



# European Network of Public Employment Services

## Youth employment support

PES Thematic Review Workshop

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# **Youth employment support**

PES Thematic Review Workshop

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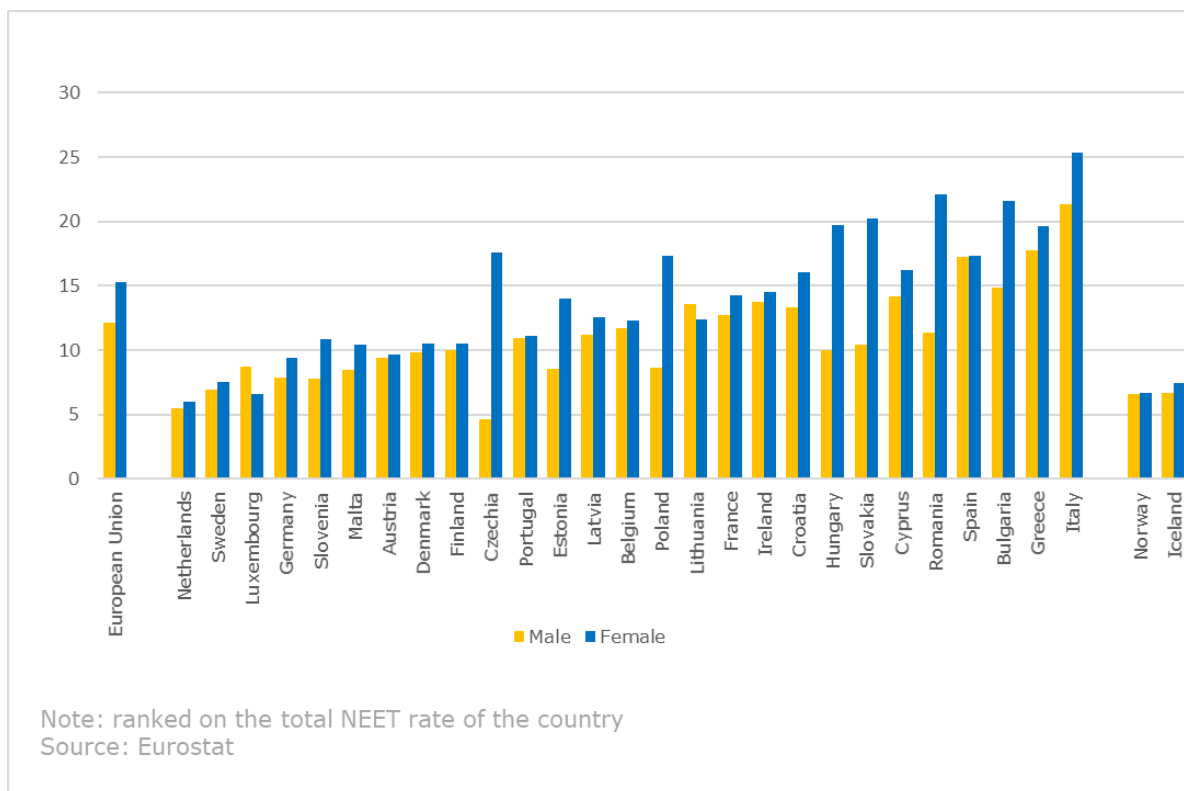
## INTRODUCTION

The Youth Guarantee (YG) has reached and helped more than 30 million young people in the European Union over the past seven years. Public Employment Services (PES) have played a vital role in the YG's success, in a co-ordinating role, by designing and providing tailored or novel active measures and youth services. There are two major issues that need to be addressed, however. First, the COVID-19 pandemic has struck the employment prospects of young people particularly hard, and preventing the damage of this recession from becoming long-term is the prime objective of PES. According to the latest estimates by Eurostat, the average labour income loss due to the pandemic among young people across all Member States was about 11%. This was primarily due to job losses, as opposed to reduced working time, which was particularly pronounced for young people with medium levels of education. Second, it has become evident that, despite the success of the YG, there are large groups who have been unable to benefit from it. To address these issues, the EU Council adopted a Recommendation on '[A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee](#)' on 30 October 2020, which contains suggestions for several ambitious goals.

In this thematic paper, we draw on the discussions of the Thematic Review Workshop (TRW) on Youth Employment Support by the European Public Employment Services Network. It was held online on 18-19 March 2021, hosted by the French PES Pôle emploi and attended by participants from 17 PES. The workshop was devoted to an initial discussion of how the members of the EU PES Network need to adapt their offer to young people to accommodate the goals of the 'A Bridge to Jobs' Recommendation. This paper first briefly reviews the main points of the Recommendation, then highlights some areas where PES will need to adapt, mentioning some of the issues and the potential solutions put forward in the fruitful discussions at the TRW. We will also call attention to some of the promising practices recently implemented or piloted. The paper will largely follow the four main phases suggested by the 'A Bridge to Jobs' Recommendation – see further below.

The new Recommendation puts forward a number of key modifications in the priorities of youth interventions. First of all, it highlights that those not in education, employment or training (NEETs) in the 25-29 age group need to be included, and acknowledges that one of the major groups are inactive women who are out of the labour force due to caring duties for young children. Indeed, as seen from Figure 1 below, in many Member States, NEET rates are close to twice as high for women as for men. Second, the Recommendation emphasises that more effort needs to be put into identifying and reaching young people from a vulnerable background in the YG. Third, in line with the above points, the Recommendation indicates the need to more precisely identify the requirements of different groups and tailor services and measures accordingly. This includes the possibility that young people from a vulnerable background could receive individualised skills training, psychosocial support etc. during an intensive four-month preparatory phase, before entering a longer-term active measure. A particularly important skill to be acquired in this phase is digital literacy, as well as skills needed for the green transition. Fourth, the Recommendation acknowledges the need for post-placement support for young people from a vulnerable background.

