



The implementation of the reinforced Youth Guarantee – Trends in EU Member States, impact, EU funding and governance

European
implementation
assessment

STUDY



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The implementation of the reinforced Youth Guarantee – Trends in EU Member States, impact, EU funding and governance

European implementation assessment

This European implementation assessment of the 2020 Council Recommendation on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee (the 'Reinforced Youth Guarantee, or 'RYG') aims to inform the ongoing work of the European Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) on an own-initiative implementation report on the RYG (2025/2184(INI)).

The assessment is composed of two parts. The first part is an introduction by the European Parliamentary Research Service that provides the essential historical background, including an overview of selected evaluations, Parliament's position, and a complementary analysis on young people not in education, employment or training. The second part is an evaluation study undertaken by a team of external experts that aims to provide an updated assessment of the RYG's implementation. It is guided by three core objectives: (i) to assess current trends in implementation at Member State level; (ii) to analyse the impact of the 2020 reinforcement in addressing previously identified challenges; and (iii) to examine the role of EU funding and governance mechanisms. Based on interviews, a survey, desk research, and extended national research in 10 selected Member States, the study provides key findings and policy recommendations to tackle the implementation gaps identified.

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Executive summary

About this European implementation assessment

The evaluation study, together with this introductory analysis, are part of the European implementation assessments series produced by the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS). These European implementation assessments are made available to committees that work on implementation reports as part of the European Parliament's commitment to the Better Regulation agenda and notably its 'evaluate first' principle.

This European implementation assessment of the reinforced Youth Guarantee (RYG) was produced by EPRS to support the work of the European Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) on an own-initiative implementation report on the RYG (2025/2184(INI)).

The introductory analysis (Part I)

The in-house introductory analysis provides a background to the origins of the initial Youth Guarantee from 2013 and the rationale for reinforcing it in 2020. Under the 2013 Youth Guarantee Council recommendation, Member States were to ensure that all young people under 25 receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed. In addition to an overview of selected evaluations, both of the RYG and its predecessor, it also examines the RYG's main target group: young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs).

In particular, the introductory analysis explains who NEETs are, why this indicator is used, and how NEET rates in the EU have evolved over time. In this context, it draws particular attention to a persisting NEET gender gap, with NEET rates among young women exceeding those of young men in the EU for more than a decade up until today. Based on recent statistics, it highlights that young women (and particularly those with caring responsibilities) are, on average, not only more likely to become a NEET than men; however, once they are NEETs, they are also more likely to be outside the labour force (i.e. not actively seeking work) than young male NEETs. This may be linked to structural barriers and, in particular, the unequal burden of caregiving responsibilities.

Moreover, this part outlines the European Parliament's position on the RYG, as detailed in several of its resolutions and parliamentary questions.

Finally, it outlines the scope, objectives, limitations and key findings of the external evaluation study.

The evaluation study (Part II)

The evaluation study on the implementation of the RYG was commissioned by EPRS from an external contractor (Milieu). The study was carried out between May and December 2025. It was guided by three core objectives: (i) to assess current trends in implementation at Member State level, focusing on the effectiveness of national YG schemes across multiple dimensions; (ii) to analyse the impact of the 2020 reinforcement in addressing previously identified challenges; and (iii) to examine the role of EU funding and governance mechanisms. The study scope extends to both the EU- and

Member-State level, with focused national research carried out across 10 selected Member States: Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland, Spain, Italy, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland, Finland and Sweden. The study draws from desk research, semi-structured interviews with EU-level stakeholders, and national YG coordinators, as well as surveys distributed to the managing authorities (MAs) of relevant operational programmes (OPs).

The study finds that the RYG has served as a catalyst for institutional reform and policy innovation across the sample of Member States, with EU funding levels appearing broadly adequate and accessible. Against a backdrop where average rates of NEETs have reached record lows, the RYG's impact has nonetheless been uneven, in terms of both the extent of national adoption of the 2020 recommendation's new reinforced elements and the outcomes achieved.

While the expanded age range has successfully increased participation, outreach remains difficult. In this context, equity concerns persist in terms of the ability of RYG schemes to reach vulnerable subgroups and to serve rural and remote areas, with structural barriers often limiting engagement. Moreover, the four-month offer target is not met in more than half of the cases, and flawed monitoring and data reporting by the Member States persists. On the impact of merging the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) into the European Social Fund+ (ESF+), the study yielded mixed but largely positive feedback. Despite persisting challenges in implementation, the study also finds that the European Semester's engagement with Member States on the YG has declined considerably since 2014.

The study proposes four policy recommendations addressed to the Member States and the European Commission respectively, relating to the capacity of authorities responsible for RYG implementation, outreach, offer quality and monitoring.

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PART I. IN-HOUSE INTRODUCTORY ANALYSIS

1. Introduction

The Youth Guarantee is a commitment by EU Member States to all young people under the age of 30 to be offered a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship, within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.¹

In the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, the EU Member States faced high youth unemployment rates. The European Commission published a Youth Employment package in 2012, which included a proposal for a Council recommendation on a Youth Guarantee.² The EU Member States created the Youth Guarantee on this basis in 2013.³ Since then, youth unemployment has fallen by almost 10 percentage points but has stalled at around 15 % for the past three years, with high disparities between Member States. **Youth unemployment in the EU is therefore still almost three times higher than the overall unemployment rate.** The number of people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) also remains at an alarming level in several Member States, with particularly difficult situations for women and young people living in rural areas. The Youth Guarantee was reinforced in 2020 in the context of the pandemic, targeting an extended age range (15–29 years old instead of 15–24 years old), and putting an additional focus on aspects such as job quality and serving those hardest to reach.⁴

In 2020, the European Parliament welcomed the Commission proposal for a Council recommendation on reinforcing the Youth Guarantee.⁵ It also stressed that a reinforced Youth Guarantee should 'overcome the shortcomings of the previous approach, which was based on employability, and must be conceived as a path aimed at ensuring, within a reasonable time, quality and permanent jobs for all young people involved'. **In a 2022 resolution on empowering European youth, the European Parliament called for further strengthening the Youth Guarantee, notably with a binding instrument, criteria for quality offers, and additional EU funding.**⁶

On 20 March 2025, the European Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) requested the Ex-Post Evaluation Unit (EVAL) of the Directorate for Impact Assessment and Evaluation, within Directorate-General for Parliamentary Research Services of the European Parliament (DG EPRS), to provide expertise in support of a forthcoming implementation report on

¹ Council of the EU, [Council Recommendation](#) of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee.

² European Commission, communication 'Towards a job-rich recover', [COM\(2012\) 173](#), 2012.

³ Council of the EU, [Council Recommendation](#) of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee.

⁴ Council of the EU, [Council Recommendation](#) of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee.

⁵ European Parliament, [Resolution](#) of 8 October 2020 on the Youth Guarantee.

⁶ European Parliament, [Resolution](#) of 17 February 2022 on empowering European youth: post-pandemic employment and social recovery.

the reinforced Youth Guarantee (RYG). This European implementation assessment study is composed of two parts. This first part, which serves as an introduction to the external evaluation study, was drafted by the EVAL Unit of EPRS, while the evaluation in the second part was drawn up by an external contractor (Milieu).

2. Background

2.1. The Youth Guarantee

While national youth guarantee schemes have existed in Europe for around 40 years, with Sweden the first country to establish such scheme in 1984, a **Youth Guarantee (YG)** at EU level was adopted as late as in **2013**, to combat high youth unemployment in the EU in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis.

However, the importance of facilitating the transition from education to employment was already recognised at EU level back in 2005, when the Council offered young people the perspective of 'a new start before reaching six months of unemployment' in its employment guidelines.⁷ Pointing out that **more than 5.5 million young people in the EU under the age of 25 were unemployed in December 2009** – which was equivalent to **21.4 % of all young people** at the time – the European Parliament in 2010 called for a European Youth Guarantee, suggesting to shorten the period within which young people should receive an offer from six to four months.⁸ In December 2012, the European Commission put forward a Youth Employment package, including a proposal for a Youth Guarantee and financial assistance for its implementation. In October and December 2013 respectively, the **Youth Guarantee**⁹ and the **Youth Employment Initiative (YEI)** were adopted.¹⁰ Due to persistently high levels of youth unemployment, the initial total budget of the YEI (€6.4 billion for the 2014–2020 Multiannual Financial Framework programming period) was further increased to €8.9 billion later (in 2017, 2019 and 2020 respectively).¹¹

Under the 2013 YG, Member States were to ensure that all young people under 25 receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed (paragraph 1).¹² As a 2017 EPRS analysis points out, this policy objective (to cover all young people) was ambitious (even if the policy instrument setting out this goal was a recommendation and thus not legally binding). At the same time, it was noted that the Council recommendation on the YG followed a pragmatic approach, stating that implementation of the YG 'should be geared to national, regional and local

⁷ [Council Decision 2005/600/EC](#) of 12 July 2005, p. 21

⁸ European Parliament, [Resolution](#) of 6 July 2010 on promoting youth access to the labour market, strengthening trainee, internship and apprenticeship status.

⁹ Council of the EU, [Council Recommendation](#) of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee; 2013/C 120/01.

¹⁰ The Youth Employment Initiative was established as a separate financial instrument on the basis of Articles 16 to 23 of [Regulation \(EU\) No 1304/2013](#) on the European Social Fund, providing additional EU funds to complement ESF funding.

¹¹ The YEI was aimed at directly supporting young NEETs in the regions with youth unemployment rates above 25 % in 2012. See further info on the Commission's dedicated [Youth Employment Initiative \(YEI\)](#) website.

¹² The starting point should be the registration with an employment service or, for those not registered, any other moment as defined by the Member States.

circumstances' (recital 20) and 'should take into account the diversity of the Member States and their different starting points' (recital 22).¹³

The **Council recommendation** included comprehensive guidelines on how to implement the YG, defining:

- 1 key elements of **governance** such as:
 - partnerships between employers and relevant labour market players;
 - development of outreach strategies, with a particular focus on young vulnerable people facing multiple barriers (such as social exclusion, poverty or discrimination) and NEETs; and
 - supportive measures for labour market integration (such as enhancing skills or using wage and recruitment subsidies for employers).

and

- 2 a multi-layered **monitoring mechanism** including:
 - monitoring and evaluation of measures under YG schemes by the Member States;
 - mutual learning activities at national, regional and local level between all parties involved in combating youth unemployment to ensure continuous improvement;
 - regular monitoring and reporting on developments concerning the design, implementation and results of YG schemes by the European Network of Public Employment Services (PES); and
 - monitoring of the implementation of YG schemes through multilateral surveillance of the Employment Committee (EMCO)¹⁴ under the European Semester (analysing the impact of the policies in place, and addressing, where appropriate, country-specific recommendations (CSRs) to Member States).

As regards the latter, **EMCO** has developed a dedicated **indicator framework for monitoring the YG** and started data collection in 2014. The framework was subsequently revised in 2017 and 2021.¹⁵

¹³ J. Tymowski, [Youth Employment Initiative: European Implementation Assessment](#), EPRS, European Parliament, 2017, p. 16.

¹⁴ EMCO is the advisory committee in the Employment and Social Affairs Council coordinating employment and labour market policies at European and national levels.

¹⁵ A guide elaborated jointly by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the European Commission sets out the [indicator framework for monitoring the youth guarantee](#). It reviews the concepts and provides practical examples for the application of three sets of indicators that relate to the national implementation plans of the YG (i.e. indicators agreed upon by the members of the EMCO Indicators Group, those established by the European Social Fund (ESF) for the programming period 2014–2020, and those set under the YEI).

