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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

Synopsis of stakeholder consultations for the evaluation of ESF and YEI support to youth employment

SYNOPSIS OF STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS FOR THE EVALUATION OF ESF AND YEI SUPPORT TO YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

1. The consultation strategy

1.1. Objectives

This synopsis report outlines the consultation organised to evaluate ESF support for Youth Employment for the 2014-2020 programming period and presents the main findings.

To ensure transparency and involve the stakeholders, the process followed the standards and methods set out in the Better Regulation guidelines. The various consultations have followed the roadmap and consultation strategy. The roadmap¹ of the evaluation itself was published on the Better Regulation website and open for public feedback between 20 July 2018 and 17 August 2018².

1.2. Consultation stakeholders

The stakeholders targeted by the consultation were organisations or individuals that:

- had an interest in youth employment operations funded under the ESF/YEI;
- had or might have participated in the operations;
- had expertise in the subject;
- and had or might have run or been involved in running the operations.

Therefore, the following groups were formed for the consultation:

1. **Participants:** people who have received support under the Youth Employment Initiative or other youth employment operations, with the aim of gaining an insight into the extent to which the objectives of the funding have been achieved in terms of their integration in the labour market, and which factors played a role in this that weren't directly identified by the monitoring mechanisms;
2. **Young people not in education, employment and training not reached by the operations (NEETs):** the consultation tools collected the views of members of this group (the main target for the Youth Employment Initiative) who had not participated in the operations, with the aim of understanding why they had not;
3. Bodies involved in running **the operational programmes**, such as managing authorities and other Member State representatives, social and economic partners represented in the monitoring committees;

¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/1863-Evaluation-of-the-support-to-youth-employment-by-the-Youth-Employment-Initiative-and-the-European-Social-Fund>.

² Feedback on the roadmap: https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/1863-Evaluation-of-the-support-to-youth-employment-by-the-Youth-Employment-Initiative-and-the-European-Social-Fund/feedback?p_id=273121.

4. **Organisations** involved in **delivering** youth employment operations as beneficiaries or project partners and their EU-level representatives: public administrations at the national, regional or local levels, public and private training and education providers, workers' and employers' organisations, youth organisations, NGOs, charities and companies. Their feedback was relevant to all evaluation questions, particularly to identify any issues of efficiency and delivery in running the youth employment operations;
5. **Organisations and individuals not directly involved in running the operations**, but who have a stake in youth employment issues, notably with regards to young people and, specifically, young people at risk of social exclusion, who contributed their views on how the operations met the specific needs of young people;
6. **Academic and research bodies** with expertise and knowledge of youth employment policies and issues, who provided insights into the relevance and coherence of measures;
7. **Organisations** representing employers, who should contribute feedback on the factors that played a role in the successful integration of participants, and young people in general, in the labour market;
8. **Young people in general**, who contributed their opinions on the relevance of the action taken;
9. **The general public**, i.e. any individual or organisation outside the previous groups who wanted to provide their views on EU support for youth employment.

1.3. Consultation methods and tools

Type of stakeholder consultation	Type of stakeholders	Timeframe
Evaluation partnership meetings	Managing authorities/intermediate bodies	February 2019 – February 2020
Open public consultation	Open to all stakeholders and the general public	24 May – 16 August 2019
Field work in 10 Member States (case studies) in the form of semi-structured interviews and focus groups	Managing authorities, beneficiaries, socioeconomic partners; evaluators/researchers and representatives of participants.	July 2019 - September 2019
EU-level focus groups	Members of ESF technical working group	2 October 2019

2. Specific consultations/activities

2.1. Stakeholders involved in managing the ESF

Stakeholders involved in managing the funds were consulted regularly during the ESF evaluation partnership, which comprises Member State representatives of ESF monitoring and evaluation capacity. They carried out numerous tasks, ranging from preparing the evaluation questions to presenting the findings.

Date of ESF evaluation partnership meeting	Topic discussed
18 February 2019	Update on the state of play of the evaluation study
12 November 2019	The draft findings of the thematic evaluation and conclusions from the public consultation
11 February 2020	Findings and conclusions of the study

Draft reports were circulated to the partnership members, who were given the opportunity to comment on the outputs of the evaluation. The comments made by the managing authorities were mostly to flag inconsistencies in data related to individual Member States, which were then corrected.