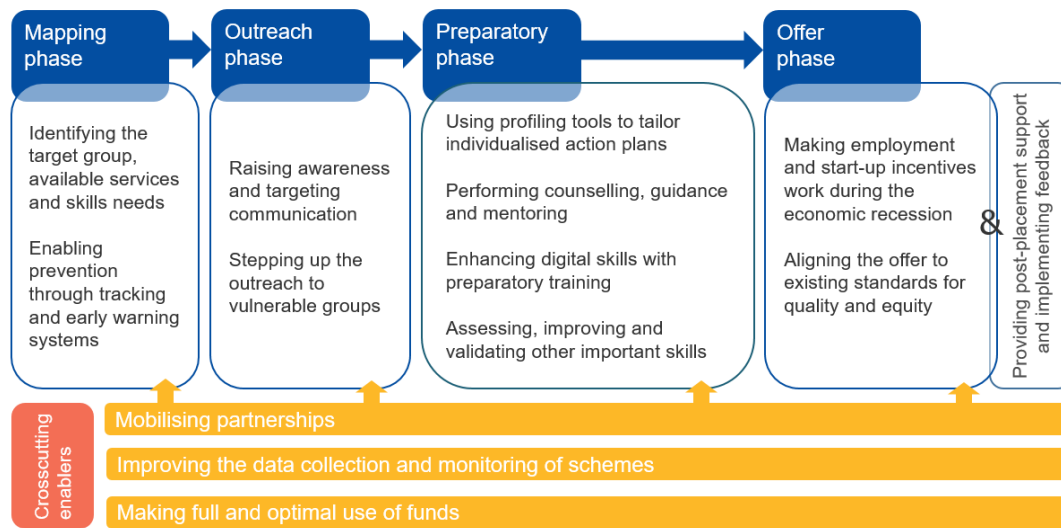
**Figure 1: Young people (aged 15-29) not in education, employment or training, by sex, 2020 (%)**



Finally, the Recommendation calls attention to the fact that this more inclusive approach (which puts major emphasis on vulnerable groups) cannot succeed without effective cooperation between PES, educational institutions, social service providers and the providers of other support services including psychological and healthcare. It underlines the need to build formalised partnerships that include timely data exchange to identify vulnerable NEETs, and signposting of young people so they receive adequate services and are not lost between service providers. It also points out the crucial role of cooperation with educational institutions to prevent young people from becoming longer-term NEETs.



**Figure 2: Phases in the ‘A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee’ Recommendation**



Source: PPT presentation of the renewed YG during the Thematic Review Workshop

## 1. THE MAPPING PHASE

To be able to reach out to young people from a vulnerable background, and to understand their needs, a first step is to collect information about them. This can be done through analysing existing statistical data on them, or through setting up partnerships that lead to information and data exchange with relevant stakeholders.

### 1.1 Data-driven approaches to the identification of NEETs

There are already a number of approaches to identifying and categorising NEETs based on their main obstacles to entering the labour market. A basic understanding of the number and main groups can be gleaned from Labour Force Surveys based on the work of Mascherini-Ledermaier (2016), with the advantage that they can be estimated in a timely manner and use a common methodology. A more intricate picture about the needs and main barriers of NEETs can be painted based on the methodology of the OECD-WB 'Faces of Joblessness Project' (see Fernandez et al (2016)), which uses the Survey of Income and Living Conditions. This approach can take into account more points of view – in particular, household incomes – and is therefore ground-breaking in identifying multiple barriers. However, all these approaches are limited in the sense that they can determine regional patterns (at the NUTS2 level), but cannot be directly used by PES offices, which typically work in local labour market and coordinate activities in smaller geographical units that would require information and data at least at the NUTS3 level.

The use of linked administrative datasets and big data analysis techniques could also bring a step forward in the identification of NEETs and their needs. In many countries, legislation exists to link data from various sources including PES registers, social security, education and healthcare in an anonymised manner. This means that those seeking to identify the target groups of services can take into account a host of indicators of NEETs' needs and this information can be disaggregated to very small geographical units. This approach can be even more fruitful in countries where the same institution already collects information from a variety of fields (such as *Norway*) and especially where e-governance is advanced (such as *Estonia*). However, in countries with less favourable conditions, this approach also has its limits, since linking of administrative datasets can be a complex process, thus limiting the timeliness of the information. Furthermore, information that could be especially important in disentangling needs, such as from social service providers, is typically collected in a decentralised manner.

Finally, there is some potential in using data from censuses or similar large-sample surveys that contain 10% of the population, which typically collect basic information about labour market status and barriers and are available at the district level. This is often the administrative level at which local labour offices and social services operate. In some countries, where none of the above approaches might work, it is worth considering conducting a specific youth-oriented large-sample survey (or a census of NEETs, such as in *Malta*), or adding questions specific to young people to existing large-sample surveys.

## 1.2 Partnerships and early warnings systems

Clearly, starting locally and signing data exchange and signposting agreements is the most useful first step towards identifying potential clients for local labour offices. The TRW brought about an in-depth discussions on these topics.

