



European Network of Public Employment Services

Contribution to the initiative of the European Commission
to reinforce the Youth Guarantee

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OPINION PAPER



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The European Network of Public Employment Services was created following a Decision of the European Parliament and Council in June 2014¹. Its objective is to reinforce PES capacity, effectiveness and efficiency. This activity has been developed within the work programme of the European PES Network. For further information: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/PESNetwork>.

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¹ DECISION No 573/2014/EU

Preface

The recent financial and economic crisis has resulted in unprecedented high unemployment rates. Young people have been particularly affected by the economic downturn, which has resulted in a record high EU youth unemployment rate (15-24) close to almost 24 % at the peak of the crisis in 2013. Several EU Member States faced youth unemployment rates exceeding 40 %: In two European Member States more than 50 % of the young people on the labour were unemployed. Since then the labour market situation for young people has significantly improved however, in 2018 the EU youth unemployment rate stood at 15.2 being more than twice as high as the overall EU unemployment rate (6.8 %).

In response to the fragile labour market situation of young people, the Council of the European Union adopted a Recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee on the 22 April 2013. The Youth Guarantee called on Member States to

‘ensure that all young people under the age of 25 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.’

Furthermore, the Youth Guarantee recommends that the starting point for delivery of services to young people should be

‘the registration with an employment service, and for those NEETs who are not registered with an employment service, Member States should define a corresponding starting point to deliver the Youth Guarantee within the same four-month time- frame.’

The European Commission’s communication ‘The Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative three years on’ outlines that since 2014 more than 14 million young people have taken up an offer of employment, education, traineeship or apprenticeship.²

The PES Network welcomes the initiative of the European Commission’s President von der Leyen to reinforce the Youth Guarantee. As the main implementers of the Youth Guarantee, the PES Network would like to offer its expertise on a reinforced Youth Guarantee.

² [European Commission fact sheet Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative](#), 2019

The Role of Public Employment Services in delivering the Youth Guarantee

Since the Youth Guarantee called on Member States to ensure provision of quality employment services to young people it is evident that the public employment services (PES) play a decisive role in the implementation of the Recommendation. The legal text emphasises the importance of PES in this regard when stressing that the European Network of Public Employment Services (PES Network) should contribute to the continuous monitoring of the Youth Guarantee through informing the Employment Committee on the developments concerning the design, implementation and results of the Youth Guarantee.

The PES Network has therefore introduced a regular reporting mechanism as part of the annual work programme ('Report on PES implementation of the Youth Guarantee') to support the implementation of the monitoring of the Youth Guarantee. Further to this, the PES Network has addressed the implementation of the Recommendation assessing the institutional capacity of PES to deliver the Youth Guarantee through the Network's Benchlearning approach.

The monitoring activities of the PES Network confirm that the PES have a wide range of responsibilities in the Youth Guarantee and that they are a central player in this field. Not only do the PES provide services to young people but around half of the PES also do have responsibility in coordinating the national Youth Guarantee schemes. Partnerships building with relevant stakeholders has consequently been central to many PES using both formal as well as informal agreements.

The implementation of the Youth Guarantee proved to be a win-win situation for both the young people that entered the YG but also for the institutions involved in the delivery of the YG. As for the Public Employment Services, evaluation shows that the YG has led to changes in most PES, proving to be a driver behind structural reforms. A majority of PES have improved the targeting of their services. Expansion of services and introduction of performance targets for youth services enabled PES to improve output. In addition, PES have introduced staff reorganisation measures including use of dedicated youth counsellors.³

³ [Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: The Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative three years on](#), 2016, p.9

Contribution of the PES Network to a reinforced Youth Guarantee

Based on the experience as main implementing institutions of the Youth Guarantee the PES Network would like to offer its expertise and contribute to the forthcoming proposal of the European Commission on a reinforced Youth Guarantee. In order to ensure full implementation of the YG an updated YG should take into account several considerations aiming to reach the full potential of the YG.

