were also important challenges in this regard.

Most projects sought to undertake some level of structural reform with the hope of achieving lasting positive changes to the way in which youth services are delivered. They contributed to the development and testing of activities related to the Youth Guarantee. They also led to an **increased range of opportunities available to the target groups in pilot communities** in comparison to standard provision. In practice this meant increased or enhanced resources for career guidance, one-on-one counselling and mentoring, individual action planning, training, business creation support and employer engagement, for example.

TOOLS	SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS (new or improved services)	POLICY INFLUENCE
• Toolkits and guidebooks • Training materials • IT/smartphone portals and apps • Database improvements	• Youth Guarantee delivery models • Dedicated youth employment agencies (one-stop-shop) • New models for supporting unemployed/inactive youth • Improvements in schools in relation to addressing early school leaving and improving school-to-work transition support	• New partnerships and networks • Lessons influencing strategies and funding priorities & programmes

Most pilot partnerships established a broad public-private-third sector structure where authorities dealing with education and training as well as employment, tended to play a key role. PES and employers' organisations were typical partners, as well as schools and training providers. Twelve of the eighteen pilots established formal relationships with youth organisations or other NGOs. Many of those partnerships which did not have links with the youth sector identified the sector as the missing link.

On one hand, the partnership focus **facilitated the development of new networks, relationships and information sharing exercises** that had not been initiated previously. On the other hand, it also provided the opportunity for these organisations to improve their functioning by increasing **the capacity and skills of their staff**, facilitating better intra-organisational communication and expanding the tools, resources and expertise at their disposal for tackling youth unemployment.

Lessons from the EPPA pilot projects on…

1. Strengths

Particular strengths were the commitment to **deliver participant-led activities**, focussing on one-on-one guidance / mentoring and ensuring labour market responsiveness of activities. Indeed, a common factor between 'successful' projects was the involvement of employers through placement and other activities. Another common feature concerned the provisions for supportive pathways to employment for at-risk youth. This often consisted of higher than average levels of guidance and counselling, preparatory programmes and other interventions before an offer of employment, education, training or traineeship was made. This also involved responding to the participants' lack of key employability skills (such as time-keeping skills, positive attitudes to work, interpersonal skills).

Using the right communication channels and language that are relevant to young people were important in getting the message across. **Effective communication strategies** with appropriate targeting, positive tone and values yielded multiple benefits for the pilot actors. Communication strategies however need to be coupled with appropriate outreach activities in order to provide a comprehensive approach that does not leave out groups of young people who have the most to gain from the Youth Guarantee.

Several partnerships made **considerable improvements to the way in which local employers are approached and communicated with.** One of the most effective ways of guaranteeing an employer involvement was through an offer of a *smörgåsbord* ('a varied collection') of different ways to get involved in the Youth Guarantee. This means a broad portfolio of 'light touch' (e.g. from inviting employers to attend career fairs, to helping students and jobseekers to improve their job interview skills) as well as more in-depth options (e.g. traineeships, apprenticeships). Such an approach explicitly recognises that employers have different needs, traditions and motivations as well as limited resources in terms of personnel and time.

In addition, employer relationships were fostered by appointing single contact points at the local project or public employment service with whom employers could communicate. This person undertook 'outreach work' with local employers and was aware of all support available for them. This was, however, **difficult to achieve as many front-line staff lack training and experience in this field**.

It was not only young people who benefited from the collaboration with employers, but **employers themselves acquired a broad range of benefits from participation** when their involvement was closely facilitated and supported. In some cases, the involvement led to a better understanding of support available for recruitment, including subsidies and candidate shortlisting services. In some cases participation raised awareness of challenges faced by today's youth in accessing the labour market for the first time and thereby improved their image of unemployed youth.

The extent to which the resources deployed via the Preparatory Action had been used efficiently by the projects varied. Many of those projects for which comparator cost data was available, performed at a lower cost per participant than their comparators (time-bound projects working with similar target groups through the implementation of similar supporting activities), although a small number of pilots featured higher than expected 'per participant' costs. The most cost-efficient projects delivered their activities with less than EUR 500 per person. The factors affecting such costs included: the types of activities offered (i.e. group guidance vs. one-on-one mentoring and individual action planning); the complexity of the support needs of the target group; and, also the level of funding and time required for the building of the new service model and delivery partnership. There were also differences in the way in which funds were used: some pilots funded activation measures which were either completely new or not otherwise currently available while other projects directed most of the funding to enhance existing

services (e.g. to increase the number of one-to-one guidance sessions available to young people).

