Youth Guarantees and recent developments on measures against youth unemployment

A mapping exercise

Margherita Bussi and Leonard Geyer

Background analysis 2013.04
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Summary

The employment situation of young people in Europe
In the EU28 there were, in the second quarter of 2013, nearly 5.5 million unemployed ‘young people’ (the population group aged between 15 and 24), representing an increase of 1.38 million since the second quarter of 2007.

Meanwhile, among ‘young adults’ (the 25-to-29-year age group) unemployment in the second quarter of 2013 was above 3.8 million.

In the first quarter of 2013, the young unemployed (15-24) represented 23.1% of the labour force of that age group (youth unemployment rate); in 2012 they represented 9.7% of the whole population of that age group (youth unemployment ratio). Among the older group of ‘young adults’, meanwhile, the unemployment rate was 14.4%.

In 2012 NEETs (‘Not in Employment Education or Training’) aged 15-24 accounted for 13.1% of the whole EU28 population in that age group, while among the ‘young adults’ (25-29 years) the percentage of NEETs was 20.6%.

NEET rates increased from 2007 to 2012 in all countries except AT, DE and MT with the starkest rises taking place in the austerity-affected countries GR, IE, ES and CY, as well as HR and IT.

Most of the increase in NEET rates can be explained by the rise in unemployment. However, in the long run, a sluggish labour market recovery may contribute to turn these available job-seekers into discouraged or long-term unemployed or even inactive young people.

Youth Guarantee
A Youth Guarantee is not a panacea against youth unemployment. However, it does encourage immediate action by public employment services designed to prevent young people from becoming disaffected and inactive in the first place.

Most of the Member States reacted positively to the call for a Youth Guarantee and included it in their 2013 National Reform Programme.

Austerity measures are an obstacle to the implementation of Youth Guarantees (CY) or to the potential impact of a youth unemployment programme (PT).

Some countries that already have some form of Youth Guarantee are planning to step up some of its aspects (AT, FI).

Some countries, such as IT, FR, BE and IE, with reference to the European Youth Guarantee, have taken initial steps towards the implementation of national measures.
Most countries are currently designing their Youth Guarantee Plans while also implementing several measures to combat the high level of youth unemployment and prevent its rise (e.g. ES). In some cases, these measures are explicitly linked to a future development of national Youth Guarantees (BG).

**Trade union positions**

At the European level the European Trade Union Confederation is supporting the Youth Guarantee, and most trade unions in different member states have already publicly expressed their support to this initiative.

However, in some countries trade unions denounce the lack of involvement of social partners and stakeholders (HR), the absence of transparent consultations with the social partners (ES) and also the lack of political will when it comes to tackling youth unemployment.

There are concerns about the prospect of European Social Funds being reallocated for this purpose, in view of the possible consequences of such reallocation for other existing programmes (BE), as well as about the sole reliance on European funds for tackling youth unemployment (CZ).

In some countries where measures similar to the Youth Guarantee are already in force, trade unions warn about the inefficiency of some of the measures (SE), suggest changes to the funding of the schemes (AT) or invite strengthening of some of their aspects (FI).

Trade unions argue that the lack of real job opportunities is likely to hamper the outcomes of labour market programmes for youth (PL), that there is a need for stronger intervention on the demand side (HR), and that some of the existing programmes are inefficient (UK).

Concerns about the effort demanded from welfare institutions are also raised (FR, CZ).
A European Youth Guarantee

Introduction

In the run-up to the forthcoming submission of the National Implementation Plans for the Youth Guarantee by member states, this background analysis aims at showing how the European Youth Guarantee has been picked up at national level – as of end October 2013 – in official measures, public discourse and/or initiatives since the official launch of a Proposal for a Youth Guarantee in December 2012 (European Commission, 2012) and the Council Recommendation on the Youth Guarantee (Council of the European Union, 2013). To this end this analysis looks at the 2013 National Reform Programmes, official documents, research papers, political statements and interviews with trade union representatives.

We also include, wherever possible, a trade union perspective on national initiatives because of the explicit support of the Council Recommendation for the use of partnership-based approaches to the Youth Guarantee as well as the commitment shown at the European level by social partners (ETUC BUSINESSEUROPE CEEP and UEAPME, 2012). Trade union positions were collected through the use of official statements, trade union publications, phone interviews or written contributions.

Where does it come from?

At its core, a Youth Guarantee is intended to provide young people with entitlement to a job, training or education within a defined period. This entitlement is provided by public institutions, usually the public employment service, often in combination with private and third-sector organisations.

Youth Guarantees were pioneered by the Scandinavian countries, with Sweden (1984), Norway (1993), Denmark (1996) and Finland (1996) being the first to implement such policies (ILO, 2012). Since then, other EU countries have introduced similar measures. Most notably, Austria launched a training guarantee called ‘Ausbildungsgarantie’ in 2008.

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The establishment of such a guarantee in Europe was advocated by the European Trade Union Conference (ETUC) as early as 2009 in its call 'Towards a new social deal in Europe: Fight the crisis, put people first' (ETUC, 2009). The demand was reiterated by the ETUC Youth Committee in 2010 (ETUC, 2010).

In 2011, the European Commission reacted to the rise in youth unemployment across the EU as a whole by launching the Youth Opportunities Initiative (YOI) (European Commission, 2011). In December 2012 this initiative was complemented by the Commission’s Youth Employment Package (European Commission, 2012). In March 2013, the European Commission proposed further rules to reinforce and accelerate the measures proposed in the Youth Employment Package with a particular view to helping NEETs (European Commission, 2013c). As one core element, the Youth Employment Package contained a proposal for a Youth Guarantee which was subsequently adopted by the Council as a recommendation to the member states in April 2013 (Council of the European Union, 2013).

According to the Council recommendation, the Member States of the European Union shall 'ensure that all young people under the age of 25 years receive 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' (Council of the European Union, 2013).

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the European Parliament but also the European Social Partners expressed strong support for the proposal for a Youth Guarantee: the EESC in an opinion (EESC 2013), the European Parliament in a resolution released in January 2013 (European Parliament, 2013) and the social partners with a Framework of Actions published in June 2013 (ETUC, BUSINESSEUROPE, CEEP and UEAPME, 2013).

To support the Youth Employment Package (including the Youth Guarantee), the European Council created, in February 2013, the Youth Employment Initiative through which EUR 6 billion will be made available to NUTS 22 regions that had a youth unemployment rate of above 25% in 2012. The June European Council concluded that the EUR 6 billion allocated to the Youth Employment Initiative should be disbursed during the first two years – 2014-2016 – of the next Multiannual Financial Framework (European Council, 2013). These resources are aimed at supporting implementation of the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plans, which most Member States are supposed to submit before the end of December 2013, in order to start implementing the Youth Guarantee in 2014 (European Council, 2013). Member States can also make

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2. The NUTS classification (Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics) is a hierarchical system for dividing up the economic territory of the EU for several purposes, including framing of EU regional policies and identifying regions eligible for aid from the Structural Funds (NUTS 2 level). Information available at http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/nuts_nomenclature/introduction
use of the European Social Fund (ESF) in order to support implementation of
the Youth Guarantee by devising broader measures designed directly or
indirectly to prevent young people from becoming unemployed and by
improving the services delivered to this age group3.

Lastly, in June 2013 the Commission published a Communication — ‘A call to
action on youth unemployment’ — that summarises and reiterates steps to be
taken by Member States in order to tackle youth unemployment (European
Commission, 2013e). Most notably, these are the implementation of the Youth
Guarantee, investment in young people through the ESF, the front-loading of
the Youth Employment Initiative, support for intra-EU labour mobility with
EURES, improvements to the school-to-work transition through the increased
supply of apprenticeships and the reduction of skill shortages, accelerated
reforms to deliver a genuine EU labour market in the longer run, as well as
measures to create jobs and encourage the hiring of young people. To this
end, the Commission called upon the ‘European institutions, Member States,
the social partners and civil society to work in partnership to implement the
measures’. While it sees the main responsibility for the fight against youth
unemployment as lying with the Member States, the Commission stated that
it would help by ‘pinpointing the most critical reforms through the Country-
Specific Recommendations’ (European Commission, 2013e). The inclusion
of the Youth Guarantee and measures to fight youth unemployment in the
Country-Specific Recommendations fully recognises the relevance of this
initiative at the EU level and incorporates the Youth Guarantee into the
European Semester monitoring exercise.

In 2013, Bulgaria, France, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Slovakia and the UK, due to
their high levels of youth unemployment or high NEET rates, already received
references to the Youth Guarantee in their Country-Specific Recommendations.
Poland and Sweden, which already had in place measures with some features
similar to the Youth Guarantee, were advised to continue in their efforts by,
for example, improving the target group (Sweden)4.

**What is it?**

The European Youth Guarantee in its core and narrow definition can be
classified as an Active Labour Market Programme (ALMP). Two major
challenges are, however, presented by the Youth Guarantee to national welfare,
educational and labour market systems: the first is the term *Guarantee* and
the second is the short timeframe within which it is stipulated that an action
should be taken (*four months*).