On the existing Youth Guarantee principles, which require revision

1. On the Youth Guarantee intervention time scale

The aim of the Recommendation is to ensure that all registered young people aged 15-24 receive a good-quality offer of education, training or employment within for months. Several PES are still facing challenges providing an appropriate quality offer for a specific target group, the disadvantaged NEETs. This target group is particularly difficult to reach and to motivate to participate in the YG scheme. This requires increased efforts, which are both time and resource intense for PES. In addition, complex preparatory interventions are often needed in order to empower this target group to take up an offer. In such cases the 4 months target seems to be too rigid and may even hamper a successful reintegration as the sustainability of participating in a subsequent quality offer might not be sufficiently ensured. An extension up to 6 months seems to be an appropriate timeframe for this target group in order to best benefit from the YG. This however should not be used as a pretext to evade early provision of services to this target group. On the contrary, a sound preparatory phase leading into a quality offer that meets the needs of the young people should be considered a pathway to the YG and therefore an integrated part of it.

The PES Network therefore suggests to introduce more flexibility into the structure of the Youth Guarantee with regards to the 4 months period, where experience shows that for specific target groups a longer duration leads to better labour market outcomes. If considered appropriate and necessary the time scale could be extended up to 6 months.

All young people who get registered with the PES should receive timely and quality activation. In order to prevent (long term) unemployment, it is crucial that the PES or social partners are in contact with the young people as soon as possible (ideally before school drop-out) to inform them and motivate them to make use of the services available under the Youth Guarantee. However, for the most disadvantaged youth (such as NEETs, low skilled jobseekers, newcomers/refugees, youngsters with psycho-medical problems, etc.), activation measures can require more time because of their specific needs. It is important to have more flexibility with regard to the activation period to adjust to the requirements of the target groups and with the aim of delivering rapid and personalized services and achieving a more successful and sustainable outcome.

2. On the existing intervention portfolio

PES experience stresses that there is no ‘one size fits all’ solution to labour market integration. The reality shows that there are many young people registered with a PES that are insufficiently covered by the Youth Guarantee. This is not because the PES are not willing to offer services to these young people but rather because they are in need of services that are not part of the existing Youth Guarantee definition (i.e. employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship). Many of the young customers of PES are not yet sufficiently equipped with the necessary skills, or have not yet found the socio-economical, administrative and/or psycho-medical stability to either (re)enter education, participate in training or to enter the labour market. These young people are in need of measures that offer preparation enabling them to successfully participate in the Youth Guarantee. Experience has shown that for many of these young people the threshold to participate in the YG is too high. Therefore, many PES are e.g. offering courses designed to educate basic knowledge like literacy and numeracy, basic digital skills and soft skills for all youth. Likewise, intense counselling sessions and individualised support have proven to be effective measures in order to train and learn basic competences a prerequisite for further participation in the YG. The development of a network of partnerships has proven to be effective to reach out to young people and to tackle non-employment related obstacles (see point 1).

The PES Network therefore suggests to introduce more flexibility into the structure of the Youth Guarantee with regards to the definition of ‘quality offers’ reflected in the corresponding indicators/targets/goals (i.e. employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship), as specific target groups are in need of offers that have a strong preparatory character enabling them to successfully participate in the Youth Guarantee and get closer to labour market integration.⁴ Such a programme could combine intense guidance with elements of mentoring and coaching; encouraging volunteering activities; strengthened outreach to the most disadvantaged youth and early intervention measures in partnership with education and youth actors, mainly from civil society; partnerships with social, medical and youth care actors to address obstacles preventing young people from entering the YG.

⁴ It is to be noted and well considered that legal or statutory responsibilities and competencies of PES and other institutions differ, e.g. when it comes to provision of basic skills.

3. On the age range of young people under the scope of the Youth Guarantee

The Youth Guarantee currently covers young people under 25. Many PES have the experience that young people above 25 still face similar labour market barriers and that the integration approaches are therefore alike. Consequently, several PES have therefore already extended their service provision under the Youth Guarantee to young adults aged 25-29 or even above. Hence, these young adults benefit from the inclusion into the Youth Guarantee schemes.