Data exchange between secondary education institutions and PES has been tried and tested in a handful of countries or PES (e.g. *the Netherlands* and the *Flemish Region of Belgium*). Furthermore, the legal framework for such procedures is in place in a number of other countries. In principle, indicating that a young person has dropped out of secondary education can be the basis for approaching them with offers from the PES. However, as pointed out at the TRW, data protection legislation in a number of countries significantly limits data exchange. In *Germany*, for instance, the process to change legislation to allow information sharing between educational institutions and the PES has been ongoing for some time, but is expected to be finalised in 2021. It also seems clear that even in countries where there is regular data sharing, the frequency of sharing needs to be increased if PES are to respond in a timely manner. The *Estonian* PES reported that they have access to the databases of secondary education institutions, as well as municipal social services, and hence can compile lists of early school leavers and other NEETs. This is done once or twice a year, but their experience shows that this is not sufficient to prevent young people slipping into a longer-term NEET status, and they thus recommend updating local information at least each quarter.

Even in the absence of precise knowledge of who has found a job after finishing secondary education, data sharing is a first step towards identifying potential NEETs. Furthermore, data sharing needs to be established with providers of social services or child protection services. Often these providers are not fully aware of the opportunities within the YG, and are therefore sceptical about cooperation and data sharing with PES. However, these data sharing agreements might require substantial effort, since social service providers typically operate semi-independently at the local level. This is significantly easier in countries where employment and social services are co-ordinated at the same level of public administration, for instance by the municipalities in *Denmark*.

Several PES have reported that local partnerships are essential for identifying NEETs, especially those from a vulnerable background and who might be detached from public institutions. This is one of the key building blocks of the recent project by Actiris (the PES of the *Brussels-Capital Region in Belgium*), in which local partners are tasked with the identification and outreach to such NEETs as they have presence on the ground. Similarly, the plan '1 young person, 1 solution' in *France* was created around the notion that the national plans need to be adapted at the regional level, and its implementation involves very close cooperation with the 'missions locales', the local service providers focused on the integration of young people, as well as other stakeholders.

Not only do PES need to be informed about NEETs, but data collection efforts need to be devoted to mapping the availability of service providers at the local level, particularly in terms of social services and counselling. This is essential for planning adequate support services for young people from vulnerable backgrounds. While PES in all countries have established contacts with local service providers during the implementation of the YG, they might not be fully aware of their capacity to address all the needs of vulnerable young

people, particularly since service providers are often capacity-constrained. Where a national or regional register of all social services exists, this is useful not only for identifying young people as potential beneficiaries, but also for providing an up-to-date picture about the variety and the volume of service provided at the local level. It is not clear to what extent this has already been incorporated into the planning of services, but in a number of PES youth counsellors are provided with a clear mapping of all possible support options in terms of employment services, and are kept informed of the availability of these options (such as in *France* or *Denmark*).

## **2. THE OUTREACH PHASE**

This is one of the key areas where implementation of the YG needs to progress, especially for young people from a vulnerable background. Reviews of the YG implementation have concluded that identification and, especially, outreach to young people from a vulnerable background have been a challenge for a number of Member States. Without attracting those most in need of help in finding their way back to the labour market, the YG risks spending resources inefficiently. Furthermore, this is the area where most PES report difficulties in implementation, and it attracted considerable discussion at the TRW.

### **2.1 Online communication and ease of registration**

A number of PES currently have a limited online presence and rarely use social media to advertise their activities. Recent experience has shown that fine-tuning communication to specific target groups and tailoring messages for them, so that potential clients receive relevant information, are key elements of successful communication campaigns. Extensive use of social media, having co-creation events and involving role models seems a useful avenue for engaging with young people. Furthermore, PES youth counsellors might have to communicate in a personalised way. The *Flemish* PES VDAB, for instance, has found that it is useful to provide NEETs with personalised cards or brochures including information about the counsellor's hobbies etc. and direct contact details.

PES also need to take into account that a number of young people use online platforms every day, and for them, the priority is to transfer (and streamline) procedures that do not need face-to-face interaction online. It is therefore essential to make as much registration as possible available online, in line with current regulation – an area where PES have recently made large strides. In the past year, as most counselling sessions had to be carried out online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, PES have gained experience in how to do this effectively. It seems that for some young people, being able to interact with counsellors from the location of their choosing, where they might feel more at ease, is a necessary first step for getting them on board. For this reason, as well as for more practical reasons – for young people who live a long way from their local office – some PES are considering continuing online counselling even after the pandemic has eased.

Furthermore, young people from vulnerable backgrounds may find it difficult to understand and navigate the formalised and bureaucratic language traditionally used for claiming jobseeker benefits, so PES need to make an effort to make the procedure as clear and simple as possible. PES also need to take into account the variety of language capabilities among vulnerable young people, and hence the language of communications needs to be adapted to include a variety of languages spoken by young people. Finally, individualised treatment is not only important during online communication, and young people are often put at ease by more relaxed face-to-face contact.

## 2.2 Outreach activities

A key question with respect to young people, especially those from vulnerable backgrounds, is the role of PES in contacting and convincing them to participate in the YG. In particular, many young people might not have trust in large public institutions such as the PES. They often need face-to-face personal contact with a person who can speak in a more informal language, and with whom they have built up trust through a longer relationship. This is why cooperation with other service providers is essential.

The most obvious choice to promote the YG is a cooperation with youth centres or similar organisations, and with secondary education institutions, which is a widely used practice – though perhaps not widely enough. Cooperation with secondary education institutions will need to be ramped up in a number of countries, as trust can only be built up through very regular presence. In some countries, PES can exchange information with secondary institutions or youth workers on early warning signs about dropout, such as truancy, and can organise information sessions for these students. Contact with social workers, especially at street level, is another very important first step towards engaging young people from a vulnerable background, as has been reported from *Luxembourg*.