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3. EU measures to tackle youth unemployment European Commission — MEMO/13/464
making-it-happen/country-specific-recommendations/index_en.htm
In this context, ‘Guarantee’ means that national Public Employment Services should, and may be legally bound to, use all the means at their disposal to provide a good quality job offer, traineeship, educational opportunity or apprenticeship to any of the young people who fall into the target categories.

Alongside the four-month timeframe for intervention, the guarantee aspect of the Youth Guarantee is probably the most crucial as it is what distinguishes this measure from more general Active Labour Market Policies (Besamusca, Stanescu and Vauhkonen, 2012).

In its wider definition, the Youth Guarantee is a tool-box including preventive and corrective measures aimed at smoothing young people’s entry to the labour market (European Commission, 2013d). In other words, there is a plethora of possible interventions that can be considered as contributing to increasing and diversifying the approaches to fulfilment of the Youth Guarantee and tackling youth unemployment. Measures to be financed through the ESF include programmes for reducing early school-leaving and training drop-outs, initiatives for improving the attractiveness of vocational education and training, or targeted and well-designed wage and recruitment subsidies to encourage employers to provide young people with an apprenticeship or a job opportunity5.

While the notion of a Youth Guarantee promotes an ambitious and comprehensive approach to youth unemployment, it is likely to encounter several obstacles at the national level that could prevent it from fully delivering on its promises and successfully contributing to the prevention and reduction of youth unemployment and NEET rates.

Macroeconomic situation

First of all, in an unfavourable macro-economic situation, the effectiveness of active labour market policies is limited. As noted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), training programmes and job-search assistance work much better in times of high labour demand than during recessions (O’Higgins 2010: 29-30). The OECD has also made it clear that during periods of recession the problem is a lack of jobs rather than the matching of job-seekers and available jobs (2009: 36). Furthermore, prolonged sluggish growth and job creation (Piasna and Bussi 2014, forthcoming) are factors likely to affect the availability of apprenticeships (Brunello, 2009; Felstead, Green and Jewson, 2011). This is important because it is training – whether on-the-job or in-the-classroom – which has been found to be effective in reducing unemployment in the medium run (Card, Kluve and Weber, 2010).

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All of this suggests that the Youth Guarantee schemes should to be developed within a macroeconomic policy framework aimed at reversing the downward economic trend.

Institutional factors

In addition, the success of Youth Guarantees is strongly dependent on the national and regional institutional context as well as on the specific design of the scheme. It is apparent from the examples of the Swedish and Finnish Youth Guarantees that developing a successful Youth Guarantee is a most challenging task (Eurofound, 2012).

Youth Guarantees are highly dependent on the institutional capacity of Public Employment Services (PES) to implement programmes and early intervention in an effective way (Eurofound, 2012). This is crucial because the European Youth Guarantee places the PES at the centre of the implementation process (European Commission, 2012a) in that these bodies are to become the main actors in charge of delivering and managing the provision of measures related to the Youth Guarantee. This means not only that PES need to have enough financial and human resources to cope with an increasing flow of young unemployed, but also that they have to be able to attract young people in the first place, if they are subsequently to achieve their participation in the Youth Guarantee scheme. In some European countries the task of attracting unemployed youngsters and school-leavers may turn out to represent a major initial challenge because services are understaffed (ILO 2012: 49) and because young people, insofar as they are often not eligible for unemployment benefits due to their short or non-existent working experience (Scarpetta, Sonnet and Manfredi, 2010), might have little reason to contact the PES for assistance.

The partnership approach

The partnership approach is a core element of the Youth Guarantee scheme that needs to be developed at the national, regional and local levels (European Commission, 2012a). The partnership approach, defined as the cooperation between PES, schools, youth organisations, training institutions, private employment services, and social partners (European Commission, 2012a: 14), contributes to providing a variety of approaches and alternatives in the efforts to help young people as well as to extending their capacity to reach more of them.

Further, a recent paper argues that the involvement of social partners in the design and implementation of ALMPs generally improves their effectiveness and quality (O’Higgins, 2010). Employers can use programmes as a screening and recruitment device and ensure that programme participants acquire the skills demanded by the labour market. Workers’ representatives, on the other hand, can safeguard the working conditions of participants and promote their
long-term prospects of quality employment’ (O’Higgins, 2010: 30). However, the coordination and inclusion of social partners in the development of active labour market policies is not always the general rule in all member states, and even less so in the development of programmes for youth (for some national examples see the country-specific section of this paper).

In several European countries, the PES already share their market with private employment agencies. However, there often is a clear division of target groups between the public and the private providers: PES tend to target the disadvantaged unemployed while private employment agencies often focus more on persons in receipt of unemployment benefits who are ready to be placed in jobs (Kluve, 2010). In addition, disadvantaged young people often experience longer spells of unemployment which, in the eyes of employers, decreases their attractiveness, particularly during economic downturns (Zimmer, 2012 and Bouvet, 2012), thereby further worsening the relative situation of the already disadvantaged. Hence the task of PES becomes relatively more challenging during recessions.

In terms of the organisation of services, it is important, further, to avoid the overlapping and duplication of efforts that would result in higher expenditure. In terms of financing, there is the need for carefully designed financing rules for agencies working together in order to avoid the risk of shifting-cost games (e.g. agencies ‘shifting’ more disadvantaged people to other agencies in order to reduce the costs) as well as of ‘grey area clientele’ who fall between the cracks of different agency responsibilities (Overbye, 2010: 60).

The challenge, accordingly, is to ensure effective coordination among national and local, public and private agencies, as well as among all relevant stakeholders involved in the partnership approach, in order to achieve a comprehensive and fair coverage of all the young people affected by unemployment.

Sensible targeting

From a consideration of the Nordic experience of Youth Guarantee schemes it is apparent, in relation to the population targeted, that these schemes are likely to be successful for ready-to-work young people, i.e. those who already have the requisite skills for labour market entry. The impact of Youth Guarantee schemes on the hard-to-reach was, by contrast, much lower. This difference is predominantly attributable to the existence of a number of specific barriers faced by members of the latter group and which relate, above all, to social and health problems (Eurofound, 2012).

Another issue arising with regard to targeting relates to definition of the age group targeted by the current design of the European Youth Guarantee. The scheme focuses on young people aged between 15 and 24 years old who are NEETs. Targeting a specific group increases the capacity to develop more customised measures and to achieve concentration of scarce resources.
However, as will be shown in the following section, the high share of NEETs equally gives rise to concern among the older group – and particularly among women – aged between 25 and 29.

Accordingly, the European Parliament has already called for a raising of the age limit to include all young people under 30 (European Parliament, 2013). However, as pointed out by a representative of the European Commission at the ‘Youth event at the margins of the intergovernmental conference on youth employment – For quality jobs’ held in Paris on 11 November, the extension of the age limit would entail a large increase in the population eligible for a Youth Guarantee and consequently a much lower amount of resources allocated per unemployed individual.

It is therefore up to member states faced with high rate of NEETs among the 25-29 age group to develop measures – whether similar to the Youth Guarantee or in some way different – that would be suitable for tackling the problems found among this slightly older population group. Differences in the capacity to focus – where necessary – on this population are most likely to be dependent on the current financial and institutional capacity of the member states in question.

Early intervention, tailored approaches and mutual obligations

Other core elements of the Youth Guarantee are early intervention, a tailored approach to young recipients and mutual obligations between PES and welfare services on the one hand and service recipients on the other.

A tailored approach and early intervention go hand in hand. The tailored approach foreseen in the Youth Guarantee aims at providing the most suitable answers to recipients’ needs, including safety nets that prevent young victims of unemployment from falling into poverty or social exclusion. In addition, early intervention is meant to reduce the long-term scarring effects, for there is a broad consensus on the need to prevent young people from becoming long-term unemployed as this has negative effects in the long term, particularly in terms of well-being and future earnings (Scarpetta et al., 2010; O’Higgins, 2012; Cockx and Picchio, 2011; Blanchflower, 2010). However, effective early intervention is highly dependent on the capacity of PES to deploy the necessary human and financial resources for the timely delivery of services (ILO 2012), even more so when such interventions are to be tailored to individual recipients’ needs. Again, institutional capacity and the professionalisation of street-level workers are of crucial importance in any effort to cope with the specific features and needs of the young unemployed population.

The stress on mutual obligations, also strongly advocated by the OECD (Scarpetta et al., 2010), entails ensuring that receipt of benefits is made conditional on active job search or participation in activation measures by the unemployed youths concerned. The inclusion of mutual obligations in Youth
Guarantee schemes might help to develop safety nets for young people who are often not eligible for unemployment or other social assistance benefits, which is the case in 11 OECD European countries (Scarpetta et al., 2010), entailing the risk of their experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

However, the very idea of mutual obligations is built on the premise that ‘welfare recipients who face the threat of sanctions are capable of complying with the work requirements’ and that ‘the failure to comply signifies a lack of motivation’, as well as the assumption that beneficiaries ‘are aware of the rules and can rationally calculate the costs and benefits of complying’ (Hasenfeld et al., 2004). While this carrot-and-stick approach can have a positive spurring effect for those young people who are ready-to-work and need only light support in their efforts to find a job, its application can be less effective, and even detrimental, in the case of young subject to multiple forms of disadvantage.