2.2. The public consultation

2.2.1. Description of the activity

The online public consultation was launched on 24 May 2019 and ran until 16 August 2019 using the EU Survey tool. The questionnaire comprised 26 questions (excluding profiling and closing sections), structured around the main evaluation questions and including both open-ended and closed questions.

2.2.2. Stakeholders

The public consultation was structured around five groups of respondents, defined as follows:

- Group A.1: Individual citizens 33 years old or under who had taken part in the ESF/YEI – i.e. ‘ESF/YEI participants’;
- Group A.2: Individual citizens 33 years old or under who either did not take part in the ESF/YEI, had taken part in other support schemes not funded by the ESF/YEI, or had taken part and didn’t know if it was ESF/YEI-funded – i.e. ‘other young people’;
- Group B: Individual citizens over 33 years old – i.e. the ‘general public’;
- Group C: Organisations involved in managing the ESF/YEI (such as managing authorities, intermediate bodies, beneficiaries, and social partners involved in running or monitoring the ESF/YEI) likely to have a direct and detailed knowledge of YEI/ESF – i.e. ‘organisations involved’;

- Group D: Organisations not involved in managing, monitoring and running the ESF/YEI, i.e. entities or organisations that presumably do not have a direct stake in the ESF/YEI – i.e. ‘other organisations’.

The number of questions for the respondents varied by profile of respondent.

2.2.3. Results

The public consultation received **1,376 responses**.

It achieved a satisfactory level of overall representation of different respondents’ profiles, in particular for young people, who were a key target of the consultation. Most respondents were under 33 years of age (57.6%) who either took part in ESF/YEI (24.7%) or did not take part in ESF/YEI (32.9%). Just over one fifth of respondents (21.8%) belonged to organisations involved in managing the ESF/YEI. The remaining respondents were either from the general public or belonged to organisations not involved in the schemes.

Most of the respondents who participated in some form of youth employment support (339 ESF/YEI participants and 92 other participants) did so through **information on job opportunities, guidance and tutoring, support to find work experience and training for general skills**. The least used type was support for going back to school or setting up a business. There were no significant differences in the type of support received by ESF/YEI participants and other participants.

Almost one third of respondents replied **on behalf of an organisation**. Overall, the most responses from organisations were from **public authorities** (38.8%), followed by **companies and business organisations** (22.3%) and **NGOs** (18.5%). Beneficiary organisations (applying for ESF/YEI funds and running the projects) are the most represented among organisations involved (Group C).

Over half of respondents are familiar with or have an idea of the goal and scope and know at least one activity funded by the ESF or YEI, or by both.

There is an important caveat regarding **representativeness**. The public consultation run as a voluntary, online survey may not have reached all target groups in the desired way. The responses to the public consultation show **a very unbalanced geographical distribution**, with four countries covering almost three-quarters of responses: Italy (20.4% of responses, considering only those referring to one single country), Bulgaria (18.8%), Spain (16.4%) and Slovakia (16.4%). All other countries elicited much fewer responses and two countries no responses at all (Denmark and Luxembourg). Almost 60% of individual respondents were women; 40% were men.

