

YOUTH GUARANTEE, THE COPERNICAN REVOLUTION

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With more than 5.5 million of young people who were unemployed, in 2013, youth unemployment rates in Europe reached the maximum level ever recorded in the history of the Union and in the majority of the Member States. As a result of the concern over the risk of a "lost generation", the Council of the European Union proposed the Youth Guarantee, namely to provide an opportunity of education, training or employment, to all young people aged 15-24 within four months since they become unemployed, and invited all the Member States for its rapid implementation.

Given the huge sense of urgency, the Youth Guarantee underwent a very rapid implementation. All Member States started the implementation of this new policy framework by presenting their National Youth Guarantee Implementation Plans and putting in place immediate measures for bringing young people back into education or employment. In doing so, Member States have adopted different implementation strategies. Some, such as France, have chosen a more holistic approach using the **Youth Guarantee as a means of improving links between labour market, education and Vocational Educational Training (VET)** provisions as well as youth and social policies more generally. Other countries, such as Spain or Greece, opted for a narrower approach - predominantly focusing on employment and on the labour market dimension.

Member States may have applied different strategies but similar policy tools have been put in place. These can be grouped along the following six main categories: a strengthened provision of information, council and guidance services to all youth, development of outreach programs, innovative tools to assist school-to-work transitions, enhanced set of training and work-based learning, an improved VET and apprenticeships system as well as measures to promote self-employment.

However, despite all the efforts done by Member States, two years after its launch, in some countries the Youth Guarantee still appear to be as a Copernican revolution in youth policies which will take time and costly major reforms to be fully completed.

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In fact, the full effectiveness of the youth guarantee is ensured by three main factors: better coordinated policies for youth; early activation of the young job seeker, limiting the risk of long term disengagement from the labour market; individualised approach on the job seeker, ensuring an optimal matching between the needs of the job unemployed and the opportunity received, maximising in this way its effectiveness and the chances of his/her re-integration. These three main factors are based on a full and working partnership among all stakeholders and labour market actors as well as on well-developed Public Employment Services, (PES), able to deliver the wide range of tasks required. Unfortunately these ingredients seem to be missing in some Member States where Public Employment

Services are not ready for full and timely provision of the services required within youth guarantee while lack of trust among various actors make difficult and intensive the achievement of a well-functioning partnership.

For this reason, besides putting in place immediate measures for bringing young people back into education or employment, **the Youth Guarantee entails long-term reforms to improve the capacity and capabilities of Public Employment Services targeted at young people.** Reforming such structures and adapting them more readily to the labour market needs of young people is a long-term project which can be costly. However, and despite recent labour market improvements, such reforms need to move ahead, with all stakeholders and labour market actors working together to ensure that this Copernican revolution is completed and the Youth Guarantee delivers its promises.