In conclusion, it seems that, while the Youth Guarantee can indeed represent a positive instrument for tackling the youth unemployment and NEETs issues, there are some crucial aspects that need to be addressed in order to obtain both short-term and long-lasting positive effects. These include the vital importance of policies designed to stimulate an improvement in the macro-economic situation, the need for an efficient institutional capacity, and the capacity to reach out, with appropriate forms of support, to the most disadvantaged sections of the population.
How are young people (and young adults) doing in the labour market in Europe?

In the second quarter of 2013 nearly 5.5 million young people aged 15 to 24 were unemployed in the European Union (28 Member States), representing an increase of nearly 1.38 million over the same period in 2007. Among young adults aged between 25 and 29 unemployment had risen by 1.5 million since 2007 and reached 3.8 million in the second quarter of 2013 (Eurostat, 2013).

In the EU28 young unemployed in the 15-24 age group represented 23.1% of the corresponding workforce in the first months of 2013, while the unemployment rate among young adults aged 25-29 was 14.4% (Eurostat, 2013).

The situation of youth aged between 15 and 24 is particularly bad in the Mediterranean countries Greece, Spain, Croatia, Portugal and Italy, as well as in recession-hit Ireland. High youth unemployment rates can also be observed in the Central and Eastern European countries (CEEs) Slovakia, Hungary and Poland as well as the Baltic States Lithuania and Latvia. While Western and Northern European countries as a whole are doing better, only Germany, Austria and the Netherlands report single-digit unemployment rates among the youngest section of the workforce. Lastly, whereas unemployment rates among the very young already differed widely across the European Union before the crisis, it is notable that the highest increases from 2007 to 2013 (second quarters) occurred in countries suffering the hardship imposed by austerity programmes, namely Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Greece and Cyprus (see Figure 1).

Furthermore, the rise in unemployment and the protracted economic crisis have increased the risk of long-term unemployment (in the EU28 a 7-percentage-point increase in long-term youth unemployment between 2007 2q and 2013 2q could be observed for young people aged between 15 and 24, data not shown) (Eurostat, 2013), amplified migration outflows from those countries most hit by the crisis such as Ireland (Glynn, Kelly and MacÉinri, 2013), and raised the risk of poverty for households and more vulnerable groups in several countries, particularly those most severely affected by the crisis (European Commission, 2013b: 36).
Figure 1  Youth unemployment rate by age (15-24), 2007 Q2 – 2013 Q2

It is important to realize that the youth unemployment indicator does not refer to the whole of the age cohort in question, the majority of whom are still in education (in several European member states – e.g. Belgium, Poland, the Netherlands, Germany (for some schools), Hungary, Portugal – school attendance is compulsory up to the age of 18 (EACEA, 2012). This is less the case in relation to the young adult population aged between 25 and 29 of whom the vast majority might be expected to be already employed on the labour market or in search of a job – a group that will be analysed more in detail in the next section.

Another frequently used indicator is the youth unemployment ratio. This indicator calculates the share of unemployed among the youth population as a whole (i.e. including the employed, the unemployed and the inactive – who include students) rather than solely within the workforce (i.e. the sum of employed and unemployed). Figure 2 below shows the youth unemployment ratio in 2007 and 2012. Figures look less dramatic than those of youth unemployment and the graph shows a somewhat different picture than the map on youth unemployment; however the distribution of countries across the board is similar to the youth unemployment rate figure (see Figure 1 above).

6. The yearly indicator was chosen instead of a quarterly indicator because in some countries seasonal changes are especially great (e.g. Sweden and Finland).
As can be seen on the right-hand side of Figure 2, Greece and Spain had the highest youth unemployment ratios, namely 16% and 20.6% respectively. Germany, Luxembourg and Austria, on the left-hand side, had a ratio of 5% or less. Considering the evolution of the ratio over time, it will be seen that between 2007 and 2012 there was an increase in a majority of countries, the exceptions being Germany, Austria, Belgium and Malta where ratios decreased over the same period. The highest increase was recorded in Spain where the ratio increased by 11.6 percentage points; in Greece, meanwhile, the increase was 9 percentage points. In Spain at the present time one young person in five is unemployed.

In 2007 the relative low youth unemployment ratios for countries such as Italy, Greece, Portugal, Cyprus, and Bulgaria were also due to very low activity rates (around 30%) and a high share of young people not on the labour market because they were in education or inactive. The increase in the youth unemployment ratio in these countries in 2012 is due to more marked increases in unemployment among the economically active.

Reasons for a high youth unemployment ratio in countries such as Sweden may include both high rates of activity and relative high rates of short-term youth unemployment. Indeed, there has been an increase in the numbers of young people unemployed even in Sweden compared to the beginning of the crisis (see Figure 1); however the share of long-term unemployed (12 months or longer) is still very limited (less than 5%), indicating that unemployment tends to be a temporary condition and that the young people in these countries may tend to declare themselves available for jobs more frequently, given that the combination of study and work or temporary seasonal jobs is widespread among the student population.
An additional indicator partially overcomes the shortcomings of the youth unemployment indicator. This is the NEET rate, referring to young people ‘Not in Employment Education or Training’. NEETs are all those young people living in a country who are part of neither the education/training system nor the labour market.

Young NEETs are a very heterogeneous group because they include young people who are completely inactive or unemployed but also those who have withdrawn from the labour market because of, for example, poor health or for family reasons. The NEETs indicator is thus more comprehensive than the youth unemployment rate because it can be considered as a social indicator showing how large is the share of young people not engaged in any form of education, training or employment. However, this indicator needs to be handled carefully in the design of policies, for its heterogeneity could be potentially misleading or overlooked, thereby making policies based on it ineffective.

In 2012 young NEETs aged between 15 and 24 years old accounted for 13.1% of the whole EU28 population of the same age group. Among the 25-29 age group, the NEETs indicator was, at 20.6% in 2012, even higher.

Eurofound estimates that the economic costs of NEETs in the European Union in 2011 alone added up to €153 billion or 1.2% of GDP in Europe (Eurofound, 2013), whereas ILO cost estimates suggest that Youth Guarantees can be implemented at an annual cost of approximately 0.5 to 1.5 per cent of GDP, including administration and compensation costs, but obviously with differences depending on the national context (ILO, 2012). For the Eurozone the ILO estimated that the costs and allocations of a Youth Guarantee would amount to EUR 21 billion a year (ILO, 2012).

Figure 3 shows that the situation is worst for the youngest labour market cohort in Italy, Greece, Spain, Ireland and Croatia. In addition, however, this indicator shows that Bulgaria, Romania and Cyprus also suffer from a particularly high population of 15-24-year-old NEETs while the CEEs and the Baltic states fare relatively better. Overall, NEET rates increased from 2007 to 2012 in all countries except Austria, Germany and Malta, with the starkest increases taking place in the worst austerity-afflicted countries Greece, Ireland, Spain and Cyprus, as well as in Croatia and Italy.

Most of the increase in NEET rates can be explained by the rise in unemployment. The relative weight of young people unemployed – i.e. looking for a job and available – in the NEET rate is higher in 2012 for countries which recorded a higher inflow of young unemployed. However in the long run, a sluggish labour market recovery may contribute to turn these available job-seekers into discouraged or long-term unemployed or even inactive young people. From a policy perspective, these sub-groups of the NEETs indicator are the most challenging and they call for preventive and remedial measures: preventive measures that would limit long spells of unemployment and remedial measures suitable for meeting specific needs and reaching the least reachable.
Figure 3  NEET rates for young people by age (15-24), 2007-2012

The Youth Guarantee in its narrow definition (providing within four months a good employment offer, training, continuing education or an apprenticeship to all newly unemployed young persons) can help to reduce the waiting period for reabsorbing young people into the labour market. On the other hand, the whole institutional structure and measures supporting the implementation of the Youth Guarantee, namely via partnerships and the tailored approach, may contribute to reaching the most disadvantaged in terms of both education and the labour market. Finally, as already highlighted in the previous section, Youth Guarantee schemes are supply-side measures that, if not complemented by initiatives designed to support the demand for labour, will not deliver on their promises.

Young adults (25-29): safer than their younger siblings?

Unemployment rates among 25-29 year olds are generally lower than among the younger 15-24 age group because their activity rates are higher and thus the denominator of this indicator is much more numerous. Nonetheless, youth adult unemployment increased across the EU, with the exceptions of Germany – where it decreased by 3.2 percentage points between the second quarter of 2007 and 2013 – and Austria. The pattern of cross-country differences is very similar to that of the younger age cohort. Again, the worst situation can be observed in Greece, Spain, Croatia, Portugal, Slovakia, Italy and Ireland. The highest increases can again be found in the austerity-affected countries Greece, Spain, Ireland and Cyprus, with Greece witnessing an increase of 30.1 percentage points.
Figure 4  Youth unemployment in the EU28 by age (25-29), 2007 Q2 – 2013 Q2


Figure 5  NEET rate in the EU28 by age (25-29)

The Central Eastern and Baltic member states most affected by the crisis have seen a substantial increase in their unemployment rates. In particular, Lithuania and Slovenia, and also Bulgaria, saw their rates double between 2007 and 2013 (second quarter).