Relevance

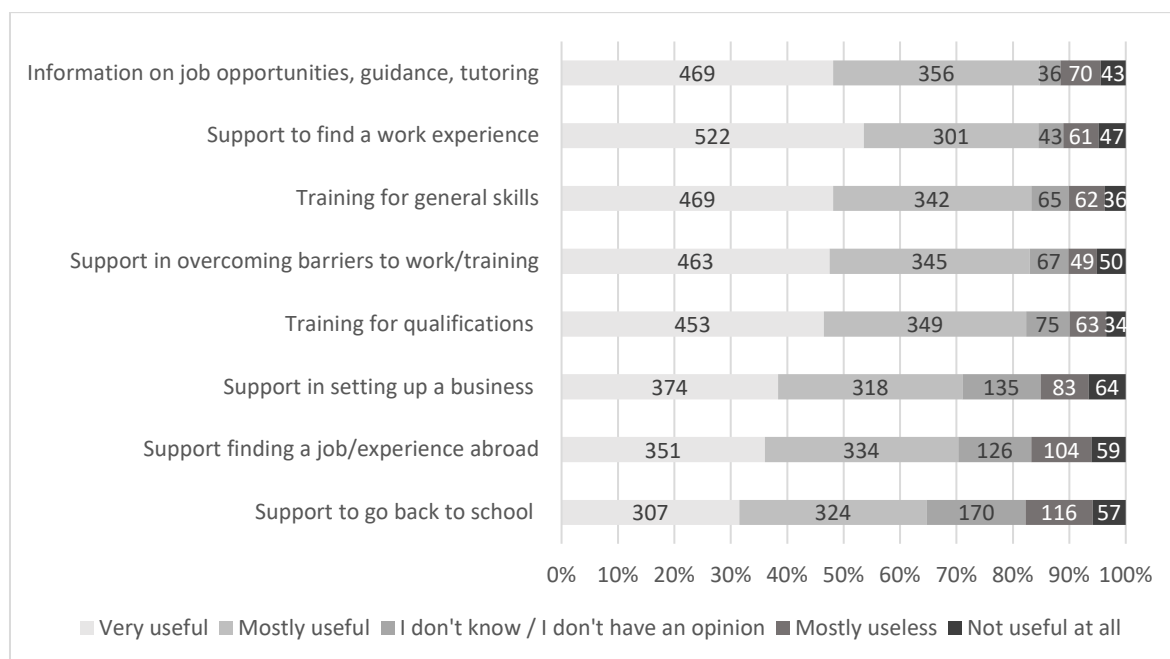
The questions on relevance explore the extent to which the different types of actions and support are in line with the needs of young people, in particular young people not in education, employment or training, in terms of helping them find a job, improve their professional skills or get closer to the labour market.

When asked to rank the **usefulness of youth employment support** actions, individual respondents (as opposed to those answering on behalf of an organisation) ranked **information on job opportunities, guidance and tutoring** followed by **support to find work experience; training for general skills; support in overcoming barriers to work**

and training; and **training for qualifications** as the most useful forms of support (between 84.8% and 82.3% say they were mostly or very useful).

Fewer respondents ranked support in setting up a business, in finding a job or opportunity abroad and support to get back to school to be most useful (between 71% and 64.8%). For more details see Figure 15. Respondents suggested additional support that could be useful, such as training in **social skills** and **psychological support**.

Figure 1 In your opinion, how useful are the following actions in helping young people find a job, improve their professional skills or enter the labour market? (Group A1, A2 and B, n=976)



The ESF/YEI action considered most relevant by responding organisations was **vocational education and training**, followed by guidance and career support; paid apprenticeships, traineeships and internships; and basic skills training. Community or voluntary work and non-paid apprenticeships were ranked the least relevant (47.5% find it relevant or very relevant vs over 90% for other types of support).

In the open questions, a few respondents suggested that **social skills training** and **emotional support** (such as counselling or psychological support) are also relevant types of support that are less often provided by ESF/YEI operations.

Overall, most responding **organisations reported that EU support was flexible enough to adapt to emerging needs**. Respondents highlighted the capacity of the ESF/YEI to adapt to the needs of young people and to the socioeconomic context in the different regions and Member States. Conversely, some others sent negative replies citing a lack of capacity of the programmes to adapt to the specific needs of young people and to tailor the actions to specific national and regional needs.