2.2. Assessing the initial Youth Guarantee's implementation

Since its inception, implementation of the YG has been monitored closely. In addition to assessments provided by EMCO, the main EU entity responsible for reporting, other EU institutions and bodies have scrutinised the YG's impact in the Member States in the run-up to 2020, when the scheme was reinforced in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In **2015** and **2017** respectively, the **European Court of Auditors (ECA)** identified persistent structural weaknesses of the YG schemes' implementation that risked undermining their effectiveness over the long term.¹⁶ In **2016, 2018** and **2019**, the **Council – in its Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs format (EPSCO)** – endorsed a set of key messages provided by EMCO, underlining the importance of prevention, early intervention, strong partnerships within Member States, and the crucial role of PES.¹⁷

In October **2016**, the **Commission** reported on the YG's effects (as well as that of the YEI), finding – in contrast to ECA's point of view – that the instrument had been successful as a driver of policy reforms and better coordination in the fields of employment and education, and also in view of overall figures: according to the Commission, since 2014, more than 14 million young people had entered YG schemes, and around nine million young people had taken up an offer of employment, education, traineeship or apprenticeship under the YG. However, the Commission acknowledged the need to accelerate and broaden the YG, and to speed up implementation of the YEI. More efforts were needed to support 'hard-to-reach' young people and to improve the quality of offers and services provided. This, in particular, in view of the fact that in 2015, less than half of young NEETs (41.9 %) were registered under the scheme on average in the EU, with coverage rates of less than 20 % in several Member States (such as Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Malta and Romania); among those registered, almost half on average took up an offer within four months across the EU. In terms of sustainability, the Commission reported that on average, 40 % of young people having left the YG scheme were known to be in a positive situation, i.e. in a job, education, training or a traineeship six months afterwards. There were indications of sustainability being highest in countries with a focus on education (such as Denmark, Ireland, Italy and Malta), and lowest in a number of countries where most young people take up an offer of employment.¹⁸

Moreover, in its **2016 Assessment report on PES capacity**, the **European Network of PES** found that, in several Member States ranking lowest in terms of reform efforts and coverage of NEETs, public employment services were facing a combination of detrimental factors: difficult labour

¹⁶ European Court of Auditors, [Special Report No 3/2015: EU Youth Guarantee: first steps taken but implementation risks ahead](#), 2015; European Court of Auditors, [Special Report No 5/2017: Youth unemployment – have EU policies made a difference? An assessment of the Youth Guarantee and the Youth Employment Initiative](#), 2017. Both reports are examined in detail in the external study in Part II.

¹⁷ Council of the EU, [2016 EMCO review key messages for the Council](#), 2016; [2018 EMCO review key messages for the Council](#), 2018; [2019 EMCO review key messages for the Council](#), 2019. The 2023 EMCO review is further analysed in the external study in Part II.

¹⁸ European Commission, communication on The Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative three years on, [COM\(2016\) 646](#), and accompanying [staff working documents](#) SWD(2016) 323 and SWD(2016) 324, 2016.

markets with high youth unemployment, a lack of capacities, and low engagement in capacity building.¹⁹ This combination of detrimental factors was also highlighted by academia, stating that precisely those Member States needing policies to reduce youth unemployment the most (such as southern European countries) were having the least developed institutional capacities and absorption rates. By contrast, countries with advanced PES (notably the Nordic countries and Austria) implemented YG measures successfully, and succeeded in reducing youth unemployment.²⁰

Many of these findings were raised at a **workshop** held at the **European Parliament** in March **2017**. While overall entry and exit figures of the YG schemes were encouraging, according to the Commission representative, considerable challenges remained to ensure full implementation. In particular, outreach to non-registered NEETs and low-skilled young people had to be improved, and offers should be of better quality and more balanced, considering that, at the time, 70 % of offers under a YG scheme were employment offers, followed by education (13.2 %), traineeships (12.1 %) and apprenticeships (4.1 %). The Commission also pointed to insufficient institutional capacities of employment and other services; the need for improved integration of employment, education and youth policies; and further development of partnerships between governments and other stakeholders. While welcoming policy changes triggered by the YG, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) across political groups expressed concerns regarding, among other things, coverage and sustainability of the scheme (and significantly divergent situations in the Member States in this context); its efficacy to fight youth unemployment (as the YG did not address underlying structural causes of unemployment and insufficient funding at EU level); and its efficacy to offer quality (suggesting that traineeships should be removed from the list of offers under the YG). Moreover, Members suggested extending the age limit up to 29 years, to cover young university graduates, as well.

In September **2020**, the Commission published an extensive **evaluation of the support for youth employment by the European Social Fund (ESF) and the YEI from 2014 to 2018**, finding that overall, youth employment operations had had a positive effect in terms of integrating young people in the labour market, although in different ways and to different extents.²¹ Operations were most effective in targeting and supporting young NEETs rather than economically inactive youth (i.e. young people not part of the labour force). In addition, measures that best helped participants improve their employability were typically linked to work experience or vocational skills with a direct link to employers, such as paid traineeships, apprenticeships and internships, vocational education and training (VET), and basic skills training for low-skilled young people. Moreover, the Commission stated that operations tailored to individual needs tended to be both more effective (particularly for more disadvantaged groups and those furthest away from the labour market) and more cost-

¹⁹ European Network of Public Employment Services, [Assessment report on PES capacity](#), 2016. The PES network has been issuing annual assessment reports on PES capacity, complemented by reports on PES implementation of the YG, with its latest report on [Trends in PES – Assessment of PES capacity 2023](#) published in April 2024.

²⁰ F. Pastore, ['The European Youth Guarantee: Labor market context, conditions and opportunities in Italy'](#), *IZA Journal of European Labor Studies*, Vol. 4(1), 2025.

²¹ European Commission, [Evaluation of the ESF and YEI Support to Youth Employment](#), SWD(2020) 216, and [Executive Summary of the Evaluation](#), SWD(2020) 2017, 2020.

efficient (as the low cost of delivering general guidance not tailored to individual needs did not compensate for the low effectiveness of this type of support). The evaluation found that the composition of the group of young NEETs had changed over the period analysed, with an increase in the proportion of inactive young people. The Commission also found that measuring the effectiveness of youth employment operations could be further improved by also tracking 'soft outcomes', among other things.²²

²² As set out in the Commission's evaluation (SWD(2020) 216, p. 42), managing authorities recognised the value of soft outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged groups with multiple problems; as such, outcomes were said to be highly valued by participants in the context of youth employment operations. The value was in the social skills built up (self-esteem/confidence, cultural and community interaction) and in the non-vocational skills employers look for (including reliability, discipline, time keeping and personal organisation). The Commission acknowledges, however, that Member States seldom monitor soft outcomes; this may be due to difficulties in measuring and tracking of such data.

3. The reinforced Youth Guarantee

Shortly after the outbreak of COVID-19, on **1 July 2020**, the Commission put forward a **proposal to reinforce the 2013 YG Council recommendation**.²³ In its explanatory memorandum, the Commission considered that, although the YG had become a reality across the EU – with **24 million young people having received a YG offer** since the scheme's first implementation, and the YEI (and the ESF) having provided significant EU financial support for the YG's implementation over the 2014–2020 programming period – challenges remained. Moreover, although **youth unemployment and NEET rates had decreased substantially (down to 14.9 % of young unemployed on average, compared with its peak of 24.4 % in 2013)**, the ongoing pandemic was expected to jeopardise this positive development, with young people likely to be hit hardest. It was therefore important to reinforce the YG to contribute to 'alleviating the impact of the COVID-19 crisis and preventing another youth unemployment crisis'.

3.1. Main objectives of the reinforced Youth Guarantee

The 2020 Council recommendation on an RYG has built on its predecessor. It aims to ensure that **all young people receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education**.

It is specified that, to achieve that ambition, an RYG 'should provide young people with a path towards a stable labour market integration, and reach out and motivate greater numbers of young people regardless of the barriers they may face, making sure that none of them are left behind'.²⁴ Moreover, an RYG should strive to support young people in gaining valuable work experience and developing the right skills for a changing world of work, in particular those skills relevant to growth sectors and the green and digital transitions. The quality of apprenticeships is highlighted as being particularly important: 'There is a need to boost the supply of apprenticeships especially during the recovery phase and to promote the participation of companies in order to facilitate a smoother transition into employment'.²⁵

The RYG sought, in particular, to tackle the challenges that arose with its 2013 predecessor, and therefore **(i)** extended the age range from 25 to 29 years of age; **(ii)** put emphasis on delivering 'good-quality' offers that are aligned with EU quality frameworks; **(iii)** focused more on serving hard-to-reach vulnerable groups and inactive NEETs; and **(iv)** introduced a four-phased approach to implementation (mapping, outreach, preparation and offer) to promote more coherent and individualised service delivery.

²³ European Commission, proposal for a Council recommendation on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and repealing Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee, [COM\(2020\) 277](#), and communication on [Youth Employment Support: a Bridge to Jobs for the Next Generation](#), COM(2020) 276, 2020.

²⁴ Council of the EU, [Council Recommendation](#) of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee.

²⁵ *ibid.*

Further to its adoption, implementation of the RYG has been assessed on several occasions and by different organisations and bodies. In **2022**, the **European Committee of the Regions (CoR)** commissioned a **study on the local implementation of the RYG**, focusing on PES.²⁶ In November **2023**, **EMCO** carried out yet another **review of the RYG's implementation** (the key messages of which were endorsed by the EPSCO Council in February 2024).²⁷ In April **2024**, the **European Network of PES** published its latest **assessment report on PES capacity**, including a focus on PES implementation of the RYG.²⁸ A survey of 28 (out of 32) PES Network members, conducted between July and September 2023, found, among other things, that outreach activities by PES had been intensified, with almost all surveyed PES (86 %, or 24 out of 28) actively engaged with vulnerable groups. The survey also revealed that many new initiatives had been introduced since 2021, and that social media channels were becoming more popular among PES to reach out to unregistered NEETs, demonstrating the rising importance of digital outreach for PES.

Observations on progress in implementing the RYG can also be drawn from a recent **Eurofound report**.²⁹ Preliminary analysis of the state of the RYG in mid-2023 showed a **mixed picture**, with Member States standing at different levels of engagement with the RYG. While Nordic Member States (such as Finland and Sweden) had long had youth employment-promoting policies in place, and others, such as Estonia, were rapidly moving forward, several southern European Member States with historically high NEET rates and strong regional disparities (such as Portugal and Spain) had started to implement the RYG, albeit with concerns regarding the RYG's capacity to deliver in the most deprived regions. According to Eurofound, many authors and interviewees thus argued in favour of a territorial/regional perspective on addressing youth unemployment, with regional or even local decision-making structures involved in RYG implementation.

As interviews also highlighted that unemployed young people were somewhat under-represented in other policy measures, such as the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and the national recovery and resilience plans (which had, according to the interviewees and preliminary assessments of the RRF,³⁰ a disproportionate emphasis on formal education over labour market integration), continued support for the implementation of the RYG was, according to Eurofound, important. The report also finds that the problems facing young NEETs are both economic and social (relating for instance to a caregiving role, an unintended pregnancy, mental health issues, an addiction, homelessness or poor health). For young people in such situations, a work-first approach

²⁶ Committee of the Regions, ['The local implementation of the Reinforced Youth Guarantee'](#), June 2022. The study is presented in detail in the external study in Part II.

²⁷ Council of the EU, [2024 EMCO review key messages for the Council](#), 2024. The review is analysed in detail in the external study in Part II.

²⁸ European Network of PES, [Trends in PES – Assessment of PES capacity 2023](#), 2024.

²⁹ Eurofound, [Becoming adults: Young people in a post-pandemic world](#), 2024. The assessment of the RYG was based on desk research and 17 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from 10 countries (Belgium, Estonia, Spain, France, Croatia, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, Finland and Sweden).

³⁰ F. Simões, [School to work transition in the Resilience and Recovery Facility framework](#), Economic Governance Support Unit, European Parliament, 2022.

is often not appropriate; this was also recognised by the RYG, which repeatedly stressed the importance of cooperation with the social sector.

Nevertheless, the RYG was often seen as an employment or economic policy, perhaps partly because measuring employment indicators was easier than measuring social outcomes. In Eurofound's view, however, **the success of the RYG was highly dependent on policies in other areas, such as family, housing, childcare, fighting gender and intersectional discrimination, sexual education in schools, and mental health, including the Commission's 2023 mental health strategy.** Moreover, in light of the labour market remaining precarious and unfair to the young generation (with many jobs being unattractive, badly paid or unable to offer young people a decent living), the report points to the need for focusing on decent work in youth employment policy. Lastly, Eurofound highlights the **need for an increased emphasis on the gender dimension of the NEET rate** (see further details in the following Sub-section 3.2. on NEETs).

3.2. Young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs)

3.2.1. Definition

As highlighted in research conducted for the European Parliament, the 'NEET' terminology was first used in the mid-90s in the United Kingdom to describe the social situation in which a growing category of the population found itself: young people who were not accumulating human capital in any of the usual ways – i.e. through work, education or training. As the traditional indicators of employment, professional training and academic success were no longer enough to track the changing nature of the difficulties many young people were facing on the labour market, and the lasting fragility that ensued, the 'NEET' indicator was established.³¹

Young NEETs comprise the unemployed (who are not at the same time in education) and a (much larger) group of young people who do not have a job and are not involved in any formal learning activity but who are also, for one reason or another, not actively looking for work.

