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The Impact of Youth Guarantee Measures in Romania: Current Bottlenecks and a Post-2020 Strategy

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Abstract

The Youth Guarantee (YG) is the most ambitious programme at European level that aims at improving the situation of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs). This paper provides an overview of its implementation in Romania, one of the EU countries that faces high rates of youth unemployment. In particular, the paper focuses on the situation of young people from vulnerable groups who face particular struggles in terms of education, training or employment.

The role of the Youth Guarantee programme at EU level

The Youth Guarantee (YG) programme was launched in 2013 and was referred to as

“the largest programme for combating youth unemployment in the last 25 years”¹. In 2013, 7.5 million (12.9%)² young Europeans were NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training). Another challenge that YG sought to address were the disparities among EU Member States, with one in four youths being part of the NEETs category in countries such as Italy, Greece or Bulgaria, compared to one in twenty youths in Germany or Denmark.

What the Youth Guarantee intended to do was to support these young people in accessing the labour market through assistance in finding jobs, internship programmes, financial support for employment (both for employees and for employers) and support for entrepreneurship initiatives.

The main mechanism for financing the YG programme at EU level is the Youth

¹ [Romanian Ministry of Labour and Social Justice, Press Release, 8 April 2015.](#)

² [Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee.](#)

Employment Initiative (YEI), together with the specific funds from the European Social Fund (ESF). The total budget of the YEI is EUR 8.8 billion distributed in twenty EU Member States for the 2014-2020 period.

Since the launch of the programme, young people's access to the labour market has improved, with NEETs indicator decreasing from 13.2% in 2012 to 10.2% in April 2019. Although there are several countries that have made remarkable progress in (re)integrating young people into the education, training, apprenticeship and labour market, there are still countries that are facing significant gaps: Romania (14.5%), Bulgaria (15%) and Italy (19%) still report high number of young NEETs.

More work is needed at EU level and the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework must provide sufficient funding for the next YG programme based on the lessons learnt until now.

The implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Romania

In Romania, the Youth Guarantee was launched based on the European model and divided into two programming periods: 2014-2015 and 2017-2020. The primary goal of the programme was to combat unemployment among young NEETs as the situation was precarious: in 2015, one out of five young people in Romania was NEET. The first phase of the YG in Romania had a limited number of measures. Basically, Romania tried to create a national database of more than sixty thousand young NEETs and twenty-seven youth centres at local level to facilitate their registration and provision of employment opportunities. These initiatives were followed by a set of

measures aimed at supporting youth employment: mobility bonuses, setting-up bonuses, subsidies for employers, etc.

At the end of the implementation period, the results were far below expectations: the programme reached less than one in five young NEETs during this period and, even if they underwent registration, one in two young people did not receive any job or training offer in a timely manner. It is not clear what happened to those who did receive an offer, since, in the absence of any follow-up mechanism, the developments in eight of ten cases remain unknown.

The Youth Guarantee 2017-2020 has however a more complex structure compared to the previous one and pursues a series of objectives with a special focus on young people from vulnerable categories in order to reduce the risk of social exclusion.

The novelty of the 2017-2020 programming period is related to the implementation of the "case management" approach that is based on a customised intervention for young NEETs so as to deliver tailor-made, multifaceted support. This method is successfully applied in many EU countries and leads to impressive results (France, Estonia, Germany, Croatia and Finland).

A variety of programmes, measures and personalized interventions have been developed for young NEETs in Romania in these two phases of YG implementation aimed at supporting them to find an appropriate offer, according to their expectations, opportunities at local level, knowledge, as well as to benefit the employers that would hire NEETs.

However, the YG programme remains poorly implemented despite recent changes. Institutional coordination among key actors is inefficient, and the number of NEETs whom the programme is able to reach remains limited, even more so when it comes to vulnerable groups. The percentage of young NEETs in Romania remains one of the highest in the EU in 2019. Despite the positive outcomes of some outreach measures, around 69% of NEETs remain inactive³, hence they are not involved in education, training, apprenticeship programmes nor does they have a job, as a result of participating in the YG schemes.

“Since the launch of the Youth Guarantee at the EU level, discussions around the programme emphasised the need to focus on young NEETs from disadvantaged groups”

The role of Youth Guarantee in supporting young NEETs from vulnerable groups in Romania

The situation of the young NEETs from vulnerable groups (and especially Roma communities) in Romania is precarious since they are one of the most disadvantaged social groups in terms of education, training and jobs. The issues the young Roma face are mainly related to: high school dropout rates, limited financial resources or poverty, discrimination

coupled with the lack of trust and interest in finding a fair training/job opportunity, living in rural/marginalized areas with reduced access to information/resources and migration.

Since the launch of the Youth Guarantee at the EU level, discussions around the programme emphasised the need to focus on young NEETs from disadvantaged groups and their particular needs in term of education, training or employment. Despite significant efforts both at EU and national levels, the most vulnerable young people tend to remain under-represented and the engagement efforts turn out to be insufficient in the first five years of YG implementation.

In Romania, as in many other European countries, Roma youth represent the most vulnerable group. Although the general rate of NEETs in Romania stands at 14.5% in 2018, young Roma NEETs were the most affected – almost two in three Roma youth are NEETs⁴.

So far, Youth Guarantee in Romania failed to address the particular situation of young Roma NEETs. A report published by CRPE in Romania in 2019 states that “public policies in the field of education, Roma inclusion, youth employment in Romania in the last years, including the YG, are deficient, at best, in their design, indicators, monitoring mechanisms regarding their support for keeping young Roma in school and for helping them transition to employment, which, obviously, has an impact on their effective implementation”⁵.

The Youth Guarantee has been and remains an opportunity for Romania in the sense

³ EC Country Report 2020.

⁴ FRA (EU-MIDIS II), 2016.

⁵ CRPE Policy Memo 76, August 2019.

that it can have a substantial contribution to the inclusion of young Roma NEETs to reduce cases of exclusion and access of young vulnerable NEETs to Youth Guarantee measures in Romania. A limited progress can be underlined in the last two years in implementing YG and reaching out young people from vulnerable groups.

The national strategy requires a better inter-institutional cooperation to promote more inclusive measures and opportunities for Roma NEETs, improve case management approach and increase the capacity of the Public Employment Services to reach the youth at risk of marginalisation, first and foremost physically and then through information.

Conclusion

The Youth Guarantee programme is set to continue after 2020. An impact assessment is required to allow lessons learned during the first two implementation periods to be taken into consideration. The need to better address vulnerable groups must be underlined and should become a priority of the future programme.

A special focus must also be given to relevant stakeholders and include them in designing the future measures – grass-roots actors such as local social NGOs, Roma NGOs, youth organizations that are already active in these disadvantaged communities, but also representative organizations of economic agents - employer unions, Chambers of Commerce, business associations should take part in this dialogue.

Both categories must be involved in designing the programme, the “popularization” of the scheme among young people, but also in the process of monitoring and analysing the implementation of the YG programme post-2020.

It is necessary for the Member States to take over good practice examples and resources at European level and to adapt them to the national specificities. This approach should rely on the significant progress made in this area since the launch of the programme with regard to the implementation of the YG, depending on the typology of vulnerability of young NEETs.

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