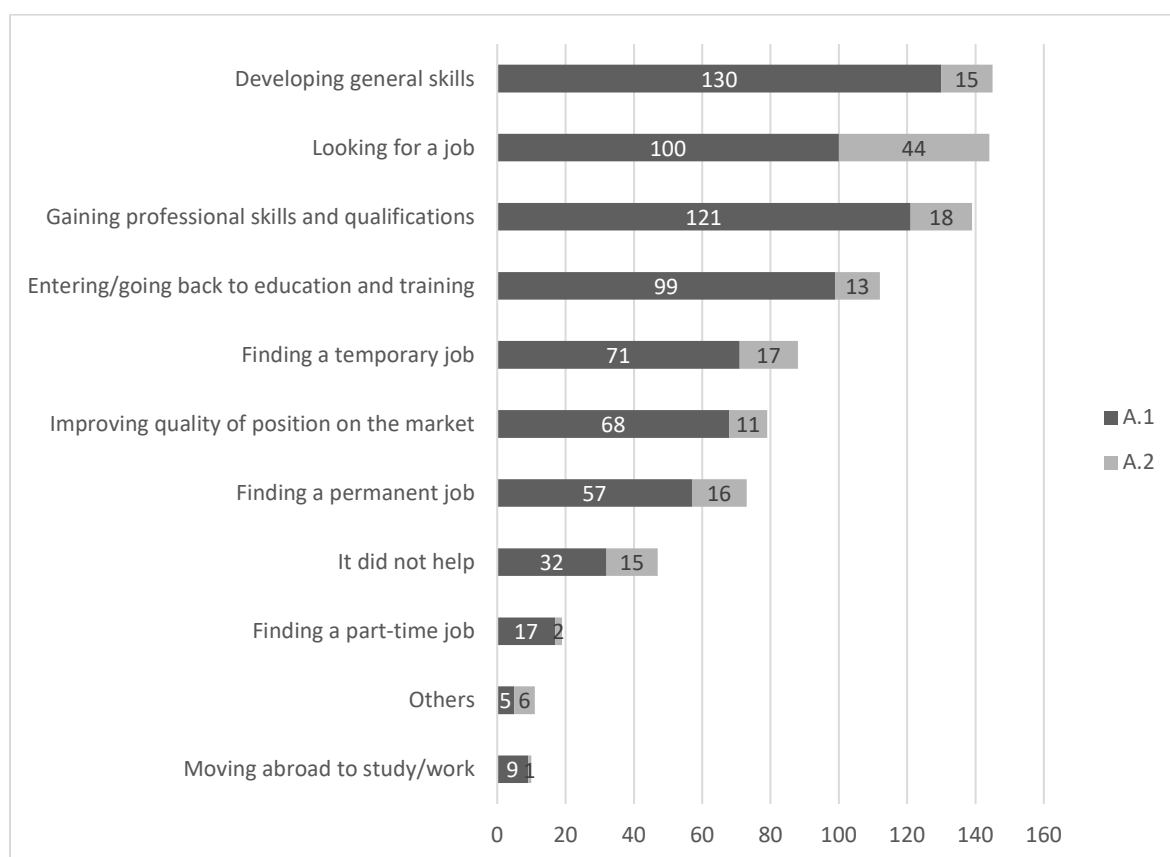
Effectiveness

Responses to the questions on effectiveness describe the extent to which ESF/YEI measures achieved the expected results.

A key factor in the effectiveness of ESF, and especially YEI, is the **programmes' capacity to reach out to** and involve those farthest from the labour market. Overall, respondents to the public consultation identified **social media campaigns** as the **best channels to inform young people of support initiatives**. In distant second place were youth networks, clubs and online groups, and word of mouth. However, when young participants were asked how they actually **learned about the support measures they took part in**, most said **through employment services and employment info centres**, followed at a distance by word of mouth, family or friends and only a smaller share learned about them via social media.

The main **results that ESF/YEI participants** achieved through the programmes were in **improvements to their skills and qualifications**, whether to develop general skills (38.3% of respondents), professional skills and qualifications (35.7%), or to start or resume education and training courses (29.2%). A smaller but still significant share acknowledged that ESF/YEI support helped them join the job market, either by finding a temporary or a permanent job (20.9% and 16.8% respectively) or by improving their employment situation (18.3%). One in ten respondents reported that the support received **did not help**.

Figure 2 The support you received helped you in... (Group A1 and A2, n=431, multiple answers allowed)



Compared to other participants, the **ESF/YEI participants are more likely to receive support to improve their education and qualifications and to develop their skills in general**, although the employment outcomes are similar (in terms of finding either a permanent or temporary job). The other participants reported in higher numbers that the support had helped them find a job.

Respondents were also asked about their **current and past labour market situation** (before they received support). Of the ESF/YEI participants, 46.7% are currently **unemployed** and 29.5% **employed full time**. Before receiving support, 88.1% were unemployed and 1.6% were employed full time, showing a consistent increase in the employment rate. Of the other participants, 51.1% are currently unemployed and 28.4% are employed full time. Before receiving support, 77.2% were unemployed and 0.6% were employed full time.