2. Weaknesses

Despite of the great potential of many tools, services and partnerships created, some projects **worked very much in a 'project-based' isolation** focussing on the delivery of the project without, at the same time, considering and planning for securing the sustainability of the actions beyond the lifetime of the project. This was sometimes evident from the lack of early planning for post-pilot sustainability and recruitment of new staff for the specific duration of the project, rather than appointing existing staff to take on the activities. **Future projects should be required to demonstrate already at the application stage how the planned outputs and outcomes are sustainable** and how they will capture and share the learning gained and contribute to best practice. In this regard, most **partnerships could have also benefitted from closer links with higher level authorities** – authorities operating at a level in which most policy, regulatory and funding decisions are made and changes can be introduced.

In many cases the targets could have been more ambitious to allow the testing of the new services and methods among a broader and larger cohort of young people. The average number of participants per projects was 183 but half of the pilot projects tested their core measures with fewer than 100 participants. Some pilots could have **done more to avoid 'creaming' effects**, which in this context refers to the project officers, teachers or other individuals in charge of participant selection choosing 'less challenging' individuals ('quick-wins'), including most motivated candidates, who are more likely to stay on and achieve positive outcomes for the project.

Improved, proactive approach to work with employers was an important strength, but overall, much more work is needed to achieve a broader, more comprehensive change in the way in which **authorities work and communicate – at strategy and front-line service levels - with employers** around creation of working life familiarisation, training and employment opportunities for young people. Some weaknesses in employer engagement were identified. For example: the lack of incentives for employers; poor coordination of employer services at the public employment service and local authorities; lack of training and experience among front-line staff to engage employers; and, conflicting priorities (not least due to the general labour market crisis).

Another area where many individual pilots fell short of expectation was the low number of pilots funded with direct / early links to national Youth Guarantee plans, which meant that the majority of pilots were **working in isolation** without concrete plans on how to link the pilot achievements with the design and implementation of larger Youth Guarantee schemes. This also included **limited consideration of how to link school- and post-school activities** under one framework.

Most partnerships exceeded the outcome targets they had set for themselves. However, in many other cases no targets were set at all or the targets were only considered during implementation; they were indeed established once an understanding of what may be achieved had been gained rather than **the premise of funding in itself being outcome driven.**

Underestimation of the time needed for partnership formation and clarification of goals and responsibilities was quite common, partially resulting from the pressure to deliver the projects within a 12-month period. Offering a role of an equal partner to youth organisations with relevant practical and strategic reach and expertise, backed by appropriate share of resources from the overall project fund, could have yielded further efficiency savings in relation to identification, engagement, retention and activation of youth for pilots in which youth organisations had no role.

3. The Youth Guarantee from the service perspective

Those pilot projects involved in the provision of 'offers' to their clients engaged in discussions about the definition of a 'good quality offer' in the context of the Youth Guarantee. There was consensus that the definition is subjective; 'good quality' can be different for every person. The common thread however was that ***'good quality offers' should support outcomes that improve the employment prospects of participants in the longer-term.***

It was also considered that 'good quality offers':

- …are not just about providing offers for the sake of targets.

- …are not necessary the end of the labour market integration process; sometimes they are just a starting point on a pathway.

- …take into account not only the skills of young people but also their personal motivations, while also considering the requirements of local businesses.

- …acknowledge both vertical (e.g. higher qualifications) vs. horizontal (e.g. qualifications at the same level at which the person already holds a qualification, but in a different field) progression opportunities.

- …are a balancing act: this refers to the challenge of ensuring that improved opportunities for the Youth Guarantee target group do not deteriorate the opportunities of others. Indeed, training displacement effect can be avoided by increasing the total number of training places especially if such places are prioritised for Youth Guarantee clients over other groups. Otherwise the situation of unemployed youth could improve at the expense of other client groups.

- …give flexibility to counsellors in charge of matching to identify and support right solutions. In this regard, a 'discretionary' pot of funding allowing the counsellors to address practical, one-off barriers to participation faced by individual young people (e.g. ability to pay for public transport to attend the project) was seen as crucial by case managers and counsellors interviewed from several pilot projects.

Many of the most disadvantaged participants showed a much stronger interest to take up employment or work placement than attend a training course. Often this stemmed from the history of failure in education. When such placement opportunities were made available to this target group, retention tended to be strong(er). This can be an important lesson especially for those countries which have adopted a strong 'train first' focus. The rationale behind the model is the wish to improve the employability of such individuals on a longer term basis, but if the school-based model does not work for them, it is essential to have training opportunities available that include ***a strong work-based learning element***.

Outreach methods usually involve one-on-one interaction in a community setting and consequently come with a higher engagement cost per person than general engagement practices but may be the only way to activate hardest-to-reach groups. Successful outreach approaches related to the Youth Guarantee include:

- Cross-reviews of databases to identify at-risk youth;

- Making use of local partners, such as youth organisations and other community organisations, to reach out; and,

- Employing 'street counsellors' to engage with at-risk youth.