The share of NEETs among the 25-29 year-olds is even more worrying than among the younger population cohort, particularly because a return to education or training is often not an option for people in the second half of their twenties.

Similarly to the situation among the younger age group, high shares of NEETs (more than 20%) are found principally in Spain, Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, Ireland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Insofar as their ranks are composed of the unemployed and the inactive, it is only to be expected that higher rates will be found in those countries with already high rates of overall and youth unemployment. Most of the increase here is indeed attributable to an increase in the numbers of unemployed young adults rather than to a change in the relative share of inactive persons.

This applies particularly to the cases of Spain and Greece. However, countries like Hungary, Italy, Slovakia and Bulgaria already had high rates of NEETs, particularly in the inactive category, for this age group before the crisis, which may be an indication of structural problems. In 2012 these four countries had respectively 15.4, 18, 12.7, and 18.3 percentage points of inactive young people aged between 25 and 29 (i.e. inactive NEETs) (Eurostat, 2013).
Youth Guarantee implementation, other measures on youth (un)employment, and the opinions of trade unions, by country

The following section presents, in alphabetical order, all the 28 European member states and briefly describes the current and planned measures aimed at tackling youth unemployment. A special focus is given to the programmes explicitly referring to the Youth Guarantee. Whenever possible, national trade unions’ representatives were interviewed on the current measures and any initiatives adopted or announced by their national Governments.

Austria

The Austrian government is working on an implementation plan, even though in this country, according to the European Commission’s assessment, ‘many relevant measures are already being applied’ (European Commission, 2013g).

The Austrian training guarantee (Ausbildungsgarantie) has frequently been referred to as one of the models for the European Youth Guarantee, in particular because of the substantial amount of investment (187 Mio euros) provided and the considerable numbers of apprenticeships founded via this mechanism, as many as 12,300 in 2012 (Austria, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, 2012). The guarantee promises that all young people under the age of 19 and who are unable to find vocational training within three months will be offered a suitable job, company-based apprenticeship, or supra-company apprenticeship financed through public funds (Public Employment Service Austria, 2011).

Although this is a well-established measure that has been in place since 2008, Austria announced, in its 2013 National Reform Programme, the launch of some improvements (Austria, Federal Chancellery, 2013). It is planned to further develop the training guarantee in order to make it an obligation to provide education and training, while particularly addressing NEETs rather than only those young people who are registered as unemployed and unable to enter apprenticeships. This improvement is currently being tested in some provinces.

The Austrian Trade Union Confederation (ÖGB) was involved in the development of the training guarantee and is convinced that the measure is one of the reasons for the low incidence of youth unemployment in Austria. However, the Confederation is also adamant that supra-company apprenticeships should not compete with, or be regarded as a replacement
for, traditional firm-based apprenticeships. Thus, to prevent companies from shifting the training costs to the state, the Confederation calls for an additional tax to be levied on companies so as to cover the expenses of supra-company apprenticeships (\textit{Fachkräftemilliard}e) (Trinko, 2012).

**Belgium**

Belgium announced in its 2013 NRP that, by January 2014, a Youth Guarantee will be implemented in all of the country’s regions (Belgium, 2013). An implementation plan is to be submitted by December 2013 (European Commission, 2013g). Further, four action plans at regional level will be coordinated by the public employment service (Synerjob) for the final implementation plan (European Commission, 2013g). Through the Youth Employment Initiative, EUR 39.64 million have been provisionally allocated to the Belgian regions. The federal government supports the planned Youth Guarantee by funding a total of 10,000 12-month traineeships in the three regions Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels (Belgium, 2013). Furthermore, the federal government has committed additional resources to strengthening the existing policy of reductions in social security contributions for job-seekers having few qualifications, and plans to extend the measure to cover also young people having medium-level qualifications (European Commission, 2012a).

The 2013 NRP claims that Flanders already fulfils the Youth Guarantee through its 2008 \textit{Youth Work Programme} according to which workplace training is offered to unskilled young job-seekers up to the age of 27, work experience projects are offered in the larger cities, and the above-mentioned federally financed integration traineeships are provided for unskilled school-leavers. Furthermore, an action plan to reduce early school-leaving is being drawn up. In the Walloon region and in Brussels, meanwhile, the Youth Guarantee will be implemented in 2014 and regional public employment services are already setting up ad-hoc services that will deal with the new measure.

Last September the Walloon-section of FGTB, one of the three most important trade unions in Belgium, critically assessed the (European) youth guarantee (FGTB, 2013). First of all, the FGTB denounces the fact that frontloading 6 billion euros for the Youth Guarantee will be likely to have important consequences for other labour market institutions if this funding does not come from new resources but is supplied through reallocation (FGTB, 2013). The trade union also fears that the Youth Guarantee will not solve the problem of unemployment if no additional quality jobs and quality counselling are created, while instead unemployment benefits become subject to increasing controls and conditionality without any genuinely new opportunities being created. The FGTB highlights that training courses proposed to young people should be in line with existing jobs. They call for sound investment to improve the quality of state schooling so as to ensure quality core education for all young people. Rethinking working time and better allocation of resources for the financing of education are advocated as the best roads to follow (FGTB, 2013a). The Flemish ACV-CSC supports the European Youth Guarantee and
will actively carry out and implement this measure. However, the ACV-CSC Confederation warns of the risk that the Youth Guarantee could come to resemble a ‘German mini-job’ (ACV-CSC, 2013).

Bulgaria

The Bulgarian government is working on an implementation plan to be submitted by the end of December 2013 and plans to launch its Youth Guarantee in January 2014 (European Commission, 2013g).

According to the Bulgarian Parliament, a first step towards the implementation of the guarantee was the National Initiative Employment for youth in Bulgaria adopted in March 2012, which includes measures for young people up to 29 years old. As a further part of the initiative, the ministries of labour and education agreed to engage in an information exchange contributing to the implementation of the Youth Guarantee (Bulgarian Parliament, 2013). In addition, the social partners are invited to participate in a coordination unit headed by the Minister of Labour and Social Policy which will assess the implementation of the National Initiative and formulate actions to further promote youth employment (Republic of Bulgaria, 2013).

What is more, several schemes financed from the state budget or with support from the ESF under the Operational Programme Human Resource Development are aimed at improving the labour market integration of young people up to the age of 29, by means of, among other things, subsidised employment and traineeships (Bulgarian Parliament, 2013).

The Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria (CITUB) is content with the government’s approach and welcomes the involvement of youth organisations. However, they criticise the slow implementation process and stress that the Youth Guarantee should cover people up to the age of 30 (CITUB, 2013).

Croatia

The Croatian government submitted a first draft of its Youth Guarantee implementation plan in October 2013. The government plans to introduce a Youth Guarantee for all young people up to the age of 29; they should receive a good-quality offer within six months (European Commission, 2013g).

Resources from the European Youth Guarantee, the national budget and the European Social Fund will be used to co-finance the wages and transport of young people. In 2014 EUR 65 million will be earmarked for this measure, and approximately EUR 81 million and EUR 97 million are foreseen for 2015 and 2016 respectively. Measures for 15-24 year-olds will be financed by the European Youth Guarantee budget line while the employment of those in the 25-29 age group will be financed from the national budget or the European
Social Fund (Croatia to join European Youth Guarantee, 2013) (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2013). Further, a special voucher programme covering employers’ benefits contributions will be implemented to help the long-term unemployed (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2013).

While generally welcoming the package of measures proposed by the government under the title ‘Youth Guarantee’, the Croatian Youth Network (MMH) and the Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia (UATUC) criticise the lack of stakeholder involvement as well as a lack of public debate and considerations of quality in the planned implementation of these measures. Specifically, both organisations point to the lack of measures addressing the problem of labour demand without which it is difficult to help young people unemployed for more than six months. They criticise, in addition, the fact that the remuneration for young people following government programmes fails to cover basic needs (Croatian Youth Network, 2013).

Cyprus

The Cyprus House of Representatives described the guarantee as ‘very positive’ while expressing ‘reservations concerning the flexibility of implementation’ of the measure, particularly in the context of austerity (Cyprus House of Representatives, 2013). Nonetheless, Cyprus is working on an implementation plan for the Youth Guarantee and, with support from the International Labour Organisation (ILO), has drawn up a Youth Employment Action Plan (European Commission, 2013g).

Existing measures to alleviate the situation of young people include several schemes aimed at, among other things, increasing youth employment through wage subsidies for young people and graduates; improved careers guidance and work placements for the young unemployed; and a programme offering employers incentives to hire young people aged up to 29 who have been unemployed for at least three months. However, the number of people reached by these projects has been very small (Cyprus, 2013).

Czech Republic

The Czech government submitted a first draft of its implementation plan for the European Youth Guarantee in October 2013 – a final draft is in preparation (European Commission, 2013g). Further, according to its 2013 National Reform Programme, the government aims at improving the public employment service and increasing its staff with the help of an ESF-funded project (Czech Republic, 2013: 43).