Second, given that mentoring vulnerable young people was already part of the YG framework, these mentors can also be involved in outreach activities as they will have likely built trust among the target group and can communicate well with them. Third, in countries, where there are already a number of active youth support services (such as the Youth Welfare Offices 'Jugendamt' in *Germany*, the 'missions locales' in *France* or the Voluntary Labour Corps in *Poland*), cooperation with them is an obvious choice. It became clear throughout the TRW that it might be essential to reach disengaged young people through institutions that work directly with PES but have a different 'branding' (such as the CISOK centres in *Croatia* or the Cité des Métiers/Beroepenpunt in *Brussels*).

However, for more vulnerable young people, further innovative or informal methods might need to be tested. These include asking former YG participants to promote the programme in their peer groups. Building ties to influential figures in local communities – from sports clubs to religious groups – can also be beneficial. Clearly, these methods require a decentralised approach and a large amount of street-level knowledge. There is also untapped potential in working with youth organisations in mapping and outreach. To ensure a successful and meaningful partnership with these organisations, PES need to invest time and resources through regular meetings and transparent sharing of information.

**Box 1: The MOBI approach (Estonia)**

Not many PES seem to use mobile counselling and registration as consciously and intensively as in Estonia. The MOBI approach requires PES staff to travel to where clients live and set up locally, if only for a day or two. This mobile service reaches out to those aged 16 to 29 and their parents, and people with reduced ability to work who are participating in vocational or higher education. In addition, the mobile service staff actively involve local employers, municipalities and counselling services. An intensive information campaign (through the municipality, local social and youth services, social media, etc.) needs to precede the local presence to make it effective. One recent further development of this project has been to set up counselling in a prison for inmates who are shortly to be released, a service that seems to have been successful. An important result of local presence is collecting information on the needs and obstacles of the clientele. In the case of prisons, this meant that debt counselling workshops had to be included among the services. In other cases, transport to the information days needed to be organised. Beyond the fact that the MOBI events requires lots of organisation, it remains a challenge that employment counsellors might need to be motivated to take on this sometimes arduous task.

Given that the expansion of the target group to 25- to 29-year-olds will include many mothers of young children from a vulnerable background, outreach to this group will need to be addressed. The mothers who can be accessed (based on the age of their children, their location, etc.) will depend on national circumstances, for instance the duration of childcare benefits, the availability of nurseries and the culture. It seems less effective to address those mothers who might not be willing or able to join the labour force because of these factors. Furthermore, national institutional setups will also influence which potential partners are appropriate for cooperation. In countries where young children receive regular home medical check-ups, visiting nurses might be helpful in promoting the YG. In countries where mothers from vulnerable backgrounds regularly receive services from family care centres or similar institutions, these centres are prime candidates for cooperation. With respect to this group, cooperation with NGOs is also important: for instance, in *Hungary*, partly through European Social Fund support, local information and counselling centres have been established in 67 towns since 2017, where NGOs provide staff.

There are some difficult questions to be addressed regarding outreach activities. First, it is not clear how the effectiveness of these services can be measured, and there have been no measurement attempts so far. Additionally, there are two overarching and interrelated questions: (i) to what extent will other (social) service providers need to be formally linked to PES, and (ii) how will these activities be financed and monitored.

**3. THE PREPARATORY PHASE**

The 'Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee' Recommendation places major emphasis on preparing young people from a vulnerable background to participate in more 'traditional' active labour market policies, while also pointing out that for other NEETs the procedure can be substantially shortened.

**3.1 Diagnosis**

While approaches to the profiling of jobseekers varies largely across PES, some important lessons can be drawn from research on this topic. First, that alongside the usual objective characteristics, a number of softer factors are relevant to chances of re-employment, such as job search motivation and the subjective assessment of the availability of jobs and of health conditions. Second, there has been a recent shift away from having many specific profiling categories based on statistical profiling and towards giving more leeway to employment counsellors. Broadly speaking, statistical profiling is useful for delineating two

to three groups of jobseekers based on their distance from the labour market, and more specifically delineating those who do not need intensive support.

In line with the 'Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee' Recommendation, more vulnerable groups will need a more holistic diagnosis. This will necessitate, in some cases, the concerted effort of career counsellors specialised in psychosocial issues. This is an area where PES have varying amounts of experience. For instance, the *German* PES (Bundesagentur für Arbeit) already has the possibility of conducting more in-depth diagnosis, by calling on specialised personnel. Indeed, diagnosing the multiplicity of barriers to entering the labour market often requires teams of counsellors (including PES and social workers, such as in some instances in *Slovenia*) to have joint case meetings.

It became obvious throughout the TRW meeting that diagnosis is a crucial and complex area for a number of reasons. First of all, in line with what is already being done in a number of countries, vulnerable jobseekers might need more meetings to establish adequate diagnosis – this is the approach followed in *France*, for instance. Second, understanding the needs of vulnerable young people is also extremely important to determine what a realistic goal is within a foreseeable timeframe. Third, in relation to the above, setting these goals is an essential building-block of finding external service providers, and ensuring that cream-skimming is limited.

Fourth, the thorniest issue is eliciting information about health – in particular mental health – from young people. In some countries, this information can be exchanged with health personnel and is taken into account during a person's diagnosis. In other countries, such details can only be included if clients state it themselves and explicitly consent to including it in their file. Clearly, one of the goals of employment counsellors in this case is to build an environment of trust so that the young person is willing to open up about these issues.