The social group of NEETs is highly diverse, including short- and long-term unemployed, young people in transition, young people with family responsibilities, and people with disabilities or medical conditions. Statistically, young women are over-represented, and the probability of being a NEET increases with age. In addition to gender and age, a person's education level is also an important determinant for the risk of becoming a NEET – with, as a general rule, someone's probability of becoming a NEET inversely proportional to their level of education.³²

While the NEET indicator has been subject to criticism (notably because it describes, in a single term, groups with highly diverse characteristics, and possibly stigmatises young people in such situations by depicting them as a uniform group that is unwilling to work or study),³³ its usefulness, among other things, as a more reliable indicator of vulnerability than unemployment has been

³¹ M. Lecerf, [NEETS: who are they? Being young and not in employment, education or training today](#), EPRS, European Parliament, 2017.

³² *ibid.*

³³ *ibid.*

recognised. As pointed out by the ILO, even in high-income countries, **young NEETs outside the labour market are demonstrably more at risk of long-term economic and social exclusion, particularly young women with care responsibilities.**³⁴

3.2.2. Statistics

Although the RYG was adopted ahead of the 2021 European pillar of social rights (EPSR) action plan³⁵ – which aims to reduce the EU NEET rate among those aged 15–29 from 12.6 % in 2019 to 9 % by 2030 – its focus on improving outreach to vulnerable groups and inactive NEETs, among other goals, is well aligned with this target. It is also in line with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,³⁶ adopted in 2015, under which all countries, including the EU and its Member States, committed, among other things, to substantially reducing the proportion of NEET youth (target 8.6).

In **2025**, however, **worldwide around 262 million – or one in four – young people aged 15–24 were NEETs**, as estimated by the International Labour Organization (ILO).³⁷ As pointed out by the ILO, one third of the world's young people still live in a country that is 'off track' in its progress to meet Sustainable Development Goal target 8.6, with primarily low-income countries experiencing a sustained increase in NEET rates in the years following COVID-19; the NEET rate in low-income countries in 2024 (28.6 %) was nearly triple that of the rate in high-income countries (10.4 %). Moreover, **two out of every three young people in NEET status are female, and young women are twice as likely as young men to be NEET.**³⁸

In the **EU, 11 % of 15- to 29-year-olds were NEETs in 2024**, with significant divergences across Member States, ranging from 5 % in the Netherlands to 19 % in Romania (see Figure 1).

³⁴ N. O'Higgins, [Measuring what matters: NEET vs youth unemployment](#), ILO, 2025.

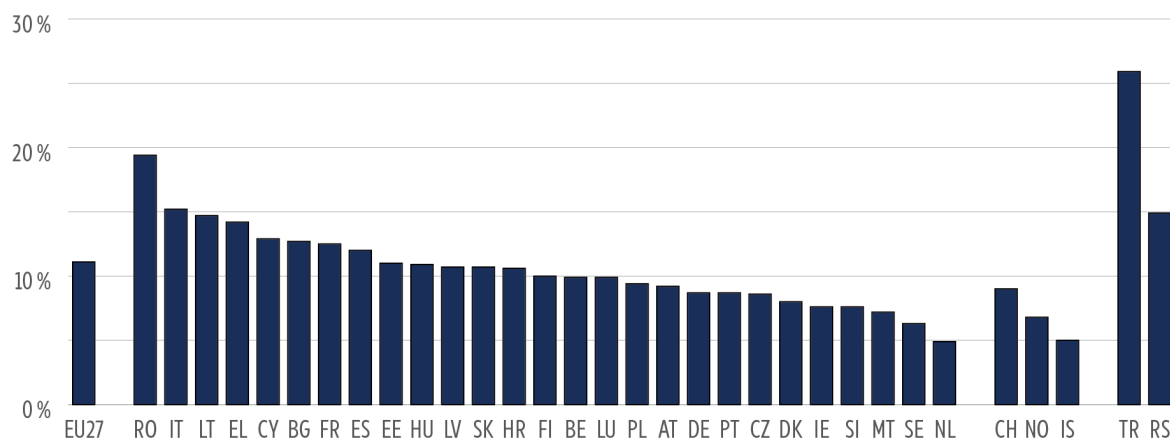
³⁵ On 17 November 2017, the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission proclaimed the European pillar of social rights, setting out 20 headline rights to promote social rights in the EU. On 7–8 May 2021, at the Social Summit in Porto organised by the Portuguese Council Presidency, the EU institutions reaffirmed their commitment, with three 2030 headline targets adopted through the Commission's [European pillar of social rights action plan](#), subsequently endorsed by the European Council on 25 June 2021. Under the general EU target to reach a 78 % employment rate among those aged 20–64, the action plan sets out three sub-targets, including a decrease in the rate of NEETs aged 15–29 from 12.6 % in 2019 to 9 % in 2030. With a view to putting forward a new European pillar of social rights action plan to support Member States in reaching the 2030 targets, the Commission launched a public consultation in June 2025. In its [call for evidence](#), it highlighted, among other things, uneven progress in decreasing the NEET rate, one of the action plan's sub-targets.

³⁶ United Nations, [Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Target 8.6](#), 2015.

³⁷ N. O'Higgins, [Measuring what matters: NEET vs youth unemployment](#), ILO, 2025.

³⁸ ILO, [Handbook on policy areas to reduce youth in NEET status](#), 2025, and [Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024](#), 2024.

Figure 1 – Young people (aged 15–29) neither in employment nor in education and training, 2024



Data source: Eurostat (online data code: [edat_lfse_20](#)).

Between 2014 and 2024, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, **overall NEET rates decreased in the EU by -4.7 percentage points (pp)**. Among EU Member States, the largest reduction by far in NEET rates (in terms of percentage points) between 2014 and 2024 was in Greece (-12.5 pp), followed by Bulgaria (-11.3 pp), Croatia (-11.1 pp), Italy (-11.0 pp) and Ireland (-10.2 pp). While Denmark recorded the same NEET rates in 2014 and 2024, there were more NEETs in Lithuania (+1.8 pp) and Luxembourg (+3.4 pp) in 2024 than in 2014.³⁹

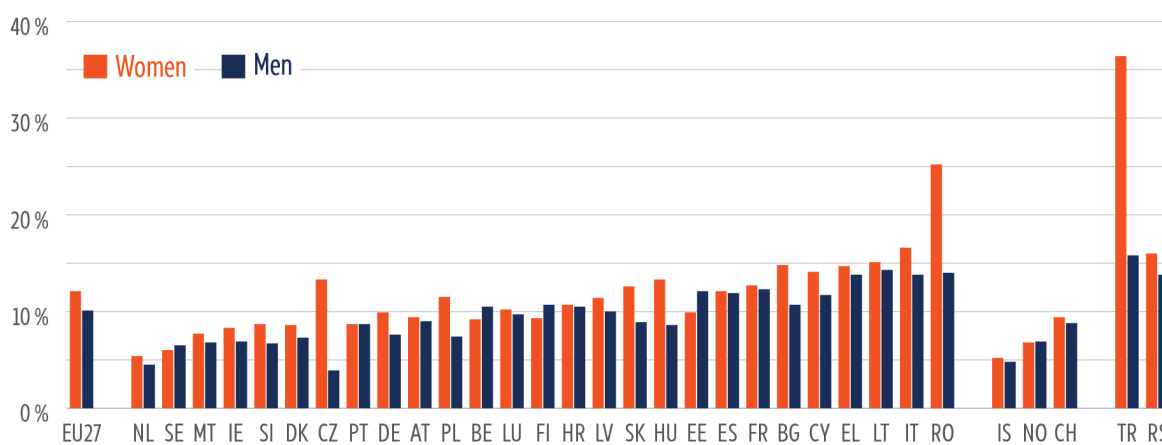
Figures also show a **persisting NEET gender gap**, with NEET rates among young women exceeding those of young men in the EU for more than a decade up until today.⁴⁰ **In 2024, 12.1 % of young women aged 15–29 were NEETs, while the corresponding share among young men stood at 10.0 % across the EU**. The largest difference between the number of female and male NEETs was found in Romania (11.2 pp) and Czechia (9.4 pp). By contrast, in 2024, four Member States (Estonia, Finland, Belgium and Sweden) had (slightly) higher NEET rates for men than for women (see Figure 2).⁴¹

³⁹ Eurostat, [Statistics on young people neither in employment nor in education or training](#), 2025.

⁴⁰ A. D'Alfonso, A. Delivorias, G. Sabbati, [Monitoring the EU's economic recovery: A promising start threatened by an unstable backdrop](#), EPRS, European Parliament, 2022.

⁴¹ Eurostat, [Statistics on young people neither in employment nor in education or training](#), 2025.

Figure 2 – Young people (aged 15–29) neither in employment nor in education and training, by sex, 2024



Note: Countries are ranked based on the average share for women and men (aged 15–29).

Data source: Eurostat (online data code: [edat_lfse_20](#)).

In addition, **as young women become older, they are more likely to be in a NEET situation.** A Eurostat analysis of three different age groups of young people (15–19, 20–24 and 25–29) shows that the EU gender gap for NEETs increased in relation to age in 2024. While for the youngest group, men had a higher share of NEETs than women, a shift was observed in the age group of those aged 20–24, with the NEET rate for young women about the same as that for men (only 0.2 pp higher than that of men). In the oldest group, the gap between the sexes widened significantly to 6.4 pp.⁴²

Finally, **young female NEETs are more likely than young male NEETs to be outside the labour force** (i.e. not actively seeking work). Accordingly, the share of young men outside the labour force in 2024 was 5.3 %, compared with 8.5 % among females (with Czechia and Romania having the largest differences between the sexes). In only one Member State (Estonia), the proportion of male NEETs outside the labour force was higher than that of female NEETs.⁴³

In the same vein, the **European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP)** recently highlighted that, while the overall NEET rate had declined since 2021, the **gender gap persisted**. In CEDEFOP's view, young women, in particular young mothers, are more likely than men to leave education or remain outside the workforce because of the unequal burden of caregiving responsibilities. This dynamic contributes to a widening NEET gender gap over time, as limited access to childcare and structural labour market inequalities further strain women's work-life balance. To effectively support female NEETs, CEDEFOP therefore suggests raising awareness among policymakers of women's unique challenges, the need to collect and analyse gender-disaggregated NEET data in order to design targeted outreach and activation measures, and the need to promote vocational education and training (VET) for female NEETs, offering opportunities for reskilling, employment and long-term career growth. To allow women to take part in VET

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ *ibid.*

programmes, CEDEFOP underlines the importance of a flexible approach, integrating part-time training, adaptable learning options, and offering accessible and affordable childcare support.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ CEDEFOP, [Breaking barriers for young women not in employment, education, or training](#), 2025.

4. European Parliament position

4.1. Parliament resolutions

The **European Parliament** has **continuously attached importance to supporting young people in a meaningful way**. Following the introduction of the RYG, Parliament adopted several resolutions on its implementation and impact. Shortly after the Council recommendation of October 2020 on the RYG, Parliament adopted its **position on adding Article 92b to the Common Provisions Regulation**,⁴⁵ which stipulates that REACT-EU resources must extend youth employment measures in line with the RYG to foster quality employment opportunities.⁴⁶ Similarly, in its **position of February 2021 on the adoption of the RRF Regulation**,⁴⁷ Parliament underlined that the Member States must align their national multiannual investment strategies with the YG implementation plans, and invest in the next generation through policies that bridge the generational gap, in line with the YG objectives.⁴⁸

In **February 2022**, Parliament adopted a **resolution on empowering European youth following the COVID-19 pandemic**, highlighting the need of a 'both binding and inclusive for all Member States' RYG, particularly in the context of traineeships, apprenticeships and internships.⁴⁹ Parliament also called on the Commission to monitor implementation of the RYG through EMCO, and invited it to establish a dedicated working group to monitor RYG implementation.

Parliament also highlighted the RYG at several instances, including its **April 2022 resolution on protecting young people fleeing the war in Ukraine**,⁵⁰ its **June 2022 resolution on cohesion policy**, specifically addressing the vulnerabilities of young people living in rural areas and regions

⁴⁵ [Regulation \(EU\) No 1303/2013](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006.

