



A system of guarantees for young people The contribution of regional policies

Reference context

Youth unemployment has reached alarming levels in the EU and shows no sign of decreasing:

- More than one young person out of five is not able to find work;
- The NEET phenomenon is gaining an alarming dimension; there are almost 7.5 million young people (aged 15-24) that are not registered in any training, education or working programme;
- 30.1% of unemployed people aged less than 25 years have not worked for more than 12 months.

These are just some of the figures offered by the European Commission on 5 December 2012 that highlight how the exclusion of young people from the labour market is clearly the most worrying indicator of the economic crisis.

Even though these phenomena are recorded at very different levels in the various EU countries, we believe that, in the context of this complex structural and cyclical situation, it is necessary to act with absolute urgency on all levels, reinforcing the conformity between European interventions at both a regional and local level, to implement an entirely multi-level strategy.

The focus on the young is the real challenge that Europe must face in the coming years. To successfully address this, it is indispensable to develop of a real Employment policy with marked complementarity between the European and national levels.

Welfare models

There are various **welfare models** within the Member States and regional governments and this is also the case for youth policies. Some of these are more focused on the role of the family, others on work, and others again on the individual and the State.

It cannot be said that one system exists that in itself is better than another nor if implemented in isolation would be able to improve significantly the condition of young people. This is the reason why integration between the various approaches rather than the quest for an overall better system is advisable and necessary.

The provision of European policies must be based on the assumption that the **most significant differences are not between welfare models, but between regions**. It is necessary to prevent a young person's place of birth from determining his/her entire life-cycle, whilst encouraging interaction between regional vocations, skills and youth expertise. For this to occur it is necessary to consolidate a European policy for the young based on local, national and transnational approaches.

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European Association of Regional and Local Authorities for Lifelong Learning
www.earfall.eu

Rond Point Schuman, 14 – 1040 Bruxelles, Belgium
Tel +32 (0)2 2868566 Fax +32 (0)2 2868568



Improve the integration of policies

The issue of the young has always been the subject of the policies of the EU Member States, even if often lack of coordination and conformity has resulted in improvements that are often poor and of little significance.

Today of positive note is the fact that an increasing number of national and regional governments have included youth policies in their agendas in an integrated policy that ranges from employment to health, revenue to the school, economic development to commerce and from culture to social aspects.

Concrete integration and complementarity of both policies and tools are absolutely necessary to increase the quality and the impact of actions aimed at young people.

Integrated intervention systems and transverse strategies are the keys to success and the only route to achieve real and long-lasting improvement in the condition of young people.

In this respect, the instigation of a youth agency/office that functions as an interface between young people and institutions and that offers a direct consultancy and information service on “possibilities” (educational, training, professional, etc.) available in the region, is a good practice that should certainly be encouraged and promoted.

Implementation of life-cycle strategies

Today the objective of governments should not so much be the provision of short-term measures connected with the various transition phases of the young persons' life, but rather personal and professional growth courses that accompany them throughout their life-cycle.

Alongside concrete and specific measures related to autonomy, work and the family it is important to offer access to a variable-duration course that offers opportunities of various types and levels, guarantees the development of talent and increases social inclusion to those in need. This involves offering assurance to young people, in their various life-cycle phases and for the time required, periods of accompaniment that include personalised and individualised programmes and made-to-measure packages that lead them towards the realisation of objectives. These objectives range from the completion of scholastic cycles to the acquisition of qualifications or specific professional skills, access to the first or second job and the creation of a business and its management, to insertion in quality social networks and participation in social life, etc.

We therefore propose that the European Institutions encourage the commitment of national and regional Governments in the implementation of institutionalised measures in support of the life-cycle of young people.

Objectives and measures in accordance with the entire life-cycle of the young

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During the years of economic crisis a wide range of measures connected with both the entire life-cycle and the periods of transition have been adopted. The experience of regional governments demonstrates how important it is to provide measures that aim to:

1. **Complete the training period and encourage the acquisition of the right skills.** The study period must lead to the acquisition of real skills that can be used in the labour market. To this end it is necessary to reinforce the connection between school and the workplace.
2. **Encourage insertion and development in the labour force,** through the provision of incentives that aim to promote and diffuse the use of tools such as apprenticeships and internships, improve orientation and counselling services, the development of entrepreneurship, competence and mobility between different jobs and different countries.
3. **Limit disadvantageous situations** through the monitoring of the individual's life stages and consequently the implementation of relevant measures for each transition.
4. **Develop an adequate social and cultural life,** through the promotion of the evolution of quality social networks, conferring new tasks and functions to the existing cultural infrastructure so that they are able to respond constantly to the various and changing needs of the young.
5. **Foster independence and parenthood,** guaranteeing basic dignified conditions to allow the individual to conduct an independent and autonomous life.
6. **Offer income support and taxation incentives,** via salary allowances, forms of taxation assistance and bureaucratic simplification that favours the increase of employment and the creation of businesses by the young.

At the same time, the experience of regional Governments shows how important it is to offer measures that operate simultaneously and systemically on the various levels of the youth population so as to support progression towards adult age.

The young population is rather heterogeneous and for this reason it is necessary to adapt measures to their real needs that change with the reference target. In this sense, three macro categories, each with different requirements, can be identified:

- **Early school leavers**

This category includes young people at risk of abandoning scholastic studies.