Table 1 Labour market status of individuals who took part in ESF/YEI initiatives

Labour market status	N. of respondents in group A1, absolute value (% in brackets)	
	Before support	After or during support
Employed full-time	5 (1.6)	94 (29.5)
Employed part-time	8 (2.6)	16 (5.0)
In a traineeship, internship or apprenticeship	5 (1.6)	33 (10.3)
In formal education	10 (3.2)	3 (0.9)
In vocational training	6 (1.9)	7 (2.2)
In voluntary service	2 (0.6)	6 (1.9)
Self-employed	1 (0.3)	11 (3.4)
Unemployed for 12 months or more	125 (40.3)	80 (25.1)
Unemployed for less than 12 months	148 (47.3)	69 (21.6)
Total	310 (100)	319 (100)
Total unemployed	273 (88.1)	149 (46.7)

According to the organisations that responded, the main results of the **ESF/YEI programmes were to develop the skills and qualifications of young people and to help them find a job**, including for young NEETs and other disadvantaged individuals, such as the disabled. This echoes the results reported by individual recipients. Overall, organisations were more sceptical concerning the effectiveness of ESF/YEI in helping young people improve the quality of their employment. Respondents also reported that ESF/YEI generated ‘soft outcomes’ in terms of increased partnerships and collaboration among stakeholders, of integrating marginalised people, developing soft skills and group work, empowering young people, increasing their fit with job market requirements, increasing their motivation and integrating young people not in employment, education and training into society.

In terms of **target groups**, the organisations that responded reported that the **ESF/YEI is relatively more successful in helping young NEETs** and, to a lesser extent, young people leaving education without a qualification and those at risk of social exclusion or marginalisation than in helping young people in rural or hard-to-reach areas, or those at risk of poverty.

Individual respondents gave a positive assessment on all facilitating factors mentioned, in particular concerning the **provision of financial benefits** to participants and measures that are aligned with labour market needs. **Respondents from organisations**, especially from organisations involved in ESF/YEI, focus on the **importance of having operations that are well integrated with general youth policies** and on **providing accompanying service or financial and non-financial incentives** to support young people during their participation. They also mentioned flexibility in implementation relatively more frequently as an important factor. Additional factors are

cooperation among stakeholders (e.g. enhancing the capacity of measures to adapt to local specificities and improve dialogue between public and private institutions), focus on individual needs and follow-up activities.

Young respondents who did not participate in ESF/YEI mostly mentioned the **lack of information as the reason for not participating**.