⁴⁶ European Parliament, [Position of the European Parliament](#) adopted at first reading on 16 December 2020 with a view to the adoption of Regulation (EU) 2020/... of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 as regards additional resources and implementing arrangements to provide assistance for fostering crisis repair in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its social consequences and for preparing a green, digital and resilient recovery of the economy (REACT-EU), 2020.

⁴⁷ [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/241](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

⁴⁸ European Parliament, [Position of the European Parliament](#) adopted at first reading on 10 February 2021 with a view to the adoption of Regulation (EU) 2021/... of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility, 2021.

⁴⁹ European Parliament, [Resolution](#) of 17 February 2022 on empowering European youth: post-pandemic employment and social recovery.

⁵⁰ European Parliament, [Resolution](#) of 7 April 2022 on the EU's protection of children and young people fleeing the war in Ukraine.

with natural or demographic constraints;⁵¹ and its October 2022 resolution on Roma communities living in settlements in the EU.⁵² In **June 2023**, Parliament also adopted a **resolution** with recommendations to the Commission **on quality traineeships**, underscoring the YG's central role in boosting high-quality traineeship opportunities.⁵³ This resolution subsequently informed the proposed traineeships directive, as noted in the explanatory memorandum accompanying the proposal.⁵⁴

More recently, Parliament called on the Member States to reinforce efforts in implementing the YG in the context of the **European Semester and ESF+ post-2027**,⁵⁵ noting in its **November 2023 resolution**, in particular, that the YG has so far not fully reached its objectives.⁵⁶

Over the years, Parliament has also commented on the implementation and impact of the YG with regard to the **Commission progress reports for EU candidate countries, specifically North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro**. In its latest **resolutions of 2025**, Parliament welcomed the positive effects of the YG on reducing youth unemployment in North Macedonia.⁵⁷ Moreover, Parliament called on Bosnia and Herzegovina to finalise and adopt the YG, and encouraged Montenegro to effectively implement it in order to tackle continued high unemployment rates and ongoing brain drain.⁵⁸

4.2. MEPs' questions

During the **ninth and tenth legislative terms**, MEPs submitted **several questions**, mainly to the Commission but also to the Council. Following the Commission's **July 2020** proposal for a Council recommendation on an RYG, several MEPs, on behalf of the EMPL committee, submitted **two thematically related questions for oral answer** to the Commission and the Council.⁵⁹ The questions concerned the Council's **reduction of allocations** for targeted actions for young people not in employment, from the 15 % proposed by the Commission to 10 %, prompting several sub-questions.

⁵¹ European Parliament, [Resolution](#) of 7 June 2022 on EU islands and cohesion policy: current situation and future challenges.

⁵² European Parliament, [Resolution](#) of 5 October 2022 on the situation of Roma people living in settlements in the EU.

⁵³ European Parliament, [Resolution](#) of 14 June 2023 with recommendations to the Commission on quality traineeships in the Union.

⁵⁴ European Commission, [Proposal](#) for a DIRECTIVE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on improving and enforcing working conditions of trainees and combating regular employment relationships disguised as traineeships ('Traineeships Directive'), COM(2024) 132, 20 March 2024.

⁵⁵ European Parliament, [Resolution](#) of 12 March 2025 on the European Semester for economic policy coordination: employment and social priorities for 2025; European Parliament, [Resolution](#) of 11 March 2025 on the European Social Fund Plus post-2027.

⁵⁶ European Parliament, [Resolution](#) of 23 November 2023 on job creation – the just transition and impact investments.

⁵⁷ European Parliament, [Resolution](#) of 9 July 2025 on the 2023 and 2024 Commission reports on North Macedonia.

⁵⁸ European Parliament, [Resolution](#) of 9 July 2025 on the 2023 and 2024 Commission reports on Bosnia and Herzegovina; European Parliament, [Resolution](#) of 18 June 2025 on the 2023 and 2024 Commission reports on Montenegro.

⁵⁹ Parliamentary question, Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee, [Question](#) for oral answer O-000059/2020 to the Commission, 2020; Parliamentary question, Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee, [Question](#) for oral answer O-000058/2020 to the Council, 2020.

The MEPs questioned the reasoning behind this reduction and the Commission's assessment thereof, particularly in view of the EU's efforts to combat youth unemployment. The MEPs also inquired how the two institutions intended to enhance the YG's proper implementation, reach and inclusiveness, and whether they supported Parliament's call to strengthen quality employment offers through binding quality criteria, such as remunerated traineeships.

While the Council did not respond to the reduction in allocations, it reaffirmed its commitment to making the YG more inclusive by raising the age limit, paying particular attention to young women and disadvantaged groups, and encouraging Member States to prioritise digital skills, as well as facilitate further training and requalification.⁶⁰ Likewise, the Commission did not comment on the Council's proposed allocation reduction either. Rather, it emphasised the crucial role Parliament and the Member States can play in implementing the YG, particularly regarding funding, synergies among funding instruments, and the quantitative monitoring of YG schemes through EMPL.⁶¹ Furthermore, although the Commission expressed some scepticism about the legal feasibility of remunerated traineeships, it shared optimism that a joint understanding on this issue would be developed, also with civil society and social partners, and proposed a Council recommendation on vocational education and training, which was subsequently adopted in November 2020.⁶²

Following the adoption of the Council recommendation on the RYG in October 2020, **Leila Chaibi (The Left)** submitted a question for written answer to the Commission in **May 2021**, asking how it would **monitor the quality of employment offers, particularly traineeships**. In response, the Commission listed several initiatives aimed at promoting quality employment, including a review of the Quality Framework for Traineeships.⁶³ Leila Chaibi also requested the Commission to disclose which Member States had already updated, or planned to update, their implementation plans in alignment with the RYG. However, the Commission refused, noting that the RYG does not oblige Member States to present their implementation plans.⁶⁴

In **December 2021**, **several MEPs** submitted, again, **two thematically related questions** for oral answer to the Commission and the Council on behalf of EMPL.⁶⁵ Among other things, the questions focused on the **implementation of the RYG**, including how the Member States planned to update their RYG schemes, and how the Commission intended to monitor their progress, for example through the establishment of a working group. The questions also concerned the **relationship**

⁶⁰ [Replies](#) of the Council of the EU and the European Commission on reinforcing the Youth Guarantee, Verbatim report of proceedings, 2020.

⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶² [Council Recommendation](#) of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience 2020/C 417/01.

⁶³ Parliamentary question, Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee, [Question](#) for written answer E-002653/2021 to the Commission, 2021.

⁶⁴ [Answer](#) given by Mr Schmit on behalf of the European Commission, E-002653/2021(ASW), 2021.

⁶⁵ Parliamentary question, Empowering European youth: post-pandemic employment and social recovery, [Question](#) for oral answer O-000075/2021 to the Commission, 2021; Parliamentary question, Empowering European youth: post-pandemic employment and social recovery, [Question](#) for oral answer O-000077/2021 to the Council, 2021.

between the RYG and the ALMA (Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve) initiative in promoting quality jobs, fair remuneration, and access to social protection, particularly for NEETs.

Although the Council did not provide a targeted answer to the MEPs' questions in plenary, the Commission referred to EMCO's 2020 review of the RYG's national implementation, which identified remaining challenges in many areas, and highlighted ALMA's cross-cutting role, whose success is contingent on other successful initiatives financed by the ESF+ in Member States.⁶⁶

The question of **implementation progress** made by Member States was again raised by **Ioan-Rareş Bogdan (EPP)** in **January 2023**.⁶⁷ In response, the Commission again alluded to the 2021 EMCO review, which 'showed progress in mapping, reach-out to inactive and vulnerable [NEETs], and the quality of offers', while also highlighting some room for improvement on data protection issues that hindered the effective cross-sectoral exchange of personal information necessary for delivering integrated services.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ [Replies](#) of the Council of the EU and the European Commission on Empowering European Youth: post-pandemic employment and social recovery, Verbatim report of proceedings, 2022.

⁶⁷ Parliamentary question, Business schemes for young people, [Question](#) for written answer E-000230/2023 to the Commission, 2025.

⁶⁸ [Answer](#) given by Mr Schmit on behalf of the European Commission, E-000230/2023(ASW), 2023.

5. Presentation of the external evaluation study

5.1. Scope, objectives and limitations

The evaluation study in Part II on the implementation of the reinforced Youth Guarantee was commissioned by EPRS to an external contractor (Milieu). The study was carried out between May and December 2025. It aims to provide an updated assessment of the RYG's implementation, and was guided by three core objectives: (i) to assess current trends in implementation at Member State level, focusing on the effectiveness of national YG schemes across multiple dimensions; (ii) to analyse the impact of the 2020 reinforcement in addressing previously identified challenges; and (iii) to examine the role of EU funding and governance mechanisms.

The study scope extends to both the EU and Member State levels, with focused national research carried out across 10 selected Member States: Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland, Spain, Italy, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland, Finland and Sweden. The study draws from desk research, semi-structured interviews with EU-level stakeholders and national Youth Guarantee coordinators, as well as surveys distributed to the managing authorities (MAs) of relevant operational programmes (OPs).

Because the MA survey received only a limited number of replies (from 15 out of 143 MAs across the 27 EU Member States), the representativeness of the survey's key findings should be interpreted with this in mind. Moreover, variations in Member States' data collection and monitoring systems, as well as high proportions of 'unknown' YG outcomes in some countries, have challenged the study's ability to make direct cross-country comparisons of the RYG's performance. Similarly, the comparability of periods before and after the 2020 reinforcement is limited (as the reinforcement introduced significant changes to the YG's scope and objectives, while the external context was fundamentally altered by the impact of the pandemic on youth labour markets). Finally, establishing direct causality between the implementation of the RYG and its observed outcomes, such as a decline in NEET or youth unemployment rates, is inherently complex, particularly in view of significant macroeconomic shifts over the YG's implementation period, and the fact that the RYG is typically embedded within broader national active labour market policies, making it difficult to attribute outcomes solely to the YG framework, as opposed to complementary or related policy measures.

Based on the key findings (see section below), the study proposes four policy recommendations relating to the capacity of authorities responsible for RYG implementation, outreach, offer quality and monitoring.

5.2. Key findings

5.2.1. Member State level trends in implementing the RYG

The study finds **considerable diversity in approaches to YG implementation** across the ten Member States examined. For instance, institutional arrangements range from full policy mainstreaming within existing systems (as in Italy, the Netherlands and Finland) to the creation of distinct, branded national models (as in Ireland). Furthermore, national YG scheme delivery models

cluster around two main poles, with a notable imbalance in favour of employment-first approaches (i.e. Bulgaria and the Netherlands) over training-focused systems (i.e. Germany and Italy), with the governance structures of such schemes varying from decentralised municipal delivery to more centralised national coordination.

The **adoption of the four-phase implementation approach** (mapping, outreach, preparation and offer), which is central to the 2020 reinforcement, has been uneven. The comprehensive mapping of support services, as envisioned by the Council recommendation, appears to be limited across the Member States. **Outreach to inactive and vulnerable NEETs continues to face challenges**, which in some cases is burdened by a 'creaming effect', whereby schemes primarily benefit young people who are already closer to the labour market. In part, this can stem from the structural limitations of PES, which lack the capacity to engage in proactive, community-based outreach. This is compounded by the passive, registration-based design of many schemes, which creates barriers for those facing institutional distrust or practical challenges, such as the lack of accessible transportation options or limited digital access in more rural and remote areas.

In terms of the effectiveness of the national YG schemes, analysis of the **revised Youth Guarantee indicator monitoring framework reveals clear gaps between the improving macroeconomic context and the direct performance of the schemes themselves**. While average NEET rates in the EU reached their lowest recorded level of 11.1 % in 2024, the coverage rate of YG schemes stood at less than 50 % of the NEET population in many Member States. For those registered in the schemes, timeliness remains a primary challenge. Despite the RYG's emphasis on delivering timely offers, **53.6 % of young people registered in a YG scheme in the EU had not yet taken up an offer after the four-month target in 2023**, with particularly poor performance in Italy (86.1 %), Ireland (78.8 %), and the Netherlands (73.2 %). Similarly, the **quality of offers also remains a challenge**, as stakeholders report limited material improvements since the reinforcement. Post-placement support also appears underdeveloped, while follow-up data are often lacking, thereby inhibiting the ability to assess long-term outcomes. **Equity concerns persist**, too, as national YG schemes struggle to reach vulnerable groups as well as rural areas.