A ***successful outreach practice embraces the principles and ethos of youth work*** especially what comes to the relationship between practitioners and young people, voluntary participation and non-judgemental approach that does not exclude anyone.

The pilot project experiences ***highlighted entrepreneurship and self-employment as valuable options for young people. But they also recognised that this option is not for everyone;*** the most successful efforts begin with the initiative coming from young people themselves. For others, there is an initial stage, where the support raises awareness among young people regarding what enterprise is and what it takes to own and manage a business. This understanding enables young people to consider self-

employment as a realistic career option. Business development training, provision of personalised advice, support to access finance and the value of intergenerational support were cited as important follow-on support required to make this option a reality. However, all this support should also take into account the additional needs and challenges that some young people may face, who may require (sometimes) extensive, additional hands-on support to address personal, social, and skills barriers, before being able to move onto practicalities related to entrepreneurship.

4. The Youth Guarantee as a policy intervention

The pilot projects showed the Youth Guarantee is not a one-off reform or a quick fix. Instead, it should be seen as *a process to review and continuously improve the way in which employment and youth services are delivered*. In most countries, the implementation requires considerable structural reform, whilst in others it may be enough to focus on enhancing and coordinating existing services and addressing bottlenecks and access barriers.

The design of a Youth Guarantee scheme should start off with a systematic analysis of supply and demand (see the Box on the right). Key partners, including representatives of the target group, should be involved from the beginning. Other key messages for the design of Youth Guarantee schemes include:

> A needs analysis to establish an understanding of the needs and wishes of the target group.
>
> A cohort analysis to understand scale (how many young people currently belong to the target group and how many will in the future) and scope (profile) of the target group.
>
> A service analysis to map out the depth and breadth of existing services and the extent to which it is sufficient/insufficient in addressing the needs of unemployed youth.
>
> A resource analysis to assess the current level of funding dedicated to youth services by different service providers.

- Identify clear objectives and targets for the scheme; but also consider output and outcome targets as well as complementarity and cost-effectiveness concerns already at the planning stage.

- When possible, consider allocating the partnership a dedicated pot of funding, which the partnership is responsible for. This can increase ownership and accountability.

- Plan from the beginning the means and method to collect relevant monitoring data; this may require changes to existing recording systems.

- Ensure the timetable takes into consideration the time required to build up a partnership:

  - Of which members (1) understand and are committed to the goals of the scheme, (2) have a mandate to represent their organisation, and (3) are committed to inter-agency working;

  - Where responsibilities are clearly defined, written down and allocated across the partnership (and where partners are accountable to implementing their responsibilities and reporting on progress); and

  - Which is guided by targets that are realistic and jointly determined.

- When deciding on the composition of the partnership, do not only consider what different partners can bring in to the table, but also consider the consequences of leaving them out; it may be helpful to look at the issue from the perspective of 'a life of a young person' and all the organisations that are involved in it.

- Consider ways to capture and calculate the full cost of the Youth Guarantee for cost-effectiveness assessment; this includes cost information from relevant partners and consideration for the social value and additionality of inter-agency working.

5. Empowerment of young people

Pilot projects sent important messages about ***youth needing to be empowered and supported in coming to realise that they themselves can contribute to improving the quality of their lives and taking charge of their future***; front-line Youth Guarantee staff such as counsellors, mentors, facilitators can play a key supporting role here. But overall, ***empowering young people requires a change in professional practice and in the process of policy making***. Their knowledge, aspirations as well as needs, opinions and insights must be taken seriously in order to find solutions to the problems that they are facing. Young people can also play a key role in the monitoring of the Youth Guarantee, through discussion forums, surveys, focus groups and other platforms established to capture their views.

Within this context, it is also important to consider how young people are perceived. Too often they are portrayed in a negative light, especially in the context of the youth unemployment crisis. While they will always be disadvantaged in the labour market in terms of labour market experience, young people have a lot to offer for example in relation to creativity and entrepreneurship.

Youth organisations can play an important part in the Youth Guarantee as advisors, advocates, role models, promoters, mentors, outreach workers, feedback facilitators and service providers. They can also support employment agencies in the design of new approaches that help develop confidence and esteem. However, many third sector agencies have less experience in working within the remits of the formal sector, tend to have limited funds, rely on voluntary contributions, and may not have equally defined goals for cooperation, thus may need extra time and resources to contribute and adjust to the new ways of working.

The full report, case studies, conference materials (presentations and papers), evaluation & monitoring guide for project officers and other material related to the Preparatory Action are available on the website of the European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1099&langId=en

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