**Box 2: The ‘1 young person, 1 solution’ plan (#1jeune1solution) (France)**

In July 2020, to limit the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on young people entering the labour market, the French government initiated a series of labour market programmes within the framework of ‘France Relance’. The centrepiece of this was the ‘1 young person, 1 solution’ plan, which has one clear objective: to prevent the long-term impact of the crisis on the careers of young people. Most elements of the programme are scheduled to run until the end of 2021; others go further. The main idea is to provide each young non-employed person with an appropriate solution that enables them to find a way back to employment, with a specific emphasis on those further away from the labour market. The plan has three specific overarching goals: (i) to intensify support for young people; (ii) to strengthen young people’s skills; and (iii) to offer enhanced support for companies supporting young people. The plan offers tailored solutions to young people based on their distance from the labour market. For vulnerable young people, based on their motivation, level of commitment and barriers, there is a variety of active measures and career pathways to choose from. While the PES Pôle emploi contributes to the plan alongside other stakeholders, part of its implementation is carried out by the regions, which guarantees that the specific details of the measures are adapted to the relevant labour market. The programme was successful in 2020, providing a large number of young people with intensive support and ensuring they enter a training programme. The implementation period has only recently begun, and the number of people signing an apprenticeship or subsidised employment contract will significantly rise in 2021, especially in terms of target groups to be integrated by employers. It also needs to be noted that #1jeune1solution can build on the results of the ongoing Skills Investment Plan, which was launched in 2018 and aims to train 1 million young people furthest away from the labour market over a five-year period.

**3.2 Skills development in the preparatory phase**

While PES have ample experience in structuring active measures, much less is known about how to formulate complex skills development plans and services for vulnerable young people. More precisely, a number of PES have a long-standing tradition of formulating professional development plans, such as at the *French* PES Pôle emploi, where this is a separate service. This is also intimately linked to the recognition of informal learning and competences. At the same time, courses that develop transversal and language skills are regularly used. In some cases, basic non-formal skills need to be developed first for the most vulnerable young people, as in the ‘project based learning’ programme in *Slovenia*.

It is also clear that in many cases, the first step before implementing skills development plans is to have regular meetings between vulnerable young people and specifically trained counsellors to engage them and keep their motivation up. In *France*, assigning more young individuals to ‘reinforced guidance pathways’ (where counsellors have a caseload no higher than 70 clients) and increasing the number of referrals towards the ‘intensive support pathway for youth’ (more intensive counselling for three to six months) are some of the key components of the recent youth employment package (#1jeune1solution). Having regular meetings and intensive support for vulnerable young people is especially important, as many might dropout from programmes at the time of crucial preparatory training.

It seems clear that lack of IT skills might be a serious obstacle for young people from a vulnerable background, which is emphasised by the ‘Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee’ Recommendation. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of PES have moved towards diagnosing these skills more extensively and providing for short courses – such as in *France*, where the ‘Digital Pass’ programme will enable many jobseekers, including young people, to participate in free training. While these courses can have significant effects on the chances of reintegration, it remains to be seen whether such courses cover all the basic skills needed in today’s labour market and to evaluate whether vulnerable

young people receive an adequate level and number of training opportunities that will enable them to enter an active labour market programme (ALMP) or the labour market. In relation to this, it needs to be acknowledged that many young people from vulnerable backgrounds do not have the adequate equipment or the basic skills to participate in online courses. One way forward – as discussed in the TRW – is to organise some preliminary short courses in training centres, and – in the most problematic cases – to lend equipment to participants, as has been recently done in *Portugal*. However, as most PES do not have training centres, further cooperation will need to be organised.

The 'Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee' Recommendation also suggests that young people closer to the labour market might need a lighter-touch approach, which might mean they only need training in a few specific skills. Thus, a proper diagnosis is also important for this group. The results of competence-based job-matching procedures can be used to discern the skills needed. In line with this, a potential step forward is the modularisation of longer training courses, which is currently an area that VDAB in *Flanders* is working on. However, this will require a much more flexible approach from both training providers and PES. Furthermore, we have limited evidence so far on the effectiveness of training lasting only a couple of days. Discussions during the TRW also revealed that it is worth considering such short modularised training for more vulnerable young people, as they often lack the determination or motivation to directly enrol in longer training courses. Thus, initial preparatory short courses can be a first step for them towards enrolling in a longer vocational training programme. This is an approach that has recently been widely used in *Germany* and *Denmark*. In the latter, clients in the 'Building bridges to education' programme within the Danish cash benefit system were targeted – those people who were facing the greatest challenges in entering and successfully completing educational study courses. Clients initially signed up for bridging courses, which emphasised development of general skills and confidence building. Mentors supported clients in this phase and the subsequent phase, when they go on to courses at vocational schools or traineeships at enterprises.

Furthermore, previous experience and experiments have shown that in many cases, there are substantial unmet health needs among vulnerable young persons, which might prevent them from participating in more substantive active measures. In particular, psychological problems such as depression are widespread, and helping young people to find adequate counselling will also lead to higher take-up of ALMPs such as skills formation programmes. The availability of psychological and health services at the *Finnish* one-stop-shop youth centres, for instance, was one important element of their success. However, it remains an open question whether health-impaired young people (including those with psychosocial issues) need a lengthy preparatory phase or, as the more recent approach in *Norway* suggests, whether it is more effective to try to reintegrate them into workplaces as soon as possible. At the same time, it is clear that psychological support might be needed for a longer time, even after people have entered the workplace.