5.2.2. Impact of the 2020 reinforcement

The 2020 Council recommendation sought to address many of the key weaknesses previously raised by the ECA's 2015 and 2017 Special Reports, including the inadequacy of funding, the absence of a clear definition of 'good-quality offers', and insufficient monitoring and reporting frameworks. The reinforcement itself did formally address these criticisms by, for example, obliging Member States with NEET rates above the EU average to allocate at least 12.5 % of ESF+ funding to youth employment measures, offer quality standards being aligned with key EU quality frameworks,⁶⁹ and a revised indicator monitoring framework for improved data collection. However, despite these improvements, **the study identifies a gap between these ambitions and their practical implementation**.

In terms of **funding adequacy, stakeholders express mixed views**. While some, such as the European Youth Forum (EYF), maintain that total funding remains insufficient, others, including

⁶⁹ Specifically: Council of the EU, [Council Recommendation of 10 March 2014](#) on a Quality Framework for Traineeships; and [Council Recommendation of 15 March 2018](#) on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships.

BusinessEurope, note that the challenge has instead shifted from the amount of funding to its effective absorption and implementation at national level, particularly by the implementing PES. The latter view highlights a persistent lack of the necessary human capacity in some Member States, which impedes efficient utilisation of available funds. This distinction is key, as the latter view aligns with the broader evidence gathered for this study, including survey results from managing authorities (MAs) and interviews with national YG coordinators across the selected Member States, suggesting that perceived funding gaps may instead stem from bottlenecks in implementation rather than from an absolute lack of resources, informing one of the overall findings of this study that EU funding levels appear to be broadly adequate.

The 2020 Council recommendation also introduced more specific criteria to determine what constitutes a 'good-quality offer'. However, the **stakeholders consulted find that there has been little material improvement in practice**. For instance, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) observes that traineeships continue to have poorly designed learning objectives, while BusinessEurope raises concerns regarding the continued reliance of many national YG schemes on wage subsidies, questioning whether these create long-term or temporary positions that end when public funding does. The EYF also identifies low quality of offers as a persistent issue, resulting in precarious employment rather than sustainable labour market integration. Finally, in response to the third main criticism expressed by the 2017 ECA Special Report on insufficient monitoring, the RYG established a more robust framework for data collection, although – as the subsequent analysis confirms – notable gaps in reporting remain.

Many key findings of the 2023 EMCO review remain largely valid in 2025, highlighting **three enduring challenges**: (i) persistent difficulties in outreach to vulnerable NEETs; (ii) diverging trends in service delivery, with a shift from personalised to generalised services in some Member States, contrasted by reinforced individualisation in others; and (iii) inconsistent monitoring and reporting of key indicators.

Analysis of the **RYG's reinforced elements demonstrates that Member-State level implementation has been uneven**. The expanded age range to 15–29 years produced different outcomes among Member States: participation in Ireland nearly doubled, while the Netherlands has yet to even implement the change. The mapping requirement shows limited documented implementation. While some Member States have moved in the direction of more individualised approaches, as intended by the RYG, this has not been applied consistently across all cases observed. Furthermore, in response to the RYG's focus on enhancing skills relevant to the digital and green transitions, YG-specific data suggest that impact has been limited. For example, in Ireland, YG schemes offering continued education accounted for just 0.4 % of exits of young people leaving the scheme in 2023.

5.2.3. EU funding and governance mechanisms

The available **EU-level funding mechanisms to support the RYG have evolved over both the 2014–2020 and 2021–2027 programming periods** examined. This was initially a combination of the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) and the European Social Fund (ESF), but from 2021 to 2027, the ESF+ became the primary instrument. During the 2014–2020 period, the planned EU allocation for the relevant intervention field totalled €14.64 billion, with actual expenditure reaching

€12.85 billion. In comparison, the planned EU allocation through the ESF+ for the 2021-2027 period amounts to €10.84 billion, with the Just Transition Fund and Interreg programmes also providing modest support in a few cases.

The study's analysis suggests that **EU funding levels appear to be adequate and accessible**, although this assessment varies across Member States. For instance, in countries such as Germany, Ireland and Sweden, funding is deemed sufficient, with the ESF/ESF+ playing a supplementary role. Rather, the main funding challenges lie in the **insufficient administrative capacity**, uneven coordination and unclear guidance. **National co-financing has increased** both in absolute and relative terms, increasing from €3.63 billion (20 % of total allocations) in 2014-2020 to €6.23 billion (37%) in 2021-2027. Beyond the ESF+, **uptake of the RRF** to support the YG appears mixed. Some Member States link RRF funding to targeted interventions (i.e. Ireland, Finland), while others use it to finance broader plans or interventions (Italy). According to the MAs, **merging the YEI into the ESF+ is viewed as having both positive and negative implications**. These include an extended target population and greater flexibility in implementation. However, challenges cited include frequent reporting requirements and limited visibility of YG-specific expenditure.

Finally, the **monitoring framework has data quality and completeness issues** that undermine its effectiveness. While direct monitoring indicators are provided by all Member States, follow-up monitoring is not always available. Even among Member States providing follow-up data, high proportions of unknown outcomes persist: Sweden, Poland and Ireland report 24-30 % unknown situations at six months post-exit from national YG schemes. Furthermore, **governance within the European Semester heavily utilises social monitoring tools** (i.e. Joint Employment Report) to track RYG objectives, while the macroeconomic imbalance procedure has recalibrated its focus by downgrading youth unemployment to an auxiliary indicator. At the same time, **direct political engagement within the European Semester shows declining responsiveness**: country-specific recommendations (CSRs) relating to national YG schemes were issued only in 2013-2014, despite the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the youth labour market in 2020 and beyond. Ultimately, the relationship between CSRs and actual conditions in the Member States suggest there is limited sensitivity to outcomes.

The implementation of the Reinforced Youth Guarantee

Part II

This study assesses the implementation of the Reinforced Youth Guarantee (RYG), as established by a 2020 Council Recommendation. The RYG is a commitment by the EU Member States to ensure all young people under the age of 30 receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship, or traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. The RYG built on and updated the 2013 Youth Guarantee by: widening the target age to 15-29; improving offer quality; adding a four-phased implementation approach; and emphasising individualised service delivery. The study examines how the 2020 reinforcement has impacted implementation in 10 selected Member States by assessing: Member State trends, the impact of the 2020 reinforcement against key longstanding challenges, and the role of EU funding and governance mechanisms.

The study finds that the RYG has served as a catalyst for institutional reform and policy innovation across the Member States, with EU funding levels appearing broadly adequate and accessible. Against a backdrop where average NEET rates among young people have reached record lows, the RYG's impact has nonetheless been uneven in terms of both the extent of national adoption of the 2020 recommendation's new reinforced elements and the outcomes achieved. While the expanded age range has successfully increased participation, outreach remains difficult, the four-month offer target is not met in more than half of the cases, and flawed monitoring and data reporting by the Member States persists.

AUTHORS

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ADMINISTRATORS RESPONSIBLE

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Executive summary

Background and objectives

The Youth Guarantee (YG) was established via a Council Recommendation in April 2013 in response to the persistent impacts of the 2008 financial crisis on youth employment across Europe. The aim of the initiative was to ensure that all young people under the age of 25 would receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship, or training within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving the formal education system.

The initiative made progress in its initial years, yet subsequent evaluative reports published by the **European Court of Auditors (ECA) in 2015 and 2017 identified significant structural weaknesses** with how the 2013 Council Recommendation was being translated into implementation in the Member States. Key issues raised by these ECA reports included inadequate funding, the absence of a clear definition of what constitutes a 'good quality offer', and incomplete monitoring frameworks. As the COVID-19 pandemic threatened to reverse years of progress in reducing youth unemployment, the European Union (EU) responded with the **RYG** through a new Council Recommendation in October 2020. The RYG introduced a number of concrete reforms over the initial instrument, namely: broadening the target age range to 15-29 years, emphasising 'good quality' offers that are aligned with key EU quality frameworks, focusing on hard-to-reach vulnerable groups, as well as introducing a four-phased approach to better structure implementation of the initiative (i.e., Mapping, Outreach, Preparation, and Offer). Three years after the introduction of the RYG, the **Employment Committee (EMCO)**, which is the advisory committee in the Employment and Social Affairs Council coordinating employment and labour market policies at European and national levels, **launched its own review in 2023**. The EMCO review focussed on how the now reinforced YG was being implemented in the Member States, finding that many of the key challenges identified under the previous 2015 and 2017 ECA reports remain¹.

In this context, the study aims to provide an updated assessment of the RYG's implementation. It is guided by three core objectives: (1) to assess current trends in implementation at Member State level, focusing on the effectiveness of national YG schemes across multiple dimensions; (2) to analyse the impact of the 2020 reinforcement in addressing previously identified challenges via the ECA and EMCO reviews; and (3) to examine the role of EU funding and governance mechanisms.

The study scope extends to both the EU and Member State level, with focused national research carried out across ten selected Member States: **Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and Sweden**. The study draws from desk research, semi-structured interviews with EU-level stakeholders and national Youth Guarantee coordinators, as well as surveys distributed to the Managing Authorities (MAs) of relevant Operational Programmes (OPs).

¹ Employment Committee, [EMCO review of the implementation of the Youth Guarantee – Key Messages](#), February 2024.

Key findings

Member State level trends in implementing the RYG

The study finds that there is **considerable diversity in approaches to YG implementation** across the ten Member States examined. For instance, institutional arrangements range from full policy mainstreaming within existing systems (as in Italy, the Netherlands and Finland) to the creation of distinct, branded national models (as in Ireland). Furthermore, national YG scheme delivery models cluster around two main poles, with a notable imbalance in favour of employment-first approaches (i.e., the Netherlands, Bulgaria) over training-focused systems (i.e., Germany, Italy), with the governance structures of such schemes varying from decentralised municipal delivery to more centralised national coordination.

The **adoption of the four-phase implementation approach** (Mapping, Outreach, Preparation, and Offer) that is central to the 2020 reinforcement has been uneven. The comprehensive mapping of support services, as envisioned by the Council Recommendation, appears to be limited across the Member States. **Outreach to inactive and vulnerable NEETs (young people not in education, employment or training) continues to face challenges**, which in some cases is burdened by a 'creaming effect' whereby schemes primarily benefit young people who are already closer to the labour market. In part, this can stem from the structural limitations of public employment services (PES) that lack the capacity to engage in proactive, community-based outreach. This is compounded by the passive, registration-based design of many schemes, which creates barriers for those facing institutional distrust or practical challenges, such as the lack of accessible transportation options or limited digital access in more rural and remote areas.

In terms of the effectiveness of the national YG schemes, analysis of the **revised Youth Guarantee Indicator Monitoring Framework reveals clear gaps between the improving macroeconomic context and the direct performance of the schemes themselves**. While average NEET rates in the EU reached their lowest recorded level of 11.1% in 2024, the coverage rate of YG schemes stood at less than 50% of the NEET population in many Member States. For those registered in the schemes, timeliness remains a primary challenge. Despite the RYG's emphasis on delivering timely offers, **53.6% of young people registered in a YG scheme in the EU had not yet taken up an offer after the four-month target in 2023**, with particularly poor performance in Italy (86.1%), Ireland (78.8%), and the Netherlands (73.2%). Similarly, the **quality of offers also remains a challenge**, as stakeholders report limited material improvements since the reinforcement. Post-placement support also appears underdeveloped, while follow-up data is often lacking, thereby inhibiting the ability to assess long-term outcomes. **Equity concerns persist** as well, as national YG schemes struggle to reach vulnerable groups as well as rural areas.

Impact of the 2020 reinforcement

The 2020 Council Recommendation aimed to address many of the key weaknesses previously raised by the 2015 and 2017 ECA Special Reports, including the inadequacy of funding, the absence of a clear definition of 'good quality offers', and insufficient monitoring and reporting frameworks. The reinforcement itself did formally address these critiques through, for example, obligating Member States with NEET rates above the EU average to allocate at least 12.5% of ESF+ funding to youth

employment measures, offer quality standards being aligned with key EU quality frameworks,² and a revised Indicator Monitoring Framework for improved data collection. Yet despite these improvements, **the study identifies a gap between these ambitions and their practical implementation.**

In terms of **funding adequacy, stakeholders express mixed views.** While some, such as the European Youth Forum (EYF), maintain that total funding remains insufficient, others, including BusinessEurope, note that the challenge has instead shifted from the amount of funding to its effective absorption and implementation at national level, particularly by the implementing PES. The latter view highlights a persistent lack of the necessary human capacity in some Member States that impedes efficient utilisation of available funds. This distinction is key, as the latter view aligns with the broader evidence gathered for this study, including survey results from Managing Authorities (MAs) and interviews with national YG coordinators across the selected Member States, suggesting that perceived funding gaps may instead stem from bottlenecks in implementation rather than from an absolute lack of resources, informing one of the overall findings of this study that EU funding levels appear to be broadly adequate.