However, the Bohemian-Moravian Confederation of Trade Unions (ČMKOS) claims that youth unemployment has received little attention recently and it is critical of the measures implemented over recent years which it describes as ‘one-sided cuts to the social safety net’ (Janicko, 2012: 11). Moreover, the
high reliance of the Czech Government on EU funds for financing measures against youth unemployment is criticised by ČMKOS which states that the political interest in tackling this issue is strictly dependent on the availability of EU funds (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2013). ČMKOS also criticises the lack of evaluation and monitoring of outsourced employment services for young people (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2013).

Denmark

The Danish government is working on an implementation plan scheduled for submission in the first semester of 2014 (European Commission, 2013g). Further, in its 2013 NRP the Government already announced that increased resources had been allocated for several measures aimed at improving vocational education and training (Danish Government, 2013).

Denmark already has a measure similar to a Youth Guarantee in the form of a legal entitlement for young people to participate in active labour market policies; it also stipulates a legal obligation on the part of registered young people to participate in the measures (ILO, 2013). These mutual obligations between PSE and young unemployed vary according to the age and educational level of the recipients (Danish National Labour Market Authority, 2011).

For example, young people under 30 in receipt of unemployment or social assistance benefits are entitled, but also obliged, to accept an offer within three months. The offer can be, for instance, subsidised employment, a traineeship or continued education; in the event of failure to comply with the terms of the offer, the young unemployed person will be sanctioned (loss of benefits) for three weeks. The sanction can be extended if the person continues not to comply with her/his obligations. For younger unemployed people aged under 25 without formal education there is the obligation to attend formal education, but no sanction is foreseen for non-compliance. Active labour market policies are implemented at the local level and social partners are directly involved through national, regional and local councils, thereby guaranteeing their strong and direct involvement (Danish National Labour Market Authority, 2011). Although approving the alternatives offered to young unemployed, FTF (2013) found that some of the alternatives offered to young people neither prepare nor qualify them for a stable job. Therefore FTF suggests redirecting the young unemployed towards sectors with job-shortages (FTF, 2013).

Estonia

Estonia’s implementation plan is in preparation and is scheduled for submission by the end of December 2013 (European Commission, 2013g). Further, the country’s action plan for 2011-2015 (Estonia, 2013a) foresees the development of measures for work, education and training opportunities
and the involvement of young people not in education or employment. The target group is extended to young people between the ages of 16 and 29, thus including a larger population group than foreseen by the European Youth Guarantee. In addition, the conditions for the receipt of wage subsidies for the long-term unemployed are more favourable for young people in the 16–24 age bracket (European Commission, 2012a).

Finland

The Finnish government is working on an implementation plan, even though it is widely assessed that the country already has a comprehensive Youth Guarantee scheme (Eurofound, 2012) (European Commission, 2013g). Since January 2013 Finland has expanded its existing social guarantees into a Youth Guarantee. According to the reformed policy, all young people under the age of 25 as well as recent graduates under the age of 30 will be offered a job, a work trial, a study place, or a period within a workshop or rehabilitation within three months of registering as unemployed (Ministry of Employment and the Economy, Finland, 2013).

In addition, the educational guarantee included in the Youth Guarantee guarantees a study place for each young person finishing basic education. The skills programme for young adults, to be implemented as part of the Youth Guarantee, provides under-30-year-olds who have completed only their basic education with the possibility of obtaining a vocational qualification (Ministry of Employment and the Economy, Finland, 2013).

The means deployed to achieve the Youth Guarantee include educational measures such as apprenticeships and training, as well as language classes and competence training for young migrants designed to enable them to pursue further studies. In addition, wage subsidies are available to young people through the so-called ‘Sanssi card’ (Ministry of Employment and the Economy, Finland, 2013).

As a general principle, the guarantee is based on a model of Public-Private-People partnership approach, which underlines the necessity of including relevant partners such as ministries, social partners, municipalities and, importantly, young people themselves (Ministry of Employment and the Economy, Finland, 2013).

Finland also allocates substantive funding to the tackling of youth unemployment. The country spends 60 million euros on the Youth Guarantee every year, plus a further 79 million euros until 2016 for the skills programme for young adults holding no qualifications (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2013). As pointed out by the European Commission (European Commission, 2013e), the high level of spending turns out to be a sound investment as it prevents the incurring of more protracted and heavier economic and social costs.
The three largest Finish trade unions, SAK, STTK and AKAVA, participated in the working group that devised and implemented the new Youth Guarantee (Finnish Youth Guarantee Working Group, 2012). STTK is satisfied with the new measure but points out that further improvements should be made to prevent young people from becoming NEETs (STTK, 2013).

France

France approved a Youth Guarantee (Garantie Jeunes) in August 2013 based on the report of an ad hoc working group (Wargon and Gurgand, 2013). The guarantee will be initially implemented in the form of pilot projects in 10 of the French départements, with the goal of progressively scaling it up to national level in 2016. The total budget earmarked for the policy is EUR 500 million until 2016; this sum is to be used to target NEETs aged 18 to 25 who were not previously covered by the social assistance legislation (République Française, 2013) (Zapalatski, 2013). During 2013, the pilot projects are intended to reach 10,000 young people while it is planned to reach up to 100,000 participants in 2016.

While it does include provisions for mentoring and counselling (Wargon and Gurgand, 2013), the Garantie Jeunes is conceived as an offshoot measure to the Revenu de Solidarité Active (RSA – social assistance) rather than as a genuine form of Youth Guarantee. It will be provided by the local public employment offices (missions locales) and it also includes a financial support equivalent to the RSA (450 euros). Hence, the French Garantie is qualitatively different from the Youth Guarantee suggested by the Council, most importantly because it does not promise an offer for education, training or employment within a specified timeframe and because the access to the scheme is means-tested. However, the French government is also preparing an implementation plan for the European Youth Guarantee (European Commission, 2013g), which might bring further changes to the current setup.

The trade unions did not take part in the negotiations on the Garantie Jeunes within the ad hoc working group but were invited to present their opinions to the members of the group. Nevertheless, the trade unions welcome the Youth Guarantee as an effective policy to improve the conditions of young people in society and on the labour market. However, they are concerned about the heavy workload entailed by this policy for the missions locales as well as about the future of the guarantee after 2016 (CFDT, 2013).

Germany

Even though the German government initially claimed that existing measures would be sufficient (Deutscher Bundestag, 2013), the European Comission has stated that Germany is preparing an implementation plan for the Youth Guarantee to be submitted by the end of the first quarter of 2014 (European Commission, 2013g).
The measures initially cited are an obligation for public employment services to provide applicants for social assistance (Arbeitslosengeld II) (§ 3 (II) (Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 2013) with an offer for employment or training within six weeks of the application and, further, the obligation to review the integration agreements (Eingliederungsvereinbarungen) of job- or apprenticeship-seekers aged under 26 after three months instead of six months as it is the norm for older job seekers. In contrast to the Recommendation made by the Council, however, the first measure applies only to those in receipt of social assistance and not to all young unemployed persons. In addition, the German government pointed to the pact on apprenticeships (Ausbildungspakt), a voluntary agreement between the government and employers’ organisations to provide all young people ready and willing to take up vocational training with an apprenticeship (Deutscher Bundestag, 2013). For the future, the Federal Government aims at intensifying support for initial vocational training by financing the skills upgrading of young people in the 25-34 age bracket (Germany, 2013).

The German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) strongly disagrees with the German government’s initial argument, criticising, in particular the situation whereby a large number of young people are stuck in the so-called ‘transition programmes’ intended to provide a temporary solution for young people who have been unable to enter apprenticeships. Some 266,000 young people are covered by these programmes. According to the DGB this approach does not create jobs and simply staves off the need for quality education. The trade union confederation points out, further, that more than 1.4 million young people aged between 20 and 29 remain without a decent apprenticeship or any other similar VET education and many of those who do have a job or apprenticeship are engaged in temporary and atypical work. Therefore, the DGB is discussing a guarantee for apprenticeships that, while being more specific and centred on apprenticeships, would meet the needs of and comply with the country’s socio-economic context (DGB, 2013).

Greece

Greece is preparing a Youth Guarantee implementation plan with the focus on filling gaps and building bridges between existing policies while paying special attention to NEETs (European Commission, 2013g).

Further, it is intended to implement a national youth action plan using EUR 517 million in European funds to promote employment, training and entrepreneurship with the aim of benefiting up to 350,000 young people. Measures combined under the plan include the already launched temporary hiring programme for unemployed persons below the age of 35 in community-based work programmes in the cultural sector and support for social structures aimed at tackling poverty and social exclusion (European Commission, 2013e). In addition, in July 2013, the country launched a youth internship and employment voucher programme under the Youth Action Plan, aimed at supporting vocational training and internships for a six-month period.
for 45,000 young people up the age of 29 (Greece, 2013). A further EUR 1.2 billion is being allocated to address the liquidity needs of small and medium-sized companies, with a view to, among other things, strengthening youth employment (European Commission, 2013e).

The General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) supports the implementation of a Youth Guarantee and does not oppose the measures envisaged by the Greek government as long as they are not used for deregulation of the labour code or to replace workers under conditions more favourable to employers (GSEE, 2013). However, the GSEE points out that these measures are insufficient, taken on their own, to improve the situation of young people. The trade union confederation calls, accordingly, for a complementary macroeconomic investment plan.