As the initial phase of reaching out to, diagnosing, mentoring, motivating and counselling vulnerable and disengaged young people is – among other things – about building a relationship based on trust, partner organisations who have a long-standing local presence might need to manage most of the preparatory phase. A promising practice recently implemented by Actiris (building on the work of VDAB in particular) exemplified this approach.



**Box 3: Actiris partnership measures for NEETs (Brussels Region, Belgium)**

In this project, 11 partner organisations won the opportunity to integrate young people who are distant from the labour market. The partners were granted a high degree of freedom in the methodology they applied, so they could take into account the specific characteristics and situations of their target group. Five basic principles needed to be respected: (1) Working on the ground, i.e. be a grassroots organisation, building on local networks and activities; (2) Putting the young person at the centre of the project; (3) Working closely with the PES, i.e. in coordination structures cooperation; (4) Provide services free of obstacles; and (5) Create opportunities and open doors. Furthermore, the partners needed to provide four basic types of services based on the FIND-MIND-BIND method: (i) outreach activities; (ii) mobilisation and support including personal development plans; (iii) personalised guidance; and (iv) follow-up.

FIND	MIND		BIND
OUTREACH ACTIVITIES	REMOBILISATION AND SUPPORT	PERSONALISED GUIDANCE	AFTER CARE
ACTIVELY IDENTIFY AND SEEK NEETS ON THE GROUND  GAIN CONFIDENCE TO EMBARK THEM ON A PATHWAY	WORK ON BARRIERS TO SOCIO-PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION  MOTIVATION AND INTERESTS  PERSONAL AND CAREER ASSESSMENTS  DEFINITION OF PROFESSIONAL OBJECTIVES AND HOW TO REACH THEM, ACTION PLAN	SERVICES TO PREPARE FOR A SUITABLE OFFER OF WORK, INTERNSHIP, TRAINING OR STUDY	FOLLOW-UP  CONTINUOUS COACHING DURING THE PLACEMENT  RESUME SUPPORT FOR THE YOUNG PERSON IF THE SOLUTION DOES NOT LAST

The target for partners is for at least 80% of the participants to have achieved either a 'positive result' or a 'positive action' by the end of the guidance. The issue of setting the right targets, both for the partners and for the young individuals, is one area that this project highlighted. At the level of individuals, it is clear that tailored approaches need to be developed, given that young people have a variety of barriers, and their checks of availability might need to be adapted (in many cases, made lighter). Clearly, this needs to be counterbalanced with the right incentives, by fine-tuning objectives for partners such that NEETs exit registered unemployment status and do not simply circulate across different service providers. At the level of partners, having a flexible methodology must not negate the need to respect administrative, financial and monitoring requirements, and for the managing authority, finding a balance between these points of view is key.

**3.2 Partnerships, outsourcing and service integration**

It is clear that with the new approaches outlined, there is a need to cooperate and coordinate many more partners than before. This raises several questions. First, to what extent is service integration necessary? A second, related question, is which services are particularly important to keep in-house? Third, given that this approach will need a concerted approach, how to deal with financing, monitoring and accountability issues?

A couple of recent studies on service integration for long-term unemployed people (European Commission (2018a); European Commission (2020)) have shown that more integrated services and partnerships between the providers of employment and social services lead to quicker re-employment. While institutional setups can vary, from formal partnership to mergers, having these services under the same roof does not necessarily guarantee effective referrals. By the same token, regular case management meetings can be sufficient (such as in *Slovenia*). While it is beneficial if the cooperating institutions are at the same level of territorial governance, this is not essential.

It seems to be important that for young people, these 'one-stop-shops' need to provide a low-threshold entry and be available at the local level, and in many cases, they are not

formally part of the PES (such as the missions locales in *France*, the UngKOMP in *Sweden* and the CISOK in *Croatia*). Tests are needed to show which service areas, besides career and employment counselling and social counselling, must be integrated to achieve the best results for young people from vulnerable backgrounds. Ideally, the establishment of one-stop-shops or other models of service integration does not necessarily entail a large increase in staff, rather, bringing together services that are already available in a fragmented manner. Thus, each partner institution might delegate staff, expertise and budget. It is also worth keeping in mind that having a separate visual identity (different from that of the PES) is part of the success of the one-stop-shop model – this is the case for the Ohjaamo in *Finland* or the Cité des Métiers/Beroepenpunt in *Brussels*.

Without harmonisation of goals and agreement on what headline indicators ought to be, cooperation is difficult to achieve<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, clear incentives, responsibilities and mechanisms for monitoring results need to be put in place to guarantee cooperation. This does not preclude variation at the regional or local level in implementing partnerships, but in that case, strong accountability or transparent benchmarking is needed. In the absence of such incentives and clear concepts, there is a risk that different agencies will shift clients and costs to other institutions. The *Swedish* PES, based on research by the OECD, entered a partnership with social agencies with a coordinator specifically tasked with aligning and streamlining the activities of the institutions involved. In a similar vein, for some of the most vulnerable jobseekers, social activation co-ordinators are employed in *Slovenia* to ensure that different services are more integrated at the local level. Learning by doing is considered the only way forward, to deal with misunderstandings and misassumptions in a partnership. This also applies with other types of cooperation, such as joint case conferences or joint integrated teams. Within this type of cooperation, the role of PES is often seen as that of the coordinator that has the overview and ensures a holistic approach, bringing in specialists and specialised services when needed.