The 2020 Council Recommendation also introduced more specific criteria to determine what constitutes a 'good quality offer'. However, the **stakeholders consulted find that there has been little material improvement in practice.** For instance, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) observes that traineeships continue to have poorly designed learning objectives, while BusinessEurope raises concerns regarding the continued reliance of many national YG schemes on wage subsidies, questioning whether these create long-term or temporary positions that end when public funding does. The EYF also identifies low quality of offers as a persistent issue, resulting in precarious employment rather than sustainable labour market integration. Finally, in response to the third main critique made by the 2017 ECA Special Report on insufficient monitoring, the RYG established a more robust framework for data collection, although as the subsequent analysis confirms, notable gaps in reporting remain.

Many key findings of the 2023 EMCO review remain largely valid in 2025, highlighting **three enduring challenges:** (1) persistent difficulties in outreach to vulnerable NEETs, (2) diverging trends in service delivery, with a shift from personalised to generalised services in some Member States contrasted by reinforced individualisation in others, as well as (3) the inconsistent monitoring and reporting of key indicators.

Analysis of the **RYG's reinforced elements demonstrates that Member State level implementation has been uneven.** The expanded age range to 15-29 produced different outcomes among Member States: participation in Ireland nearly doubled, while the Netherlands has yet to even implement the change. The mapping requirement shows limited documented implementation. While some Member States have moved in the direction of more individualised approaches as intended by the RYG, this has not been applied consistently across all cases observed. Furthermore, in response

² Specifically: Council of the European Union, [Council Recommendation of 10 March 2014 on a Quality Framework for Traineeships](#), March 2014; and [Council Recommendation of 15 March 2018 on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships](#), March 2018.

to the RYG's focus on enhancing skills relevant to the digital and green transitions, YG-specific data suggests that the impact has been limited. For example, in Ireland, YG schemes offering continued education accounted for just 0.4% of exits in 2023.

EU funding and governance mechanisms

The available **EU-level funding mechanisms to support the RYG have evolved over both the 2014-2020 and 2021-2027 programming periods** examined. This was initially a combination of the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) and the European Social Fund (ESF), but from 2021 to 2027, the ESF+ became the primary instrument. During the 2014-2020 period, the planned EU allocation for the relevant intervention field totalled €14.64 billion, with actual expenditure reaching €12.85 billion. In comparison, the planned EU allocation through the ESF+ for the 2021-2027 period amounts to €10.84 billion, with the Just Transition Fund (JTF) and Interreg programmes also providing modest support in a few cases.

The study's analysis suggests that **EU funding levels appear to be adequate and accessible**, though this assessment varies across Member States. For instance, in countries such as Germany, Ireland, and Sweden, funding is deemed sufficient, with the ESF/ESF+ playing a supplementary role. Rather, the main funding challenges lie in the **insufficient administrative capacity**, uneven coordination and unclear guidance. **National co-financing has increased** both in absolute and relative terms, increasing from €3.63 billion (20% of total allocations) in 2014-2020 to €6.23 billion (37%) in 2021-2027. Beyond the ESF+, **uptake of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)** to support the YG appears mixed. Some Member States link RRF funding to targeted interventions (i.e., Finland, Ireland), while others use it to finance broader plans or interventions (Italy). According to the MAs, **merging the YEI into the ESF+ is viewed as having both positive and negative implications**. These include an extended target population and greater flexibility in implementation. However, challenges cited include frequent reporting requirements and limited visibility of expenditure specific to the YG.

Finally, the **monitoring framework suffers from data quality and completeness issues** that undermine its effectiveness. While direct monitoring indicators are provided by all Member States, follow-up monitoring is not always available. Even among Member States providing follow-up data, high proportions of unknown outcomes persist: Sweden, Poland, and Ireland report 24-30% unknown situations at six months post-exit from national YG schemes. Furthermore, **governance within the European Semester heavily utilises social monitoring tools** (i.e. Joint Employment Report) to track RYG objectives, while the Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure has recalibrated its focus by downgrading youth unemployment to an auxiliary indicator. At the same time, **direct political engagement within the Semester shows declining responsiveness**: Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs) related to national YG schemes were issued only in 2013-2014 despite the impacts to the youth labour market in 2020 and beyond due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Ultimately, the relationship between CSRs and actual conditions in the Member States suggest there is limited sensitivity to outcomes.

Policy recommendations

Four policy recommendations are proposed in response to the implementation gaps identified:

- 1 Member States should improve the administrative capabilities of national YG implementing authorities by strengthening interinstitutional coordination between ministries and PES and by investing in specialised staff training to enable more effective service delivery (e.g., individualised and tailored approaches). At EU level, the Commission should emphasise implementation capacity as a priority through CSRs within the European Semester, while separately supporting the dissemination of best practices via Commission-provided technical assistance and in DG EMPL-national YG coordinator meetings.
- 2 Member States should invest in establishing more decentralised or community-driven outreach infrastructure to shift away from reliance on registration-based systems. This should be supported by formal partnerships between PES, social services and local community organisations to better engage with hard-to-reach NEETs and vulnerable subgroups (e.g., Roma communities, migrants) within their local context.
- 3 Member States should restructure national schemes to rebalance RYG pathways towards skills development by reducing dependence on direct employment and wage subsidies as default measures. Instead, prioritisation should shift to a diversified portfolio of continued education, apprenticeships and traineeships that meet defined quality standards. In parallel, the Commission should enforce funding conditionality to ensure alignment with EU quality frameworks.
- 4 The Commission should provide targeted technical assistance to Member States, particularly for the linking of administrative datasets across public services and promote the exchange of best practices via DG EMPL coordination meetings to support Member States in improving their monitoring systems and addressing data quality issues. Specifically, these efforts should aim to reduce the high rate of 'unknown' outcomes by fostering peer support on how to better track beneficiaries beyond their exit from the scheme.

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List of acronyms

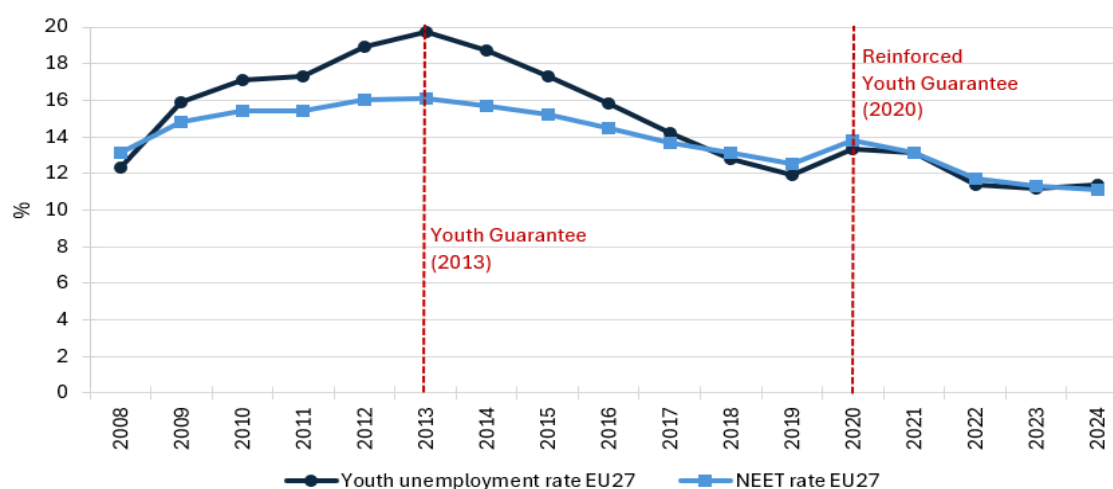
ALMA	Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve
BMAS	Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales
CoR	European Committee of the Regions
CSR	Country-Specific Recommendation
DG EMPL	Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
ECA	European Court of Auditors
EMCO	Employment Committee
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESF+	European Social Fund Plus
EU	European Union
EU-LFS	EU Labour Force Survey
EYF	European Youth Forum
GOL	Garanzia di Occupabilità dei Lavoratori
IAP	Individual Action Plan
IF 103	Intervention Field 103
IF 136	Intervention Field 136
ILO	International Labour Organisation
JER	Joint Employment Report
JTF	Just Transition Fund
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual people
MA s	Managing Authorities
MIP	Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure
NEET	Not in employment, education or training
NGO	Non-governmental organisations
NRRP	National Recovery and Resilience Plan
NUTS	Nomenclature for Territorial Unit of Statistics
OSGCs	One-Stop Guidance Centres
OSS	One-Stop Shop
PES	Public employment services
PEX	Probability of Exit
PON IOG	Programma operativo nazionale Iniziativa occupazione giovani
RRF	Recovery and Resilience Facility
RYG	Reinforced Youth Guarantee
SIISL	Information System for Social and Labour Inclusion
YG	Youth Guarantee
YGIP	Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan

1. Introduction

1.1. Background: The Youth Guarantee in the EU policy context

The Youth Guarantee (YG) was established in April 2013 via a Council Recommendation in the years following the **2008 financial crisis**. This instrument largely served as a response to the continued economic consequences of the crisis nearly 5 years after its inception that were having a significant effect on young people across Europe.³ As unemployment rates for youth aged 15–24 reached an average of 25% across the EU in 2013 (and nearly 20% for youth aged 15–29 – See Figure 1),⁴ the YG aimed to ensure that all individuals under the age of 25 would receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship, or a traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving the formal education system.⁵

Figure 1 – Youth unemployment rate & NEET rate, aged 15–29, EU27



Source: Eurostat, [Youth unemployment rate \[yth_empl_100\]](#) & [NEET rate \[edat_lfse_22\]](#).

In its initial years, the YG framework catalysed action at the Member State level, with millions of young people across the EU registering with their national YG schemes and subsequently taking up offers as the policy instrument intended. However, this initial progress took place amid a backdrop of implementation challenges, many of which were identified by several key EU-level evaluative reports. Notably, Special Reports from the **European Court of Auditors (ECA)** in both 2015 and 2017 highlighted persistent structural weaknesses of such YG schemes' implementation that risked

³ Council of the European Union, [Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee \(2013/C 120/01\)](#), April 2013.

⁴ Eurostat, [Youth unemployment rate - % of active population aged 15-24](#), September 2025.

⁵ Council of the European Union, [Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee \(2013/C 120/01\)](#), April 2013.

undermining their effectiveness over the long term.⁶ Ultimately, these reports centred on three key issues: 1) the **inadequacy of total funding** to meet the scale of the challenge, 2) the **absence of a clear, operational definition of what constitutes a 'good quality offer'**, which led to inconsistencies and concerns that some schemes were channelling young people into precarious, short-term positions, and finally, 3) an **incomplete monitoring and reporting framework**, resulting in an accountability gap. Yet several years later, the economic fallout resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 re-aggravated and exacerbated many of these pre-existing challenges, threatening to reverse years of progress in reducing both youth unemployment and the number of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET). This group, which is highly heterogeneous and includes not only the unemployed but also those who are inactive for various reasons (such as care responsibilities or health issues),⁷ constitutes a primary target population for the YG.

In response to the impacts of the pandemic, a new Council Recommendation was adopted in October 2020 which established the **Reinforced Youth Guarantee (RYG)**,⁸ and was designed explicitly to address many of the key challenges that had been previously identified with the original instrument. To do so, the reinforcement introduced a number of concrete reforms, including:

- An **extended target age range**, increasing from up to 25 to 29 years of age.
- An enhanced focus on delivering **'good quality' offers** that are aligned with EU Quality Frameworks.
- A stronger emphasis on serving hard-to-reach vulnerable groups and inactive NEETs.⁹
- The introduction of a structured **four-phased approach** to implementation (Mapping, Outreach, Preparation, and Offer) to promote more coherent and individualised service delivery.