Hungary

Hungary has not yet implemented the European Youth Guarantee, but an implementation plan is in preparation (European Commission, 2013g). In addition, the country has launched several schemes to reduce youth unemployment. Under the so-called ‘Job Guarantee Programme’ employers agreeing to hire young labour market entrants are being refunded the wage and social contribution tax for these employees. The programme is only temporary, however, running from March until December 2013 (Government of Hungary, 2013). Further tax relief for, among others, career starters is offered through the Job Protection Plan and, from February 2013 until April 2014, companies can apply for participation in subsidised traineeships for young people with secondary education who already acquired the practical skills of their profession during a traineeship. Entrepreneurship courses and non-refundable financing are aimed at increasing entrepreneurship among the 18-35-year-olds. Lastly, the Hungarian government envisages supporting NGO-based employment programmes to help young people enter the labour market (Government of Hungary, 2013).

In the view of the Forum for the Co-operation of Trade Unions (SZEF), the Job Guarantee Programme improved from 2012 to 2013 and the obligation to further the employment of young people is welcomed. However, these measures still fall short of a genuine Youth Guarantee. In 2012, the number of supported young workers was about 7000 and there is no data about how many of them were able to remain in the workplace when the support ceased. Trade unions generally support the idea of incentives to hire young people, but the programme is not completely new. It was renamed and minor changes have been made but it remains very similar to the earlier programme (START) which had been running since 2004 (SZEF, 2013).
Ireland

Ireland was severely affected by the crisis and still suffers from very high youth unemployment rates, despite migration flows particularly among the highly educated (Glynn, Kelly and MacÉinri, 2013).

An implementation plan for the Youth Guarantee is scheduled for submission before the end of 2013 (European Commission, 2013g) and a pilot project in a disadvantaged area of Dublin that will test the Youth Guarantee scheme has been launched. The EU co-funded project will be organised with stakeholders from the Irish Business and Employers’ Confederation (IBEC), the Ballymun Job Centre and the National Youth Council of Ireland. The expected costs of the pilot scheme are €302,279, €250,000 of which are sought from the EU. A total of 90 people will benefit from the project over a 12-month period, meaning that the allocation per recipient will be above €3000 (House of the Oireachtas, 2013).

Already existing arrangements are the national JobBridge internship scheme, that provides paid work experience placements for a period of 6 to 9 months, Pathways to Work which provides training to the unemployed, and the Action Plan for Jobs which targets job creation in general (European Commission, 2012a). However, none of these policies is specifically addressed to young people.

Italy

On 31 October 2013 the Italian government approved a preparatory document for the Garanzia Giovani. Although this document does not tackle all core aspects of the Youth Guarantee in concrete terms, the European Commission has stated that the Italian government is working on an implementation plan for the Youth Guarantee (Garanzia Giovani) (European Commission, 2013g). In August 2013 some measures targeting youth unemployment and the search for work were already implemented (subsidies to employers who hire young people under 29 on open-ended contract). The Government reports that, as of October 2013, 12000 young people had been hired (Struttura di missione istituita presso il Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, 2013). In 2011 a reform of apprenticeships was introduced (Ministero del Lavoro, 2013) and the current government, together with the regions, approved the entry into force of both a common framework for internships (Presidenza del Consiglio dei ministri, 2013) and a decree-law on emergency measures to revive employment and support social inclusion.

The decree-law includes recruitment incentives, internship subsidies and incentives for work-study training for 18-29 year old job-seekers and disabled workers. These measures aim at preparing the introduction of a Youth
Guarantee. The targeted regions are mainly in southern Italy where NEET rates are the highest. At national level, the decree-law includes internship scholarships in the civil service for young skilled workers (2€ million until 2015), incentives to do work-study training for college students (15€ million for the period 2013/2014), stronger links between technical and professional schools and businesses, and common rules for traineeships in the private and the public sector. The decree-law appears to be aimed at improving the institutional capacity of PES in order to manage the Youth Guarantee effectively. PES capacity would appear to be one of the weakest elements of the Italian active labour market institutions (Pastore, 2013).

The three main trade unions (CGIL, CSIL and UIL) welcome and support the approval of the framework for internships and the steps taken towards the implementation of the Youth Guarantee. However, CGIL criticizes the fact that the maximum age is set at 25 and not 29 years which will prevent a large share of NEETs and unemployed from benefitting from these measures. Further, CGIL underlines its disappointment at not having been consulted during the design of the Decree. The unions now expect the government and the regions to keep their promise and invite them to participate in the monitoring process (CGIL, 2013). Further, in October 2013, CGIL published its guidelines for the Youth Guarantee after a meeting with the Minister of Labour. The most significant points of the proposal are the extended coverage of the Youth Guarantee for young people up to the age of 29, the inclusion of the civil service as an opportunity for NEETs and the ‘certificate and monitoring’ phase that should ensure the qualitative and quantitative assessment of the newly implemented measures (CGIL, 2013a).

Latvia

The Latvian government is working with several partners on an implementation plan for the Youth Guarantee that is scheduled for submission in December 2013 (European Commission, 2013g).

Recent measures already implemented are Workplace for Youth and Support for Youth Volunteering. The former financially supports job creation for young people in the private sector while the latter fosters volunteering of young people in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Latvia, 2013). In 2012, 2454 young people were involved in these measures. In addition, for 2013 the implementation of the Youth Workshops programme is foreseen; this is a scheme intended to provide 250 young people with the opportunity to experience three different occupations within three weeks (Latvia, 2013). Lastly, the ESF-sponsored Promotion of Primary Vocational Education Attraction programme, which provided scholarships to 31,983 vocational education students, ended in August 2013 (State Education Development Agency (Latvia), 2013). Latvian trade unions support the implementation of the ESF-funded training programme and emphasise the importance of initial vocational training (IVET) for young people without school-leaving qualifications.
Lithuania

The Lithuanian government submitted a first draft of its implementation plan in October 2013 and is preparing a final version. The plans for the Youth Guarantee include an analysis of weaknesses in existing schemes as well as new partnerships across policy sectors (European Commission, 2013g).

Under the latest measure to tackle unemployment, ‘More Jobs 2014-2020’, introduced by the Lithuanian government and approved by the country’s tripartite committee, youth unemployment is to be tackled by increasing job matching as well as promoting entrepreneurship. In addition to better matching, it was decided that schools and social partners should work together to ensure that ‘jobseekers under 25 would systematically be offered, within 4 months, an internship, an apprenticeship place or a job’ (Planet Labor, 2013) which is in line with the European Youth Guarantee. To this end, the number of apprenticeship places will be doubled by 2020. Furthermore, the government proposed cheap loans to support employment in small companies, in particular in regions with high unemployment and for high-skilled positions. Whereas the promised ‘guarantee’ would apply only for young people under 25, firms may receive subsidies for hiring young people up the age of 28 (Planet Labor, 2013).

Moreover, a number of measures addressing youth unemployment have already been implemented (Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, 2013); several of these are supported by the European Social Fund (European Commission, 2013f).

Luxembourg

The government of Luxembourg already submitted a ‘substantial’ first draft of its implementation plan in October 2013 and is preparing a final plan (European Commission, 2013g). Currently two pilot projects are running. Started at the beginning of this year, they involve 100 young people each of whom will receive a personalised action plan. Luxembourg’s Youth Guarantee explicitly refers to the European Youth Guarantee and foresees intervention within four months for young people registered with the public employment service (Schmit, 2013).

Furthermore, the Luxembourg public employment service (ADEM) offers three specific youth employment measures. The Contrat d’Appui-Emploi is a specifically designed work contract for low-skilled young people, which stipulates a 32-hour week to allow young people to gain a first work experience while still having time for further job search and training. Under the Contrat d’Initiation à l’Emploi young people first receive (on-the-job) training and supervision before being offered a long-term contract with the company. To this end, ADEM reimburses 50% of the wage cost as well as the employer’s share of social security taxes. Similarly, the Contrat d’Initiation à l’Emploi – Experience Pratique, which was introduced as a response to the financial
crisis, subsidises the employment of qualified young people (Luxembourg, Agence pour le développement de l’emploi, 2011).

Luxembourg’s OGBL is generally supportive of the Youth Guarantee and of the government’s steps towards implementing it (OGBL, 2013).

Malta

Malta has not yet implemented the Youth Guarantee, but plans on launching it in March 2014. An implementation plan is in preparation (European Commission, 2013g).

Moreover, a number of measures supporting youth employment were envisaged in the 2013 NRP (Malta, 2013). The Active Youth for Employment Programme is aimed at increasing the employability of young people, helping them to make informed decisions and provide them with the skills and motivation to enter the labour market, retain their jobs and progress within the workplace. To this end, the programme envisages young people passing through systematic procedures with specified timeframes including activation measures and training courses to develop their skills.