Prevention and orientation measures must be implemented for these young people, directing them towards more appropriate courses that are suitable to their respective skills and aspirations.

- **NEETs**

These are the young people that must be first intercepted and then re-directed and re-inserted in a training, education or professional course. For this category it is fundamental to implement motivational, guidance and specific professional measures that meet the individual's needs.

- **Talent**

These are the Young People that have concluded a training course and have gained specific skills and specialisations but who at times suffer for being too qualified and consequently are

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not able to find a place in the workforce. The promotion of talent means offering this group the chance to grow and train at high level, but also find concrete and dignified employment opportunities.

Young people must be inserted in a sustainable and long-term programme that does not focus solely on fast solutions that improve the short-term employment rate but also aims to resolve definitively the problem of youth access to the workforce.

Within this programme our hope is that the best practices and methods are subject to suitable organisation and systematization at a European level in terms of:

- public policies and operative methods that act on the transitions involved in the process of the autonomy of the young worker;
- regional integrated policy systems for young people to address unemployment and the difficulties related to emancipation and the ability to “construct a solid trusted front line with all those involved, including placement services, instructors, social parties, employers or youth organisations”.

The following are amongst the most important actions and measures, also strongly recommended by the Commission that must be adequately implemented in the regions:

- **Guarantee for the young**

The assurance that, within a given time period from the completion of scholastic studies or the conclusion of professional training, young people will receive a qualitatively acceptable training or work experience offer. Measures of this type would permit the limitation of a maximum period of inactivity thus ensuring that young people do not become discouraged or lose faith.

- **Internships**

Programmes such as internships should be developed that allow the young to acquire useful experiences and skills that can be applied to the labour market. These measures should be supported by strong cooperation between institutions, companies, training institutions and social parties so as to create synergies and complementarities that enhance and enrich training programmes.

- **Traineeships and the combination of school and work experience**

Intended as a method of approach to training that enhances the combination of theoretical and practical learning in the company. This mix ensures a greater connection and integration of the education and employment system; an integration that makes the transition from school to work less complex for the young people concerned.

- **Policies for business start-ups**

These must be seen as an opportunity to offer young people to reward their desire for autonomy and the development of innovative ideas, enhancing talent and at the same time supporting the SME that is the primary engine of growth in employment and in the European Union. In this regard, the promotion of business and/or professional start-up through tools such as micro-credit are positively considered.

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- **Mobility for work**

This is a tool to help solve local imbalances between demand and supply of labour and thus contribute to a better integration of the market and encourage the reciprocal exchange of good practices.

These measures should serve as a basis for designing new flexible and continually evolving actions schemes.

In addition, to significantly improve the condition of young people in their journey towards independence and adulthood, it is necessary to promote a system, involving both the Public and the Private sector, in which potential and talent is recognised as an engine of development. This means offering a “win-win” scenario, encouraging the business community to take an active role in the growth and education of the young. Changes in careers and professional skills must be taken into account, legitimizing and promoting new forms of youth employment that have not yet been established (as part of the ITC, in terms of co-working, etc.).

Our aim is to devise more and more schemes conceived in a European context, including innovative interventions, to address an emergency, such as is youth unemployment, for which an effective response can only be found through supranational and united effort. For this reason, the European regions, which are at the heart of the EU program for cohesion policies, undertake to identify a shared path aimed at the activation of effective measures in favour of the young population.

Three driving themes: exploit the potential of creating jobs in key sectors

Europe is currently facing profound structural changes. Our economy will have to undergo a radical change in the next decade to address these challenges and turn them into opportunities. It would be opportune to direct investments and public policies to areas that represent important sources of growth and employment. In this regard, the Annual Growth Survey 2012 has identified three “strategic” areas:

The green economy

In the recession that has hit our economies, this sector has seen an increase in jobs and forecasts indicate that this increase will remain firm.

It is more necessary than ever before to invest in those sectors such as energy efficiency and renewable energy that still have great growth potential and could absorb a large quota of the young population.

Health and social services

Employment in these sectors is growing rapidly due to the ageing of the population and the consequential expansion of services to better meet the new demands.

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Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

The demand for ICT professionals is constantly increasing. Employment among ICT professionals has grown by about 3% each year and demand has exceeded supply. The development and use of ICT applications will assume a major role in increasing the international competitiveness of European enterprises. Improving the ICT knowledge and skills in companies and those of European workers, would undoubtedly be extremely far-sighted, even if this requires considerable effort in terms of education and development policies of employees' skills.

Transferability of measures and implementation in the 2014-2020 ESF

We believe that regional and local authorities, generally already competent in the implementation of policies relating to employment, education and training, constitute the most appropriate level in the assessment of requirements and the needs of regions and local contexts.

In this sense, the European funds for common policy, in particular the European Social Fund, but also the ERDF and the funds for the Agricultural Policy (EAFRD) are fundamental tools for the support of integrated development policies.

In particular, the ESF will be an essential tool for the regions to ensure the growth and maintenance of employment levels focusing on the most vulnerable in the labour market, namely young people and women, to promote access to education and the achievement of high levels of education and skills and combat early school leaving, promoting policies of inclusion through participation in the labour market of various disadvantaged categories (disabled, immigrants, the elderly, workers at risk, drop outs, women).

In the 2014-2020 planning period, the quantity of funds, will directly affect the regions' ability to develop policies that are effective and responsive to the real needs of young people in the area.

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