Despite these reforms and the general downward trend in NEET rates since the pandemic, a 2023 review by the **Employment Committee (EMCO)** found that notable challenges with implementation of the now reinforced YG remain.¹⁰ Specifically, the review highlighted persistent challenges in outreach to the most vulnerable, declining coverage rates, and the poor quality of follow-up data. It is within this context of an advanced yet still-challenged policy that this study takes place.

⁶ European Court of Auditors, [Special Report No 3/2015: EU Youth Guarantee: first steps taken but implementation risks ahead](#), March 2015; European Court of Auditors, [Special Report No 5/2017: Youth unemployment – have EU policies made a difference? An assessment of the Youth Guarantee and the Youth Employment Initiative](#), May 2017.

⁷ Lecerf, M., [NEETs: who are they? Being young and not in employment, education or training today](#), EPRS, March 2017.

⁸ Council of the European Union, [Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee](#), November 2020.

⁹ According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition, the NEET population is divided into two main subgroups: the unemployed (i.e., who are actively seeking work but cannot find it) and the inactive (i.e., who are not actively seeking work). This latter group is highly diverse and can include young people with caring responsibilities, those with disabilities or health issues, and others who are disengaged from the labour market for various reasons. See: O'Higgins, N., [Young People Not in Employment, Education or Training, ILO Technical Brief N° 3](#), 2019.

¹⁰ Employment Committee, [EMCO review of the implementation of the Youth Guarantee – Key Messages](#), February 2024.

1.2. Objectives and scope of the study

The overarching objective of this study is to provide an **up-to-date assessment of the implementation of the RYG**. In doing so, the research carried out for this study was guided by three core objectives:

- 1 To assess the **current trends** in implementation of the RYG at the **Member State level**, focusing on the effectiveness of national YG schemes across multiple dimensions.
- 2 To analyse the **impact of the 2020 reinforcement** in addressing the previously key identified challenges and how this translated into material impacts on the ground.
- 3 To examine the role of **EU governance mechanisms**, in terms of both **funding** and **monitoring** systems, in supporting the implementation of the RYG.

To achieve these objectives, the study's scope combines EU- and Member State-level research across ten Member States, which serve as the primary source of evidence in terms of the implementation of the RYG on the ground. The selected Member States are **Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain** and **Sweden**. The research for this study also draws on EU-level perspectives comprised of key sources of academic, policy, and grey literature; interviews with EU-level stakeholders and National Youth Guarantee coordinators; and surveys distributed to the Managing Authorities' (MAs) of Operational Programmes relevant to the RYG's funding.

1.3. Structure of the report

This report is structured over six chapters. Following this introduction, **Chapter 2** details the methodological approach of this study, including the research design, the tools used, as well as its limitations. Next, **Chapter 3** presents findings on current implementation trends in the selected Member States. Then, **Chapter 4** analyses the impact of the 2020 reinforcement itself, assessing the extent to which the 2020 Council Recommendation addresses the specific challenges identified by prior key EU evaluations. **Chapter 5** examines the EU governance framework, starting with the use of EU funds for implementing the YG as well as the role of EU level data and monitoring systems. Finally, **Chapter 6** concludes by synthesising the key findings and proposing a set of policy recommendations.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research design and approach

This study uses a mixed-methods approach, consisting of both qualitative and quantitative data collection methodologies. The study is structured around the three core research objectives as previously described. This enabled multiple research activities to be carried out in parallel, from analysing EU funding data to conducting national and EU-level interviews as well as a survey with MAs implementing projects funded by the ESF+/RRF. The methodological approach combined both EU-level analysis, including relevant literature, interviews and quantitative funding data, with more focused, in-depth research at the Member State level.

2.2. Data collection methods

The evidence base for this study was constructed using three data collection methods: **desk research**, **semi-structured stakeholder interviews**, and an **online survey**.

At both the EU and Member State level, **desk research** was carried out to establish a thorough understanding of the RYG's policy context, implementation, and performance. At **EU level**, this involved a wide ranging and up-to-date review of policy and legal documents, including both the 2013 and 2020 Council Recommendations, and key evaluative reports published by the ECA in 2015 and 2017, and by the EMCO in 2023. Statistical data from Eurostat was also examined, as well as academic literature focusing on the effectiveness of active labour market policies (ALMPs), youth employment trends, and EU governance mechanisms. This was complemented by a review of reports and position papers from think tanks and stakeholder organisations offering different perspectives on the implementation of the RYG. For instance, key sources included policy recommendations and assessments from EU-level social partners such as the European Youth Forum (EYF), BusinessEurope, and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) in order to gain an understanding of the most prominent and recurring issues surrounding the pre- and post-2020 reinforcement of the YG.¹¹

At the **national level**, the **desk research** focused on documentation from the ten Member States selected for this study. Critically, this review included a consistent set of published reports related to the implementation of the YG in these countries, including their official National Youth Guarantee Implementation Plans (YGIPs) for 2013 and 2020 where available, YG-specific Country Fiches, Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs) via the European Semester, as well as national fact sheets on data monitoring concerning the implementation of the YG in the observed Member States, all of which are publicly accessible and published by the European Commission.¹² Beyond these EU-level sources, the national analyses were deepened by a review of national documentation such as

¹¹ The full list of sources consulted for this study is located in the References section.

¹² European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Reinforced Youth Guarantee, July 2025.

country-specific academic articles, assessments of national YG schemes, as well as reports from national-level social partners and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), among others, in order to capture the nuances in national RYG implementation and to assess the on-the-ground impact of the RYG.

Beyond desk research, **18 targeted semi-structured interviews** were key to gathering evidence for this study as well. These interviews were conducted with EU-level stakeholders and Member State-level actors involved in the implementation of the national YG schemes. Together, this enabled the collection of qualitative insights into the operational realities of the RYG from both high-level and on-the-ground perspectives. More specifically, a two-tiered strategy was followed:

- **EU-level interviews** were held with relevant officials at the European Commission (DG EMPL) with extensive knowledge on the design and intended aims of the RYG, as well as with representatives from major EU-level stakeholder organisations. These included social partners, such as ETUC and BusinessEurope, in addition to the civil society organisation, the EYF¹³.
- At least one **national-level interview** was conducted in each of the ten selected Member States to gather first-hand evidence on the implementation of national YG schemes following the 2020 Council Recommendation¹⁴. Specifically, the interviews were held with the **National Youth Guarantee Coordinators**, who possess in-depth knowledge of the structure, management and delivery of their respective YG schemes, and are responsible for communicating with the Commission on matters related to the YG.

Finally, an **online survey** was also developed and administered between 25 July and 5 September to gather data specifically on the EU funding and governance elements of the RYG, with questions also posed regarding monitoring. Aiming to fill specific gaps within the data, the surveys posed questions relating to the use and tracking of EU funds, both for youth employment generally as well as the YG more specifically, and how this was impacted by the absorption of the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) into the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) for the 2021-2027 programming period. The survey was distributed to the MAs responsible for overseeing the relevant ESF+ and Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) operational programmes across all 27 EU Member States, collecting data on funding allocations, the tracking of expenditures, administrative experiences amid the transition to the ESF+, as well as national monitoring practices and indicators, among others.

¹³ During the study, the following five EU-level interviews were conducted: Interview with DG EMPL, conducted on 26.06.2025; Interview with Business Europe, conducted on 03.07.2025; interview with DG EMPL, ESF+ Unit, 23.07.2025 Interview with ETUC, conducted on 22.07.2025; interview with European Youth Forum, conducted on 03.07.2025.

¹⁴ Thirteen interviews were conducted for this study. Nine interviews were held with Youth Guarantee coordinators and experts from Sweden (24.09.2025), Spain (04.08.2025), Ireland (13.08.2025), Hungary (30.07.2025), Poland (17.07.2025, 22.07.2025 and 01.08.2025), the Netherlands (28.07.2025) and Finland (31.07.2025). Additionally, interviews were held with a Senior Evaluator at INAPP – the National Public Policy Analysis Institute of Italy (17.07.2025), an employee of the Italian Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs (30.07.2025), a representative of Bulgaria’s Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (04.07.2025), and a representative from Intreo, Ireland’s Public Employment Service (13.08.2025). One written input was also received from Germany’s Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs on 29.08.2025.

Responses were received from 25 MAs located in 13 Member States: Poland (9), Portugal (2), Belgium (2), France (2), Italy (2), Malta (1), Slovenia (1), Cyprus (1), Ireland (1), Luxembourg (1), Spain (1), Latvia (1) and Lithuania (1).

2.3. Member State selection criteria

A set of well-defined criteria was used to select the ten case-study Member States, to ensure that the sample reflects the varied experiences and outcomes of the RYG across the EU. The process used criteria across two primary analytical dimensions, 1. Youth unemployment and 2. Macroeconomic context, which were then supplemented by a cross-cutting criterion for achieving geographic balance. The core purpose of this approach was to better distinguish between the policy impacts of the RYG and the positive outcomes that may be attributable to broader macroeconomic tailwinds, enabling a more nuanced assessment. These criteria include the following:¹⁵

- 1 Youth unemployment (2013–2025):** The first dimension assessed the full spectrum of Member State experiences with youth unemployment (aged 15–24) from the YG's inception to the present. The selection includes: Member States with the highest (e.g., Sweden, Spain) and lowest (e.g., Germany, the Netherlands) current YU rates in order to identify persistent challenges and notable successes, Member States demonstrating substantial improvements to highlight effective strategies in national contexts recovering from high initial rates, as well as Member States exhibiting minimal improvement or worsening trends to reveal potential policy implementation barriers and ongoing challenges.
- 2 Macroeconomic context (2013–2024):** This dimension categorises Member States by their real GDP per capita growth to reflect varied macroeconomic environments. This allows for subsequent analyses to factor in the extent to which improvements in youth employment can be attributed specifically to the RYG, as opposed to benefiting from broader economic tailwinds.
- 3 Geographical balance:** Finally, a cross-cutting criterion was applied to ensure the Member State selection reflects the diversity of governance structures, public administration cultures, and socio-economic contexts across the EU's distinct northern, southern, eastern, and western regions.

On the basis of these criteria, the study selected the following ten Member States for in-depth analysis: Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and Sweden.

2.4. Limitations of the study

In view of the mixed-methods approach described above, there are a number of limitations that should be acknowledged. The first and most significant issue concerns the MA survey. The survey

¹⁵ Further details concerning how the following three criteria were used to categorise the Member States can be found in the Annex (See Table 14).

was limited by a small and not fully representative pool of respondents (N=25) relative to the total number of MAs contacted across the EU27 (143). Additionally, responses came from only 13 Member States, with an overrepresentation of respondents from Poland (9) and with no contributions from Managing Authorities in 14 Member States. This includes six of the ten Member States selected for in-depth analysis in this study (i.e., Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Netherlands, and Sweden), in addition to the remaining eight Member States for which no responses were received (i.e., Austria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Romania, and Slovakia). As such, the representativeness of the interviews' and survey's key findings should be interpreted with this in mind.

Next, while efforts were made to ensure consistency and comparability of national-level data, this has been ultimately constrained by variations in Member States' data collection and monitoring systems. More specifically, these variations manifest as inconsistent approaches to follow-up monitoring, high proportions of 'unknown' YG outcomes in certain countries, as well as the use of differing national indicators or timeframes, all of which challenge the ability to make direct cross-country comparisons of the RYG's performance.

Furthermore, establishing direct causality between the implementation of the RYG and its observed outcomes, such as a decline in NEET or youth unemployment rates, is inherently complex. The period of the YG and RYG's implementation has coincided with significant macroeconomic shifts, including economic recovery after 2013 and the subsequent fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. Separating the specific impact of the RYG from these powerful external factors therefore poses a considerable analytical challenge to this study. This is compounded by the fact that the RYG is rarely implemented in isolation. Rather, it is typically embedded within a broader suite of national active labour market policies, which in turn makes it difficult to attribute outcomes solely to the YG framework as opposed to complementary or related policy measures.

Finally, the comparability of periods before and after the 2020 reinforcement is limited. The reinforcement introduced significant changes to the scope and objectives of the YG, while the external context was fundamentally altered by the impact of the pandemic on youth labour markets. Consequently, while this study analyses the evolution of the instrument, direct comparisons of its performance across these distinct and, at times, destabilising periods, must be approached with caution.