A Work Trial Scheme is foreseen for young jobseekers in the sixth and ninth month of the programme. Additional programmes target the needs of disabled persons, promote entrepreneurship and support voluntary work. Lastly, a plethora of instruments aimed at increasing youth employment have been devised in the context of the National Youth Employment Strategy 2015 published in February 2013, financed both by national and European funds (Maltese Ministry of Education and Employment, 2013). Measures under the National Youth Employment Strategy address young people aged between 15 and 24 who are job-seekers or inactive, but also those already in work. The measures include preventive measures for early school-leavers (of whom there is a high rate in Malta), facilitating the transition from school to work, favouring the integration of young job-seekers in the labour market, but also supporting the sustainability of the jobs, for instance, through supporting lifelong learning, tackling undeclared work and poor working conditions, as well as ensuring better forecasts of skill needs on the markets.

The Netherlands

The Dutch government is preparing an implementation plan scheduled for submission in 2014 (European Commission, 2013g).

Although the UWV WERKbedrijf (PES delivering services to the unemployed) was already committed to providing school-leavers with a job after three months (Drost and van Wel, 2011), young people could not legally claim a job offer or a training place after this period (ILO, 2013). Under the new regime of the UWV Werkbedrijf, young people receive unemployment benefits
depending on their work history. The current regime also foresees that those unemployed for less than a year are entitled to e-coaching, while those entitled to more than a year of unemployment benefits will get personal coaching. This means that often young people are entitled to e-coaching alone because of their short working history (FNV, 2013).

Moreover, since the end of the Investment in Youth Act (Wet investeren in Jongeren, i.e. social assistance) in January 2013, young people under 27 fall under the same legal procedure as any other unemployed. However, young people do not automatically receive unemployment benefits and they have to wait 4 weeks and show proof of active job-search activities; otherwise their benefits can be cut or not granted at all. FNV (2013) explains that the Investment in Youth Act was not renewed because of reduced budgets. However, at the beginning of 2013 an anti-crisis package was approved by the new government and this included measures to tackle (youth) unemployment.

Measures that are currently implemented or that will be implemented at the beginning of 2014 are the Sociaal Akkoord – Social Agreement signed in April 2013 and financial support to municipalities and schools to combat both youth unemployment and school and training drop out. Within the framework of the agreement, the government has made €600 million available to the social partners to tackle unemployment through sectoral plans; a third of this sum will be allocated for tackling youth unemployment in 2014 and 2015. Projects are decided at sectoral level, thus also with the involvement of trade unions, and they mainly target the creation of apprenticeship and traineeship places, but also other measures such as mentoring. Government financial support for the agreement will be complemented by an additional €600 million that will be given by the social partners, again with a third of the sum earmarked for young people. In total, €400 million have been earmarked for tackling youth unemployment for 2014 and 2015 (FNV, 2013).

Furthermore, the government has made €80 million available to the municipalities (55 million) and schools (25 million) to tackle the problem of school drop-outs and devise regional action plans to tackle youth unemployment (35 municipalities). Each region developed its plan some weeks ago in accordance with specific regional needs.

FNV, while favourable to the introduction of a Youth Guarantee, states that there are already positive programmes in operation to combat youth unemployment in the Netherlands, which has seen youth unemployment rate at high levels compared to the usual overall rates for the country (FNV, 2013).

Poland

The Polish government submitted a first implementation plan in October 2013 and a final plan is in preparation (European Commission, 2013g). Already, article 50(1) of the Polish Act on Promotion of Employment and Labour Market Institutions (Polish Parliament, 2004) stipulates that ‘within
the period of up to 6 months from the registration date, the unemployment agency ‘shall present to [young people under 25, 27 for graduates] an offer of employment, other paid work, internship, on-site occupational preparation or employment within the scope of intervention or public works’ (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 2013). In addition, several activation measures are offered to young people by the Polish public employment service (European Commission, 2012a).

However, while in 2011 50 per cent of the 18-to-24 year-old unemployed found a job within six months, 25 per cent remained unemployed for more than 13 months. Further, more than two thirds of those using the public employment service to find a job were dissatisfied with the services received (Polakowski, 2012:16).

Within the guidelines of the European Youth Guarantee, the Polish government is planning to introduce the Your Career – Your Choice programme (Twoja Kariera – Twój Wybór) which is currently being tested as a pilot programme. The policy combines individual support for young unemployed with an activation promise through qualification vouchers (training, vocational and education, internship), coupons for employers for employing higher education graduates and housing subsidies for relocation within Poland (OPZZ, 2013).

It is foreseen, in addition, that the public employment service will support the programme by reducing the period during which young people have to receive an offer from six to four months, providing job-seekers under 30 with an individual advisor, facilitating employment for jobseekers under 30 by temporarily exempting them from social security contributions when taking up employment or vocational internships, and introducing tripartite training contracts. The state-owned bank BGK (Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego) will provide loans and support to young entrepreneurs while voluntary labour corps (Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy – OHP) will provide vocational training and support for VET graduates. Lastly, labour market partners may introduce customised measures on the regional level (OPZZ, 2013). However, financing provided through the European Youth Guarantee will be available only in the ten Polish regions where youth unemployment rates currently exceed 25% and not in all 16 regions (OPZZ, 2013).

The Polish trade unions were not involved in the development of Your Career – Your Choice. However, the All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions (OPZZ) and the Trade Unions Forum (FZZ) generally welcome the programme. At the same time, OPZZ criticises the lack of financial support from the employer-financed Labour Fund for active labour market measures and the planned replacement of some subsidies with loans. FZZ points out that the planned housing subsidies will be insufficient to improve the mobility of young people and that the discrimination between regions should be reconsidered. Lastly, both unions point out that the core problem of too few jobs for young people is simply not being addressed.
Portugal

Portugal is working on an implementation plan to be submitted by the end of December 2013 (European Commission, 2013g). The Youth Guarantee is planned to target NEETs, particularly the 15-24 age group. In addition, the young unemployed will continue to be targeted by the already implemented Impulso Jovem (European Commission, 2013g). The latter includes professional internships and support to employers for hiring young people via reductions of social security contributions (Governo de Portugal, 2013). The target group are young people aged 18 to 30 and the programme is co-financed by the structural funds.

An expert contribution from Portugal points out that, unfortunately, the austerity measures have drastically reduced the quality of the services provided (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2013). Moreover, the Portuguese trade union confederations also pointed out that the Impulso Jovem had not, in its initial form, led to the desired results (UGT-P, 2013).

However, all the social partners including the trade union confederations were involved not only in the design of the programme but also in the monitoring of its implementation. This allowed the trade union confederations to introduce some changes into this programme, namely the standardisation of measures and an increase in their availability to a wider group of youngsters. So far, the trade union confederations consider that these changes are proving very positive in terms of results. Further, they support the idea that this programme should comply with the objectives of the Youth Guarantee in terms of measures and the age group targeted (UGT-P, 2013).

Romania

An implementation plan for the Youth Guarantee is in preparation. The Romanian government plans to introduce a 6-month traineeship contract with the possibility of an open-ended contract (European Commission, 2013g).

Further, according to the country’s 2013 NRP (Romania, 2013), Romania foresees the introduction of a pilot Youth Guarantee scheme aimed at increasing labour market access of NEETs aged 15 to 24 years who failed to complete secondary education. The measure contains no clear reference to the early intervention period of four months laid down in the European Youth Guarantee, but it does include counselling services, internships and traineeships complemented with certified diplomas, youth job-fairs, apprenticeships, business counselling and the promotion of youth entrepreneurship.

In addition, in May 2013 Romania was preparing a National Plan for Youth Employment (European Commission, 2013a). The measure focuses on two main issues: supporting entrepreneurship and improving the matching between
schools’ curricula and labour market needs, including via partnerships. Mobility bonuses and job subsidies, professional careers guidance and entrepreneurship counselling, support for apprenticeships as well as traineeships for higher education graduates and monitoring of the labour market insertion of young graduates, are also foreseen (European Commission, 2013a).

Slovakia

Until the end of 2013, the Slovak government envisages the preparation and adoption of the Youth Guarantee for young people under 25 with the involvement of the ministries of Labour (MoLSAF) and Education (MoESRS) (Slovak Republik, 2013). A first draft of the implementation plan was submitted in October 2013 (European Commission, 2013g) and the policy is planned to be launched in 2014, as soon as funding becomes available (Slovak Republik, 2013).

An already existing project which will form part of the Youth Guarantee is an ESF financed programme, financing employers’ social security contributions for employees aged up to 29 in regions with the highest unemployment rates. In addition, the Slovak government plans to implement an incentive scheme for young people with low skills which will support their voluntary participation in education and training measures (Slovak Republik, 2013a).

The European Commission points out that Slovakia’s implementation plan should focus on the most marginalized young people, particularly those belonging to the Roma population, and that partnerships between relevant institutions will be necessary (European Commission, 2013g).

Slovenia

Slovenia is preparing a Youth Guarantee implementation plan that will not, however, follow the detailed Youth Guarantee plan suggested by the European Commission (European Commission, 2013g). In 2012 Slovenia announced measures to make work for enrolled students more costly so that it would be less in competition with other forms of work and thereby reduce labour market segmentation. For 2014 the country is planning measures to promote vocational education and concrete projects linking the entrepreneurial environment with the education system, expert discussion on a reform of vocational education and of its placement within the overall Slovenian framework of qualifications (Government of the Republic of Slovenia, 2013).