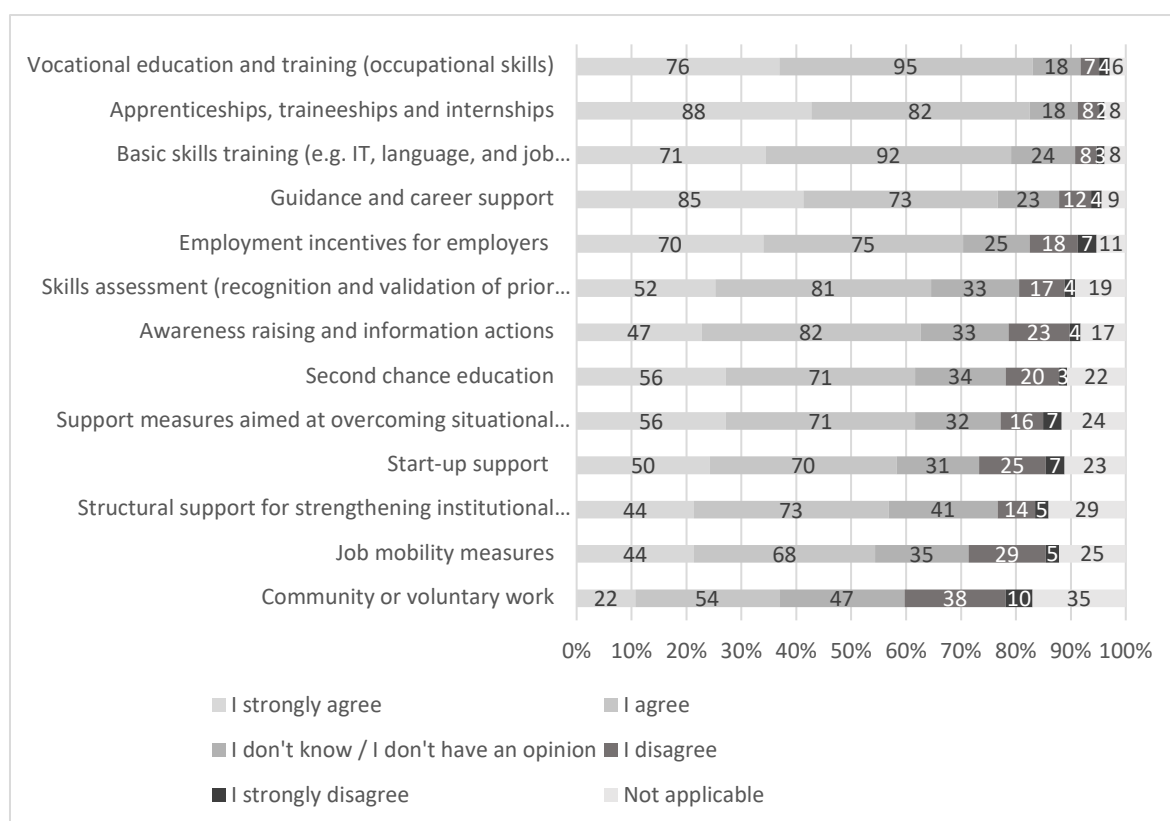
Organisations indicated the **difficulty in reaching** out to target groups as the most frequently selected **factor hindering effectiveness** (60.9%). Other factors mentioned, although less frequently, are structural problems such as the lack of jobs and the low level of education of participants, the administrative burden for beneficiaries, and the lack of involvement of stakeholders. Of the countries with the highest response rate, Portugal cited difficulties in reaching out to target groups relatively more frequently (81.3%), followed by Spain (67.6%).

Efficiency

The questions on efficiency focus on the ‘value for money’ of measures and whether resources invested by the ESF/YEI are proportionate to the results achieved.

For the ESF, **respondents from organisations involved agreed mostly on the cost effectiveness of vocational education and training activities**, followed by **apprenticeships, traineeships and internships, basic skills training** (80.9%) and **guidance and career support** (between 83.3% and 80.4%). Agreement seems to be quite low regarding community and voluntary work (41.6%). The assessment of the YEI is similar.

Figure 3 To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following activities implemented under the Youth Employment Initiative were cost-effective? (Group C, n=206)



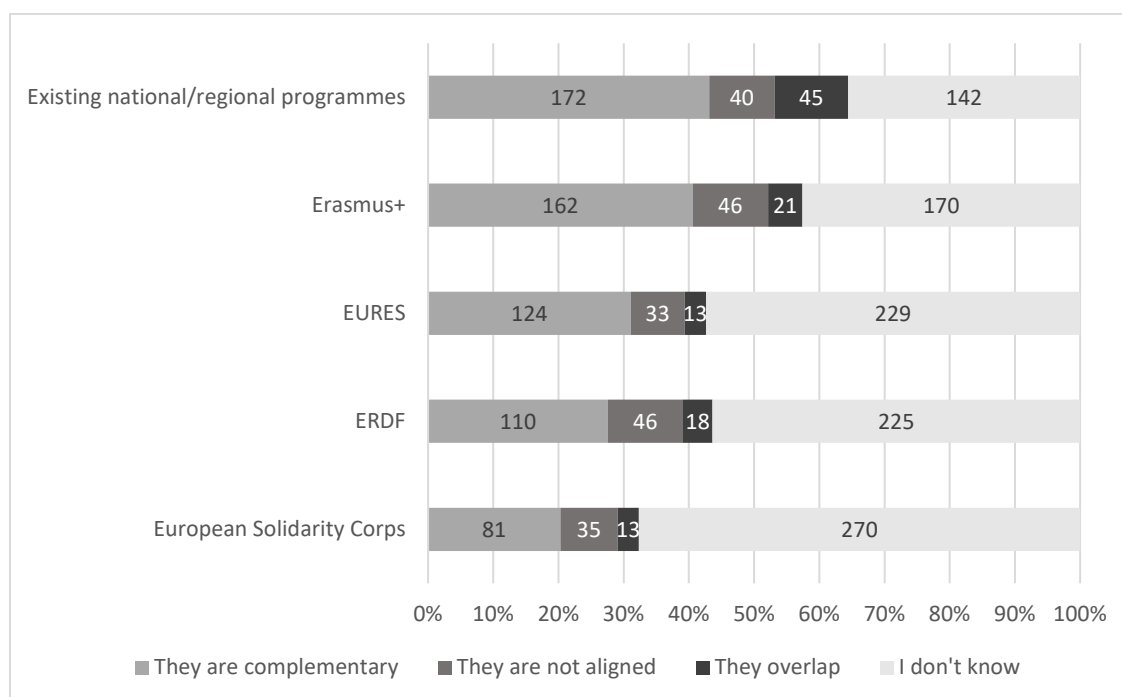
Overall, **most respondents from organisations involved in the programmes judge the administrative arrangements for project implementation, project selection, communication and evaluation to be appropriate** (between 65% and 61%). Fewer than half of respondents judged the management and control system to be appropriate.

