



Peer Review on “Active inclusion of young adults receiving social assistance benefits”

Oslo (Norway), 23 and 24 November 2022

Executive Summary

The focus of this peer review was on the active inclusion measures targeted at young adults receiving social assistance benefits. Event participants discussed barriers to activation of young people and their needs beyond employment, measures and programmes to facilitate entry into education or the labour market, methods of coordination of stakeholders, and balancing conditionalities with incentives in the design of inclusive activation policies.

The Peer Review was hosted by the Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion. It brought together government representatives and local-level social services representatives from the host country (Norway), five peer countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Malta, and the Netherlands), representatives of the European Commission and the European Social Network, and independent thematic experts.

For the host country, the Peer Review provided an opportunity to showcase Norwegian active inclusion programmes and discuss common challenges and success measures that will feed into a review of their current national-level active inclusion policies targeted at young people receiving social assistance benefits. The objective of the Peer Review was to identify success criteria and good examples of measures that could be used to develop targeted and individualised measures for this group.

EU Policy Context

Through its policies, the EU aims to give young people more equal opportunities in education and the job market and to ensure their social inclusion. In its 2008 Active Inclusion Recommendation¹, the European Commission called upon the Member States to design and implement a strategy for the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market. The strategy promotes the integration of three important social policy strands: inclusive labour markets, adequate income support, and access to quality services.

These policy outcomes are also reflected in the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)² through several principles, including principle 4 (Active support to employment), 14 (Minimum income), and 20 (Access to essential services). In turn, these principles contribute to achieving the targets set out in the EPSR Action Plan, namely at least a 15 million reduction in the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion and at least 78% of the population aged 20 to 64 in employment by 2030.³

¹ Commission Recommendation of 3 October 2008 on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market. Available here: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reco/2008/867/oj>

² For more information on the Pillar see here: https://ec.europa.eu/info/european-pillar-social-rights_en

³ See more here: https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-action-plan_en



The 2016 Council Recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market⁴ recommends that Member States provide individual support to long-term unemployed and encourage better coordination of relevant services. In 2020, a Council Recommendation⁵ was adopted on a reinforced Youth Guarantee to ensure that all young people under the age of 30 receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education. Lastly, the Council Recommendation on adequate minimum income ensuring active inclusion⁶ that calls on Member States to modernise their minimum income schemes by reaffirming the active inclusion approach and focusing on adequacy, coverage and take-up of benefits, access to inclusive labour markets, access to enabling and essential services, individualised support and governance, monitoring and reporting of the schemes.

The key policy messages from the Peer Review can be summarised as follows:

Offering individualised support and accompaniment towards long-term employment

- The needs of young adults receiving social assistance benefits are very diverse and complex, therefore, in addition to financial benefits, other supporting services that can respond to these needs should be available.
- Entry points should be easily identifiable and friendly for new beneficiaries. Establishing a meeting point outside of the public employment office can increase the take-up services.
- Activation should start with a needs assessment of the young person together with a case worker to understand their interests, aspirations, and problems to create tailored support plans. For example, in Belgium, there is a programme for young adults receiving minimum income to develop together with a social worker an individualised project for social integration.
- Close follow-up by qualified staff or mentors can be a success factor in getting vulnerable people into sustainable employment. However, the accompaniment should also continue in employment to ensure permanent inclusion.

Balancing conditionalities with incentives

- Effective activation measures require a balance between support, through income and social inclusion, and mutual obligations for professional integration.
- The requirement of activity needs to be reasonable for the situation of the young person. Being supportive is more effective in motivating young adults than being punitive.
- Once in employment, providing an ongoing platform of income support in the short term reduces the risk of poverty and an eventual return to the social assistance

⁴ Council Recommendation of 15 February 2016 on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market. Available here: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32016H0220\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32016H0220(01))

⁵ Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee 2020/C 372/01

⁶ Council Recommendation of 30 January 2023 on adequate minimum income ensuring active inclusion 2023/C 41/01 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32023H0203%2801%29>



system. For instance, in Malta, the 'Tapering of Benefits Scheme' is given for a 3-year period to those beneficiaries who become engaged in employment.

Shifting from an employment-led activation approach to an integrated response

- Activation policies should be designed with a holistic approach where health, education, housing, social inclusion and employment are all considered important factors to activate young people furthest away from the labour market. An inclusive approach that tries to meet all possible needs of a young person promotes independence and, therefore, decreases the likelihood of a return to the social assistance system.
- Mainstream public employment services need to be linked with other services to provide specialised programmes of outreach and intensive support. For instance, a municipality in Norway has centralised all services supporting young adults in one building which has led to easier interactions between organisations and easier access to different services.
- To measure the impact of active inclusion measures through a wider lens than employment, there is a need to develop qualitative indicators to gather data on other factors, such as social inclusion.

Key role of the local level in the implementation of individualised and integrated services

- The relationship between the staff and the person in need of support is crucial for successful and long-lasting integration in the labour market, especially of people in vulnerable situations. Targeted, integrated and individualised approaches include outreach initiatives (e.g. 'roaming' where young people meet as presented in an example from Norway, timely needs assessment, right mix of responses: education, training, involvement of other services, covering e.g. health and social aspects; dedicated contacts with the employers, etc.)
- Building a relationship of trust between caseworkers and young social assistance recipients is a time- and effort-intensive process. A lower ratio of caseworkers to beneficiaries leads to better quality support and outcomes.
- Integrated services and individualised programmes require significant resources and increase the administrative burden of the local-level organisations involved. Additional and adequate funding should be available to cover the costs of developing and implementing these measures.

Individualised and integrated support requires close coordination between actors responsible for active inclusion.

- Services integration begins with mapping all the available support services and creating or re-designing the network of partnerships with key agencies such as training bodies, employers, providers, and local social services.
- Formalised agreements between the involved organisation will ensure the collaboration is institutionalised and continues with staff turnover.
- The involvement of service users in the development of measures can increase their effectiveness and take-up by ensuring they work for the target group. For example, in Belgium, there is an 'experts by experience' programme that connects people with



lived experiences of poverty with public agencies to give their perspective on the policy framework.