Spain

Spain is working on an implementation plan for the Youth Guarantee to be submitted in December 2013 (European Commission, 2013g). Further, in March 2013, the head of the Spanish government presented to the trade union
and employers’ representatives 100 measures which constitute the *Strategy for Entrepreneurship and Youth Employment 2013/2016* (Gobierno de España, 2013). The plan consists of 15 key emergency measures, most of them concerning people under the age of 30, which will primarily rely on lowering employers’ contributions to recruit and facilitate access to a first job, training incentives for people under 30, and tax incentives promoting business start-up or self-employment. These measures have already been approved via a decree-law adopted on February 22 (Planet Labor, 2013a). The remaining 85 measures aim, in the medium run, to revise the educational and training system to improve the professional integration of young people and to foster a better environment for business start-up.

This strategy emerged after of a process of dialogue and participation of the Government with the social partners. The process itself has been viewed positively by the unions (CCOO and UGT) because many of their proposals were taken into account by the government (CCOO, 2013). However, a final agreement could not be reached because the unions saw the government’s strategy as being framed within an economic policy which is principally aimed at improving public accounts rather than fostering economic activity and job creation. Furthermore, CCOO criticises the fact that the decree-law approving the strategy incorporated a number of measures which had been subject to neither consultation nor discussion with the social partners, including a bonus offered to companies for hiring young people through integration companies (*empresas de integración*) and the possibility for temporary work companies to sign training contracts. This last measure was an amendment to the then existing regulation of temporary work companies and meant a redefinition of their role in the labour market (CCOO, 2013).

**Sweden**

Sweden introduced a form of Youth Guarantee as long ago as 1984 (ILO, 2012). However, an implementation plan, designed to adapt its current scheme, is in preparation for submission by the end of 2013 (European Commission, 2013g).

The current scheme, introduced in 2007, targets young unemployed people aged between 16 and 24 who have been registered as unemployed for three months, or who have been working less hours than they were willing or able to, and are entitled to compensation from the unemployment benefit fund, as well as having participated in the labour market programme concerning work-life introduction (LO/TCO, 2013).

During the first three months of registered unemployment, young people are offered careers guidance, counselling and job search services. Thereafter, participants are offered work experience programmes in different forms including practical skills development, entrepreneurship and vocational rehabilitation (Eurofound, 2012) (LO/TCO, 2013). When participating in
activation measures, young people receive a daily allowance of between 25€-80€ (LO/TCO, 2013). Further, measures are also being undertaken to raise the quality of the Job Guarantee for young people (Sweden, 2013). Sweden has also foreseen measures for assisting young people unemployed long-term, a group who might be more difficult to reach with the Youth Guarantee. Young people who have been unemployed long-term (i.e. for at least 12 months) receive a subsidy equivalent to twice the social security contributions and, for this group, the age limit for qualifying for the relocation grant, aimed at stimulating mobility from unemployment to employment among a larger target group, has been lowered from 25 to 20 (Sweden, 2013).

The Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) and the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (TCO) are critical of several aspects of the current scheme. Firstly, the measure treats young people as a homogenous group, which they are not. Secondly, the mandatory waiting period of three months before young people can access activation measures can have a scarring effect, while if the training measures provided are of low quality, they can have the effect of locking the most deprived young people into unemployment or inactivity. Thirdly, those who are eligible for unemployment benefits through work experience have their benefits replaced by the lower Youth Guarantee allowance. Further, while long-term unemployed young people will become eligible for social assistance, this has a stigmatising effect. Fourthly, the quality of the training and other measures offered under the Youth Guarantee is too low (LO/TCO, 2013).

What is more, instead of paying long-term unemployed young people twice the social security contributions, TCO suggests a wage subsidy for those affected which would increase their wage to the level set by collective agreements. At the same time, employers are entitled to receive some reductions in the salary paid to young people. Lastly, the trade unions point out that their *de facto* involvement in the 2007 revision of the Youth Guarantee was very low. Further, the reforms in the governance of the public employment service increasingly reduced the involvement of trade unions in this public institution (LO/TCO, 2013).

The country’s 2013 NRP plans some improvements in delivering places for apprenticeships and the level of financial support for studies will be raised for those not registered with the job guarantee. LO/TCO argued that these measures are not to contributing substantially to combating youth unemployment because they do not affect young people who are unemployed but young people who are finished schools (only the municipal sector also welcomes youth who are unemployed). Moreover the agreements target all people aged between 16 and 24 but actually most of young people who get access are 18, since the completion of an upper secondary education degree in a technical or professional school is requested. Finally, while the Government aims at 30000 places, less than 1000 places have been made available so far.
United Kingdom

The United Kingdom, which has not implemented the European Youth Guarantee, is the only country to have stated that it will not submit to the Commission an implementation plan for the Youth Guarantee (European Commission, 2013g).

The country’s main policy addressing youth unemployment is the ‘Youth Contract’ which was launched in April 2012 and earmarks a total of £1bn for schemes to help young people to find employment (HM Government, 2013: 27). The measures combined in the Youth Contract, such as the Work Programme, include wage incentives and work experience schemes targeted at 18-24 year olds.

However, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) has repeatedly denounced the lack of effectiveness of the Work Programme, particularly for vulnerable people (Trades Union Congress, 2013). Moreover, in October 2012, the TUC strongly criticised the decision to replace the previous government’s Youth Guarantee with the new Youth Contract. The TUC’s research supporting this position showed that the Government had drastically reduced the level of support previously supplied in the form of the Job Seeker’s Allowance (Trades Union Congress, 2012). The TUC also denounced the fact that these cuts, coupled with the axing of the Education Maintenance Allowance and the steep increase in university fees, will exacerbate young people’s situation and reduce their chances of finding a decent long-term job (Trades Union Congress, 2012).

In January 2013 a programme of grants for SMEs (an SME can have up to 1000 employees) recruiting young people between the ages of 16 and 24 was extended to December 2013. In England, the National Apprenticeship Service is currently being revised. A programme for traineeships as an intermediate step on the path to employment or apprenticeships is also in the pipeline (HM Government, 2013).

In addition, the devolved administrations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have their own policies regarding education and skills (European Commission, 2012a; HM Government, 2013). In Scotland, the ‘Opportunities for All’ strategy is a commitment to offer a place in education or training to 16-19 year olds not already in education, training or employment (The Scottish Government, 2012).
Preliminary conclusions

The launch of the European Youth Guarantee has drawn considerable attention to the serious issue of youth unemployment. The aim of this contribution is to present the Youth Guarantee and contextualise some of its features, to map the commitment shown by member states, over the past year, to dealing with soaring youth unemployment rates, while also providing, wherever possible, a trade union perspective.

Although the implementation of the Youth Guarantee is a moving target, the analysis shows that most EU countries have expressed some degree of commitment, within varying timeframes, to implementation of a national Youth Guarantee scheme. While some countries took the initiative following the proposal of the European Commission in December last year, others, after an initially cold response to the proposal, are currently, one year later, designing and submitting their Youth Guarantee Implementation Plans. Although the issue does not fall directly under EU competences and no ‘hard law’ is applicable to it, the Youth Guarantee has been fully incorporated into the European Semester via the 2013 Country-Specific Recommendations. This reference to a specific and named measure, as well as the additional financial support allocated at the European level, are likely to have encouraged member states to think of the Youth Guarantee as a plausible all-round toolbox with which to tackle the scourge of escalating youth unemployment and the increased share of NEETs.

The definition of the Youth Guarantee adopted by the Commission is simultaneously broad and ambitious: while leaving sufficient room for national-level adaptation of the measure, it identifies clear common and minimum criteria, such as the timeframe of intervention (four months) and the age range of the young people to whom the measures are to apply (15-24). Indeed, insofar as the Youth Guarantee is a supply-side measure, its impact will be highly dependent on the overall macro-economic situation, the availability of jobs accessible to the young people being targeted, as well as the availability of training – particularly on-the-job – and apprenticeships. Moreover, the capacity of member states to fully implement a national Youth Guarantee or similar measures will also be dependent on the financial capacity of each country to fund or co-finance the requisite schemes.
European funding, whether from the European Social Funds or the Youth Employment Initiative, should not be the only source of financing if a fair coverage and the sustainability and durability of the programmes are to be achieved.

Recent figures from Eurostat have pictured a quite bleak situation also for large number of young adults aged between 25 and 29. As this next age group up is not directly targeted by the Youth Guarantee, it will be up to those member states experiencing high rates of unemployment and NEETs among this age group to modify and adapt the scheme to the needs of this still youthful population that might require an approach somewhat different from that applicable to the under-25s.

The role of partnership and the inclusion of social partners have been strongly supported by the European Commission on a number of occasions; and yet, in some of the countries investigated, trade unions perceive their involvement in this area as insufficient.

The forthcoming release of the Youth Implementation Plans drafted by member states – the procedure put in place to prompt the development and initiate the implementation of new measures in this field – will allow a first concrete idea to be gained of the extent to which member states seriously seek to comply with the Commission proposal. Moreover, the design and mode of implementation of the Plans will also allow a preliminary assessment to be made of their potential capacity to overcome some of the challenges identified in the first part of this contribution.
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