Coherence

The questions on coherence assess the extent to which ESF/YEI activities are aligned and complementary with other youth and youth employment national or regional schemes.

Most organisations could not rate the **coherence of ESF or YEI with other youth and youth employment national/regional schemes** for all of the suggested schemes (Erasmus+, EURES, ERDF and European Solidarity Corps). The only exception regards coherence with **existing national or regional schemes**, with 43.1% of respondents saying that overall they are coherent, with a higher rating from organisations involved than from organisations not involved (45.3% vs 36.4%). However, overlapping or non-alignment of schemes does not seem to be an issue.

Figure 4 To what extent are the YEI and ESF coherent with other youth and youth employment EU national/regional schemes? (Group C and D, n=399)

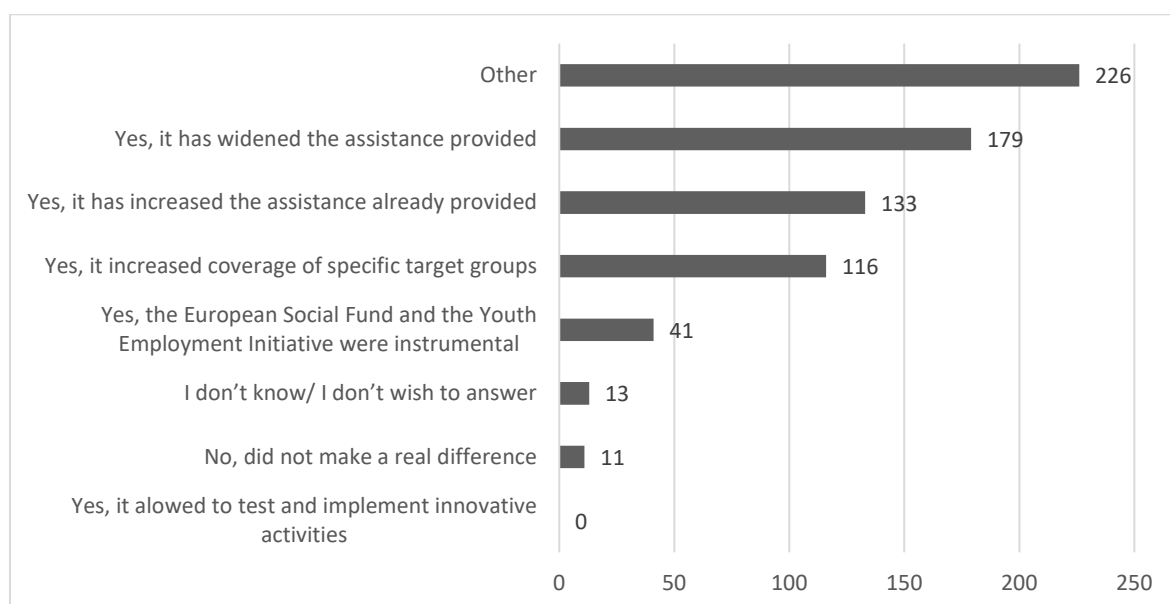


EU added value

The EU added value questions assess the additional value resulting from ESF or YEI support, compared to what could be achieved by Member States at national, regional and local levels with own funds. This question was only put to organisations.

