

Implementation of the youth employment initiative in the Member States

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The European Parliament adopted by 512 votes to 50, with 63 abstentions, a resolution on the implementation of the Youth Employment Initiative in the Member States.

The financial and economic crisis led to a steep rise in people being unemployed, especially young people. The youth unemployment rate rose from 15 % in 2008 to a peak of 24 % in early 2013, with this average rate masking huge divergences across Member States and regions.

Although having peaked at 24 % in 2013, the youth unemployment rate in the EU-28 has steadily dropped, reaching below 17 % in 2017. The level of youth unemployment remains high, there being just a few Member States (Austria, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Malta, Hungary and Germany) with a youth unemployment rate of less than 11 %.

As a reminder, in 2013, the Council, by means of a Council Recommendation, established the Youth Guarantee (YG), by which the Member States commit themselves to offering young people a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.

In parallel, the Council agreed to create the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), which was launched as the main EU budgetary instrument linked to the ESF to help Member State regions experiencing particularly high levels of youth unemployment, in particular by introducing YG schemes.

It is estimated that 16 million young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) have participated in youth guarantee schemes and that the youth employment initiative has provided direct support to over 1.6 million young people in the European Union.

Objective: one main ambition of the YEI and YG is to reach out to those young people Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEETs), who are at the highest risk of exclusion, while taking into account that the term NEETs covers various subgroups of young people with diverse needs. Members deplored the fact that the Member States have chosen to commit themselves only through the non-binding instrument of the Council Recommendation, pointing out that the aim of the YG is far from being achieved in many Member States.

In order to be effective, a strategy to boost youth employment should provide for round-table discussions involving those concerned, take account of the territorial context in which it is to be implemented and provide for targeted training that meets the needs of businesses while balancing them with the aspirations and skills of young people.

Moreover, the core labour standards and other standards related to the quality of work, such as working time, the minimum wage, social security, and occupational health and safety, must be central considerations in the efforts made.

Reaching out to the most excluded young people: Parliament called on the Member States to establish appropriate and tailored outreach strategies to reach all NEETs and to take an integrated approach towards making more individualised assistance and services available to support young people facing multiple barriers. It called for the YEI and YG measures to be accessible to all people with disabilities.

Ensuring the quality of the Youth Employment Initiative offers: Members stressed the need to develop a commonly agreed global definition of what should be a quality offer.

In this context, they stated that a quality internship contract shall offer the following guarantees: (i) a written contract outlining concrete objectives and describing high-quality training; (ii) a mentor or supervisor allocated to assess the trainee's performance at the end of the internship; (iii) a specific duration of training; (iv) setting a limit on the length of traineeships with the same employer; (v) clear provisions on social protection and remuneration.

Member States are encouraged to:

- update and revise their YEI operational programmes with the involvement of social partners and youth organisations in order to fine-tune their action based on the actual needs of young people and the labour market;
- improve monitoring, reporting and the quality of data as a matter of urgency and to guarantee that reliable and comparable data and figures on current YEI implementation are gathered and made available in a timely manner and more frequently than is required under their annual reporting obligation of the European Social Fund (ESF) Regulation.

Concerned about reports of the inappropriate use of YEI-funded measures (delayed payments to young people or the abuse of internships), Members expressed their willingness to combat such practices.

More stable EU instrument: Parliament stressed the need for a strategy to transform the YEI into a more stable EU funding instrument to tackle youth unemployment in the post-2020 period, while ensuring the quick and easy deployment of funds. It emphasised the need to improve the quality of offers under the YEI and YG and called for a future discussion about the eligible age bracket.

With a view to collecting information and investigating possible abusive practices, the Parliament has proposed the establishment of an EU hotline against the violation of the rights of young people so that they can directly report any negative experience of their participation in the YEI to the Commission.

Financing: Members noted with concern that there is an actual risk that EU funding is simply replacing national funding rather than creating added value. They welcomed the fact that at Parliaments urging, the result of the conciliation process on the 2018 EU budget was to increase the specific allocation originally proposed for the YEI by EUR 116.7 million in fresh appropriations, bringing its total to EUR 350 million in 2018. They considered that the overall YEI budget is not sufficient to cover actual demand and the resources required to ensure that the programme reaches its targets.