When thinking about partnerships and cooperation, it is necessary to consider which services need to be outsourced. Broadly speaking, research has shown that there seems to be no additional benefit to outsourcing employment counselling, especially given the difficulty of designing proper incentives. There was no clear conclusion about the most relevant service to be outsourced. Some PES suggested that skills assessment could be outsourced, but it can be argued that PES should assess and select participants themselves to avoid cherry picking. Specialised services related to health and psychological issues clearly required the help of other institutions (with the exception of PES, where many of the counsellors have psychological education or training). However, it is clear that many of the tasks relating to outreach as well as mentoring might be done by grassroots NGOs.

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<sup>1</sup> For more on these issues, see European Commission (2018b).

**Box 4: The ‘Youth towards work’ project (Finland)**

This pilot organised in 2018-2019 was an interesting example, where youth employment services were outsourced to make them more effective and tailored. The aim was to develop an effective performance-based model for services that promote youth employment that gives more freedom in the methods used by the service providers. While the Ohjaamo one-stop-shops and regional PES offices selected participants based on customer profiling and supported the service providers in administrative issues, companies provided the actual job coaching services. Payments for job coaching companies was results-based, with very little up-front payment. Positive results (which were to be achieved within a six-month service provision period and sustained for three months) were defined in terms of the number of young people getting a job, starting vocational education or joining a more suitable service that promotes employment.

However, only about half of the participants achieved the desired results, and half of those found a job. A considerable number of the other participants were directed to health and/or social services; the fact that young unemployed people need a variety of services and project goals was an important lesson. A second important lesson was that profiling (assessment) ought to be fine-tuned, since goals appeared to be too ambitious. A third lesson pertained to the right way to draw up results-based payments, and the design did not preclude cherry-picking. Finally, there was an issue with two conflicting objectives. On the one hand, there was a need to build up a market of service providers, which requires a large number of service providers. On the other hand, there is also a need for more dialogue and co-development between the PES and service provider companies to reach more effective services that promote employment – which is rendered more difficult by having many providers.

**4. THE OFFER**

While the core of the YG is likely to remain unchanged, it is worth discussing some of the issues relating to providing measures for young people with a vulnerable background. Furthermore, it is now widely acknowledged that post-placement support is much needed for this group, and different options for implementing this were widely discussed at the TRW.

**4.1 Cooperation with employers and work experience programmes**

It is clear that if PES are to be successful in placing vulnerable young jobseekers, hiring incentives for employers might not be enough. Closer cooperation with employers, in particular employee-oriented vacancy acquisition, has been tested in several countries and seems relatively successful (for long-term unemployed people in *France* and *Germany*, and for health-impaired workers in *Norway*). The use of this kind of approach is threefold. First, to build a longer-term relationship with employers so that PES counsellors understand employers' skills needs better. Second, to provide a pre-screening service to employers, which is effective in convincing them to hire otherwise hard-to-place jobseekers. Third, to build mutual trust between PES and employers, which is a pre-requisite for post-placement cooperation. Broadly speaking, this approach can be conducive to generating more job offers for disadvantaged jobseekers, but less is known about its effectiveness for young jobseekers.

It is also clear that cooperation with employers is essential in orienting upskilling efforts towards competences that are in demand in the local labour market, and in steering young jobseekers towards bottleneck professions. The recent experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, when a large number of jobseekers had to be re-oriented very quickly towards jobs in demand, might have convinced employers that cooperating with PES is very useful. In *France*, this meant that, following a pre-apprenticeship training provided by Pôle emploi,

companies took on young people in apprenticeship programmes, with the mediation of the PES – which proved to be particularly important for SMEs, who often lack an HR department. This train-place-train approach has been widely used, but it is not certain under what conditions they are most suitable for vulnerable young people. There are different types of hiring subsidies targeting sustainable employment in *France*, these types can (i) cover non-profit organisations; (ii) cover upskilling in the workplace; and (iii) offer post-placement guidance for vulnerable and health-impaired young people.

Cooperation with employers might also be needed for work experience programmes, which in general are relatively short, and very highly subsidised work placement programmes, primarily in the private sector<sup>2</sup>. These programmes might be particularly advantageous for the recruitment and skills development of young people from a vulnerable background. They encourage employers to overcome their uncertainties about recruiting young people (and potentially alleviate negative stereotypes) and allow young people to get a feel for whether the work interests them. The short duration of the job and the high wage subsidy mean that the risk of participating in the programme is relatively low for both employer and young participant, as there is no long-term commitment on either side. However, these programmes run the risk that employers might ‘game’ the system by rotating young jobseekers. They therefore require oversight by employment counsellors and a good working relationship between PES local offices and employers. This is an area where PES also need to engage with youth organisations, since their experience can help in monitoring employers and they can provide useful inputs towards enforcing quality standards.

Finally, including more vulnerable NEETs in the YG means more effort will need to be devoted to those with mental health issues.

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<sup>2</sup> There is a debate whether jobs which are ‘supplementary’ in nature, and are in the secondary labour market are effective for young people.

**Box 5: The work-oriented approach to place and train young people with (mental) health issues (Norway)**

The Norwegian PES (NAV) has adopted the approach of 'place and train' since 2016. The main points of the general programme are the following: (1) Employers are provided with a hiring subsidy (covering up to 60% of wages) for up to three years, and the participant receives a wage according to the going rate. The idea is that the subsidy should compensate for the employee's lower rate of productivity during the initial subsidised period. Since the participant increases their skills during this period, in the form of on-the-job-training or mentoring, the employer will only need subsidies for a limited time; (2) Employers can also receive 'facilitation grants', to cover expenses when hiring people with disabilities (for instance, specific furniture, special aids and computer programmes) and; (3) Employers can apply for grants to cover wages for a mentor who will help the employee in the day-to-day job. There is growing evidence that 'place and train' types of programme for people with common mental health disorders such as anxiety or depression are effective – which is very important, given that around 30 000 young clients are of limited work capacity<sup>3</sup>.