Organisations gave an **overall positive** perception of an EU added value resulting from ESF or YEI support, mostly because it **expanded coverage of the assistance provided** (63.5%) and **increased the assistance provided** (47.2%). Very few respondents (3.9%) said that it did not make a real difference. Overall, respondents from the organisations involved gave a more positive response while more group D respondents reported that it did not make a real difference (11.6%, v 1.4%).

Figure 5 Has the EU provided support that goes beyond what is addressed by national or regional programmes or support schemes aimed at youth employment? (Group C and D, n=282)



Closing questions

A high share of young respondents **would be interested in taking part in EU youth employment activities in the future** (66.8%). The type of activities that appear to interest them most are **training courses** to improve job skills, **work experience** such as traineeships and internships, **basic skills training** and **support to find a job**.

2.3. Member State-level interviews and focus groups

2.3.1. Stakeholders involved

Interviews and focus groups with stakeholders at Member State-level were carried out during the evaluation in 10 Member States and for 20 operational programmes. The types of stakeholders consulted were managing authorities, beneficiaries, socioeconomic partners, evaluators/researchers and representatives of participants – e.g. youth organisations.

Table 2 Number of interviewees by Member State and type of organisation

MS	Managing authority and other governmental bodies/agencies/institutes	Socioeconomic partners and other organisations	Evaluators/researchers
Belgium	3	2	
France	8	1	1
Germany	8		1
Greece	7	5	
Italy	12	2	2
Malta	2		
Poland	4		
Portugal	4	4	
Slovakia	20		
Spain	4	4	

In addition to interviews, focus groups were carried out in Spain, France, Poland, Greece and Portugal in order to obtain detailed information from key stakeholders on the evaluation questions. Stakeholders involved included national and regional managing authorities, PES and other beneficiaries and other private or public organisations such as research institutes. Where focus groups could not be held, additional interviews were organised as well as wrap-up meetings with interviewees.

2.3.2. Results

The case studies were used as the main source of information to answer the evaluation questions and feed into case study reports.

The interviews for the case studies highlighted an increase in the time required to locate and recruit from harder-to-reach groups. Member States also use different targeting policies, reflecting national priorities and national assessments of needs, with some countries using the youth programmes to target young people closer to employment, including graduates, and with the results generally showing higher levels of effectiveness. ESF/YEI operations showed a high level of flexibility and innovation in tackling the challenge of accessing hard-to-reach and vulnerable groups.

2.4. EU-level focus group

2.4.1. Stakeholders involved

An EU-level focus group was held on 2 October 2019 in Brussels. It was organised back-to-back with the Technical Working Group and the aim was to discuss some of the evaluation questions with a smaller group of participants, focusing on key issues and gaps. The focus group comprised representatives from managing authorities and European Commission officials. There were 15 participants from 11 Member States.

2.4.2. Results

Effectiveness/outreach

The discussion confirmed the preliminary findings of the study and highlighted that managing authorities face difficulties with outreach, especially to reach the most disadvantaged young people in the broader target group of young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs). Member States discussed the country-specific obstacles they face and the remedial actions taken to overcome them.

Efficiency/partnerships

The discussion confirmed, in line with the preliminary findings of the evaluation, that cooperation among the multiple bodies involved, in particular among employers and employment services, is key to the efficient implementation of youth employment measures. It also confirmed that this is best facilitated when employers have a clear interest to work with the employment services, which can only happen if the training offer is in line with the companies' needs for skills or when they have a financial incentive.

Sustainability

The focus group discussion revealed that managing authorities are aware of the need to measure and monitor the sustainability of results of youth employment operations, particularly with regard to making employment outcomes sustainable over time. It also revealed that Member States have difficulties in doing so, even though the result indicators (short and longer term), administrative data sets and ad hoc surveys are useful support tools. Sustainability can also be interpreted in terms of systemic changes such as an improved governance of youth employment policies or increased institutional capacity.