The PES Network therefore suggests to consider to extend the Youth Guarantee to young people aged 25-29⁵.

4. On the inclusion of the formal education sector

One of the main success factor of the Youth Guarantee is the willingness of the relevant actors to enter into partnerships in order to respond to the complexity of the target group. Interaction between the different stakeholders allows for a more holistic approach tackling the relevant aspects and needs of young people. However, from a prevention perspective the Youth Guarantee is supposed to be a remedy for those, who have already left either education or the labour market. A rethinking of the Youth Guarantee now allows for a broader institutionalised inclusion of stakeholders. In order to strengthen the preventative character, the link between the (compulsory) education system and the labour market institutions, such as the PES, needs further reinforcement in the framework of the Youth Guarantee.

The education sector needs to assume the responsibility for early school leaving (those who leave education and training with only lower secondary education or less, and who are no longer in education and training). It should not be a priority for PES to provide young people with those skills they are supposed to acquire at school. Compensating for such skills gaps is both an economic burden to PES and time consuming for the young jobseekers delaying their entry into the labour market. Moreover, early school leaving often leads into inactivity and social exclusion, creating NEETs, which requires PES to conduct outreach activities. Therefore, reducing early school leaving needs to be top priority for the education sector and the transition from school into employment needs to be better supported from the side of the education sector. Both at EU level as well as at national level cooperation between the education sector and the PES needs immediate further attention through coordinated action and pilot projects that can lead to structural cooperation (PES, NGO's, municipalities, etc.). PES thereby could take up a conducting role, stimulating and coordinating partnerships with the education sector and other stakeholders.

The PES Network therefore suggests that the education sector should be better anchored within the Youth Guarantee. This should lead to a more structured

⁵ The extension of the age range of being eligible to YG offers will however not touch existing definitions (including age ranges) of youth/young people in the EU context such as youth unemployment (Eurostat).

Moreover, the general extension of the age range does not necessarily touch upon specific national programs under the YG.

cooperation and formal partnership between the PES and the education sector aiming at providing a quality service to young people, teachers, parents etc.⁶

5. Inclusion of other relevant partners to respond to the complexity of the target group

Young people, especially the most disadvantaged groups (young inactive, young people with low skills, young people with disabilities, young people from ethnic minorities (e.g. young Roma), young people with caring responsibilities, young women, young mothers, young people in rural areas, young refugees, young people with migrant background) are faced with complex problems requiring a holistic approach including cooperation and coordination not only with the education sector but also with a broad network of partners (housing, rehabilitative services, social services, youth care, medical/health, legal, administrative etc.) whose contribution can be crucial in the YG delivery. Experience of YG implementations showed that it is needed to have different services portfolio for additional sub-groups of NEET's. Design of services portfolio could be more effective when based on removing barriers to integrate into labour market. Different sub-groups of NEET's are required different portfolio of services and collaboration between various partners are necessary. The one-stop-shop approach as inspiration from Finland could be the best practice in solving activation of NEET's.

The PES Network therefore suggests that the reinforced Youth Guarantee considers the formal and systematic inclusion of relevant partners in order to better respond to the complexity of the target group.

6. On the financial support of PES

Continued political commitment and financial support for the Youth Guarantee as a long-term, structural reform is essential in order to reap the benefits of the work carried out so far. One of the key factors for success is the financial commitment from both national and local administrations and the European level. The implementation of the Youth Guarantee also had financial impacts on the PES as existing structures and instruments needed reinforcement. It is expected that a reinforced Youth Guarantee will further lead to a financial challenge for the PES. Successful implementation will therefore require the political commitment from Member States to sufficiently equip the PES in order to ensure continuous delivery of quality offers to the young people. It is likewise important that the topic needs to be given adequate priority within the European financial instruments of the forthcoming structural-funds period.

The PES Network therefore requests political backup and adequate financial resources for strengthening PES capacities for an implementation of the reinforced Youth Guarantee.

⁶ See also: [PES Network position paper: Proposal for a structured cooperation between PES and the education sector for better school-to-work transitions](#)