This approach requires not only help from a psychologist (work-focused cognitive behavioural therapy) for the client, but also the mediation of the PES counsellor. This is primarily because employers might lack understanding of mental health conditions, and hence fear the person will not be up to the job. In Norway, there is a large effort to integrate young people with (mental) health issues into jobs, which means that as many as 200 counsellors are involved in individual placement and support (IPS)<sup>4</sup> programmes (on top of 400 supported employment counsellors). These counsellors typically work with low caseloads, with a maximum of 20 people. In addition, inter-disciplinary youth teams have been set up in most local employment offices, including market-oriented advisors whose main focus is the acquisition of job opportunities – which is clearly a challenging task. NAV also emphasises to employers that they do not simply provide a recruitment service but build a longer-standing partnership, including post-placement support.

## 4.2 Post-placement support

Previous experience of long-term unemployed people and those with health issues shows that post-placement support is needed to achieve sustainable reintegration into the labour market. It is likely that similar approaches will be necessary for placing young people from vulnerable backgrounds. Several questions need to be addressed in this respect.

First, the main issue is whether the same person (employment counsellor, psychologist) needs to support the young person after they return to work as in the preparatory phase. This is the case in a number of countries and programmes, such as for young people from a vulnerable background or long-term health-impaired people participating in an apprenticeship in *France, Germany or Luxembourg*. Similarly, for young people with (mental) health issues in *Norway* participating in an individual placement and support programme, it is the employment counsellors (psychologists) who provide support in the

<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting that individuals of limited working capacity represent around two-third of NAV's active age non-employed clients, while jobseekers are only around one-third.

<sup>4</sup> The individual placement and support (IPS) approach was initially designed for people with more severe mental health issues. The key principles include a focus on employment in the regular labour market, rapid placement with minimum assessment, training on the job instead of pre-vocational training and the integration of vocational services with mental healthcare. The IPS approach has been extended to people with common mental health disorders (anxiety, depression), using a programme built on two steps: (i) offering work-focused cognitive behavioural therapy; and (ii) provision of individual follow-up on how to handle and manage anxiety and depression symptoms within a work context after placement.

first phase of integration<sup>5</sup>. In some cases, this might not be the most cost-effective approach and might put a lot of strain on service providers' capacities. Furthermore, job coaching after placement might be difficult to organise, as it might be disruptive for the employer.

If the alternative route of having colleagues as mentors is used, there are different issues to solve. First, the person's counselling time will need to be subsidised. Second, since these colleagues are crucial for reintegration, they will need to receive some training on mental health issues in the workplace, inclusive attitudes, etc. It has been found that mentoring provided by more experienced colleagues is particularly important for jobseekers with relatively little work experience who might initially get the 'wrong impression' of a workplace. The mentor therefore serves as a role model with the right attitudes from the beginning of the placement, and as a social interpreter in the new work environment. This approach has been used in a number of countries, including *France* and *Hungary*. In *Iceland*, relying on colleagues as mentors was partly motivated by financial considerations, due to the prohibitively high cost of having PES counsellors perform follow-up in most cases.

There are a number of countries (and certain cases) where an employment counsellor follows the young person and a workplace tutor guides their skill development. This is the case in programmes that aim to develop competences through workplace training over a given period in *France* and *Luxembourg*. Having workplace mentors as well as employment counsellors is also a tried-and-tested method for supporting young people with (mental) health issues in *Norway*. It has been found that it is difficult for workplace mentors to live up to their role, so specific training and support groups have been established to help mentors. The main idea of the mentoring<sup>6</sup> element is that a colleague should provide natural support for the (young) disabled person in the workplace.

### CONCLUSIONS

The TRW saw an intense exchange of ideas around crucial topics in the implementation of the Reinforced YG. There is widespread agreement that the identification of an outreach to more vulnerable NEETs will need cooperation with a variety of local actors, and will also mean that PES counsellors will need to spend more time managing these partnerships. By now, a variety of outreach methods have been tested for different potential clients, and it is clear that gaining the trust of vulnerable young people is the key element. What remains to be seen is how to assess the strengths of alternative outreach methods, and to gain an idea of which elements of alternative practices might be transferrable across client groups and countries. While information and data sharing with other organisations is a difficult issue, it will also have to be resolved, as crucial time and effort might be lost before the relevant response can be found in absence of this information.

PES also agreed that, given the variety of vulnerable young people, barriers and needs, flexibility in methods, measures and services is essential. However, finding the most relevant and realistic goals for each of the client groups, which also motivates them to return to the labour market, is a delicate issue and requires further experimentation and evaluation. A similarly nuanced question is that while a number of these services will need to be outsourced, PES need to find ways of balancing the right monitoring of quality standards and results-oriented financial incentives for service providers while allowing for sufficient variability of methods.

Similarly, it is clear that vulnerable young people need additional attention in terms of counselling, motivation and support, and this needs to continue after the person has

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<sup>5</sup> These counsellors receive specific additional training.

<sup>6</sup> For more information see: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=17877&langId=en>

started a training course, apprenticeship or job. While for those with mental health issues the support person will need to be a specialist counsellor, there are a number of potential solutions for ensuring mentoring after placement for vulnerable young persons in general. It remains to be further evaluated whether mentorship from experienced colleagues can serve as a cost-effective method in most cases.

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