3. Implementation of the RYG in the Member States

Key findings

- National implementation of the RYG ranges from full policy mainstreaming (e.g. the Netherlands, Finland, and Germany), to branded national models (e.g. Ireland), with a notable imbalance in favour of employment-first approaches (i.e., the Netherlands, Bulgaria) over training-focused systems (i.e., Germany, Italy), with their governance structures varying from decentralised municipal delivery to more centralised national coordination.
- Awareness of the RYG among authorities and young people and implementation capacity vary widely across Member States. Staff capacity is seen as insufficient in several Member States (e.g., Italy, Spain), with PES lacking sufficient resources and the pedagogical capacity to deliver the individualised support that is intended by the 2020 reinforcement.
- Clear gaps remain between the improving macroeconomic context and the direct performance of the schemes themselves when using the YG's direct monitoring indicators. While NEET rates reached their lowest recorded level of 11.1% in 2024, over half of participants remained registered in their scheme beyond the four-month target without having taken up an offer. Equity concerns persist, as national YG schemes struggle to reach vulnerable groups (e.g., migrants, Roma) as well as rural areas.

This chapter provides an overview of how the RYG via the 2020 Council Recommendation has been taken up across Member States. Since the 2013 Council Recommendation establishing the original YG, several countries have mainstreamed the programme into their pre-existing policy frameworks, while in others, it has been launched as a distinct, branded initiative within their national employment strategy. Member States have therefore taken on the changes recommended by the RYG from different institutional baselines, which explains the variety of implementation pathways observed. To make sense of these differences, the chapter tracks cross-cutting trends and groups countries based on similar approaches taken to RYG adoption.

This chapter is divided into four sections. First, it maps the starting points of countries and contrasts the different governance structures observed (Section 3.1.). Next, it examines the level of awareness of the RYG among public authorities and target beneficiaries, and then explores the preparedness of such authorities for its implementation (Section 3.2.). Third, it assesses the effectiveness and equity of national YG schemes using the revised Indicator Monitoring Framework for the YG (Section 3.3.). Fourth and finally, the chapter synthesises the main benefits and best practices observed among the selected Member States in implementing the RYG alongside the shortcomings and key barriers that continue to inhibit their effectiveness.

3.1. Overview of national implementation of the RYG

The ten Member States that were reviewed in-depth for this study demonstrate a variety of approaches with respect to the delivery and scope of offers provided under national YG schemes.

Delivery structures

The institutional set-up of national YG schemes largely mirrors existing national public administration structures and cultures; significant variation has been observed across the ten selected Member States. Most countries have decentralised YG schemes, in recognition of the need to serve distinct local and regional labour markets and demographics. The degree of steering carried out by national authorities varies considerably between Member States.

Finland, Sweden and the Netherlands rely on municipal delivery of the YG scheme. For example, in the **Netherlands**, the implementing municipalities are given responsibility under a national framework entitled 'From school to sustainable work',¹⁶ which strengthens school-municipality-transfer cooperation. Furthermore, municipalities received dedicated budgets for the 2024-2025 school year to address youth unemployment.

Finland institutionalised the YG within a multi-ministry model supported by 80 dedicated centres.¹⁷ Established in over 80 municipalities across the country, they reflect interministerial collaboration and offer access to employment guidance, education counselling, health and social support and youth work.¹⁸ **Sweden's** YG scheme, which dates back to 2007, is administered by the PES in close contact with municipalities, social partners and other labour market actors. Since schools in Sweden have been run by municipalities since 1991, they also play a key role in helping NEETs return to school or enter employment.¹⁹

Germany's model focuses on coordinated youth employment agencies (*Jugendberufsagenturen*). In line with their federal structure, responsibility for implementing the YG is shared between the Federation and the Länder.²⁰ At the local level, this translates into networks that bring together the local employment agency and job centre with youth welfare services and schools. As a result, young people get a single, coordinated entry point into guidance, benefits and employment and training pathways. Efforts have also been made to foster cooperation at local level between those who provide employment promotion services and basic social security benefits for job seekers, and the municipal administration and schools to better manage the transition from school to employment.²¹ This integrated model aligns with recent findings from the literature regarding community-based engagement, which suggest that a 'collaborative approach' is essential for success.²² Specifically,

¹⁶ Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, [From school to sustainable work, Wet van school naar duurzaam werk \(36.667\)](#), December 2024.

¹⁷ Youth employment policies are implemented by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, which leads labour market integration, the Ministry of Education and Culture focused on education and vocational pathways as well as the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, responsible for inclusion and vulnerable youth.

¹⁸ Finnish Government, [Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan: Finland](#), April 2013.

¹⁹ Interview with Sweden's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 24.09.2025.

²⁰ Written input from Germany's Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, received on 29.08.2025.

²¹ SMEunited, [Position paper on the council recommendation on a bridge to jobs - reinforcing the youth guarantee](#), 2020.

²² Jonsson, F., Gotfredsen, A. C., & Goicolea, I., [How can community-based \(re\)engagement initiatives meet the needs of 'NEET' young people? Findings from the theory gleaning phase of a realist evaluation in Sweden](#), June 2022, p. 3.

employment initiatives must coordinate effectively with other public services, such as health and social support, in order to provide the holistic support that is required to address the complex barriers facing NEETs.

Italy has rolled out and decentralised its YG scheme.²³ Under this multi-level governance model, implementation is largely entrusted to regional and autonomous provincial authorities, which act as intermediate bodies responsible for designing and managing interventions tailored to their specific territorial needs. This decentralisation operates within a centrally designed national framework that ensures a degree of coherence and standardisation of services across the country. At the same time, however, analysis from the literature indicates that the implementation environment in Italy is challenged by structural issues, including a sub-protective welfare system, high labour market rigidities, and significant skills mismatches between the education system and the labour market.²⁴ Key programmes have included the YEI until 2023, and subsequently, national and regional programmes supported by ESF+, NextGenerationEU, and the RRF.²⁵

Meanwhile, **Ireland's** system is centrally managed: the PES is branded as 'Intreo' and acts as a one stop shop (OSS) for referrals to all employment support and services. Entry starts when a young person applies for income support, and referrals include work placements, apprenticeships, training and back-to-education options.²⁶

Finally, **Spain** uses a hybrid model: the national YG scheme is implemented by the Ministry of Labour and Social Economy, specifically the Servicio Público de Empleo Estatal, but delivery of programmes and services is delegated to the regional level.²⁷

Type of service offered

Some Member States focus on employment-related services, while others have emphasised apprenticeships and training.

In the **Netherlands**, for example, regional partnerships between educational institutions, employers and municipalities help in matching young people with educational or employment trajectories.²⁸ However, in this case, YG outcomes appear to prioritise employment-focused outcomes, as 89 % of

²³ Ministry of Labour and Social Policies of Italy, [Italian Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan](#), 2017; Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, [Facilitare l'ingresso dei giovani al lavoro](#), n.d.; Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, [Il Programma di Garanzia di Occupabilità dei Lavoratori](#), December 2021.

²⁴ Gaspani, F., Recchi, S., Rio, A., [Young People NEET in Italy: Exploring the Phenomenon and Evolving Policies](#), in [Pulcher, S., et al. \(eds\) Diversity and Inclusion in Italy](#), May 2025, p. 641.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Department of Social Protection of Ireland, [Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan](#), 2013.

²⁷ Interview with Spain's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted 04.08.2025.

²⁸ European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 – Country fiche: Netherlands](#), November 2024.

all offers made in 2023 were for employment, which aligned with the Netherlands' employment-centred activation policy more broadly.²⁹

Likewise, the national YG scheme in **Bulgaria** is focused on employment and traineeship offers through active labour market policy instruments, such as wage subsidies for employers to hire young people, job-search training and employer–youth matching events. The main difference between traineeships and employment is the presence or absence of on-the-job training and mentorship. Employment offers cover both full-time positions and part-time positions. More specifically, these offers are generally structured as fixed-term contracts due to their duration being tied to the period of the wage subsidy that is provided to the employer as part of the subsidised employment measure. There are no specific education offers, nor any measures to support re-entry into education for those outside the 15–18 age range.³⁰

As part of the focus on employment, many Member States rely heavily on wage subsidies for employers to incentivise hiring young people under the YG scheme. Payments can cover the salary, social and health insurance contributions or commuting costs, as is the case in **Bulgaria**. Additionally, **Hungary** offers a 90-day job trial wage subsidy under their national YG scheme, which covers the wage costs of young employees for three months.³¹ This measure provides employers with a low-risk opportunity to assess the practical abilities of candidates who may not meet formal educational criteria or have a fragmented employment history, thereby creating a pathway to employment based on demonstrated skills rather than on educational credentials alone.

In **Sweden**, the national approach has been to invest in short-term, targeted measures rather than long-term subsidies. In addition to subsidies for employers, the country offers a development allowance paid to young people who participate in labour-market programmes.³²

Spain has a strong dependence on public incentives, such as reductions and exemptions in employer's social security contributions for job placements.³³ In 2023, 65.7 % of timely employment offers were subsidised, well above the EU average of 11.8 %.³⁴ This reliance on subsidies extends across all types of timely offers, as 2023 data indicates that 100 % of YG scheme exits towards continued education, apprenticeships, and traineeships within the four-month period were subsidised as well.³⁵

Conversely, **Germany** and **Italy** place greater emphasis on apprenticeships and training. In **Italy**, short courses are offered in digital, green, linguistic and entrepreneurial skills. Some regions implement school-to-work transition schemes, student mobility, guidance for post-secondary

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Republic of Bulgaria, [National Implementation Plan for European Youth Guarantee \(NIPEYG\) 2014–2020](#), April 2014.

³¹ Government of Hungary, [Hungary's National Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan](#), 2013.

³² Ministry of Employment of Sweden, [Youth unemployment policies in Sweden - the Swedish response to the Council recommendation on a bridge to jobs - Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee](#), June 2022.

³³ Interview with Spain's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted 04.08.2025.

³⁴ European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 - Country fiche: Spain](#), November 2024.

³⁵ Ibid.

choices and support for disadvantaged youth. Apprenticeships are structured as open-ended employment contracts with training components and can be for vocational qualification, professional qualification or higher education and research. More broadly, their dual system focuses on the integration of classroom learning and practical work experience.³⁶ While the design of the national policy emphasises training, findings from the literature indicate that the Italian YG has primarily succeeded in activating NEETs towards employment, though such offers tend to be of low quality and a precarious nature, rather than focusing on outcomes that are geared towards apprenticeships or training.³⁷ By contrast, in **Germany** apprenticeships and vocational training constitute the main offerings: here these are channelled through counselling and support services provided by the PES and other actors.³⁸

Poland takes a similar approach by channelling young people into apprenticeships, traineeships and vocational training. Poland's RYG framework was strengthened by the addition of requirements for quality of offers, digital skills development, active outreach and a more individualised approach.³⁹ Apprenticeships are used as first-entry pathways into recognised qualifications and stable jobs.⁴⁰ A specific best practice identified in this context is the 'traineeship voucher', which requires employers to commit to hiring the specific individual beneficiary for six months after the traineeship concludes, thereby creating a clear pathway to more sustainable labour market integration.⁴¹

3.2. Awareness and preparedness for implementation

This subsection assesses two key dimensions of the effective implementation of the RYG. First, it highlights the awareness of the national implementing authorities and the target beneficiaries (i.e. young people) of the scheme and the services available. It then examines the implementation capacity of national YG service providers in view of their ability to deliver the objectives of the 2020 Council Recommendation. The findings presented are based on a synthesis of official documentation, such as country fiches on data collection for monitoring of national YG schemes as of 2023,⁴² in addition to qualitative evidence from stakeholder interviews. Accordingly, statements reflecting interviewee feedback represent the professional perspectives of the experts consulted.

³⁶ EURES, [Living and working conditions : Italy](#), June 2025.

³⁷ Gaspani, F., Recchi, S., & Rio, A., [Young People NEET in Italy: Exploring the Phenomenon and Evolving Policies](#), in Pulcher, S., et al. (eds) *Diversity and Inclusion in Italy*, May 2025, p. 646.

³⁸ Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales, [Nationaler Implementierungsplan zur Umsetzung der EU-Jugendgarantie in Deutschland](#), December 2024; Written input from Germany's Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, received on 29.08.2025.

³⁹ Interviews with Poland's national Youth Guarantee experts, conducted on 17.07.2025, 22.07.2025 and 01.08.2025.

⁴⁰ Sejm, [Labour Market and Public Employment Services Act](#), March 2025.

⁴¹ Eleveld, A., Bazzani, T., De Le Cour, A., & Staszewska, E., [Implementation of the European Youth Guarantee and the Right to Work: A Comparative Analysis of Traineeship Programmes Under the EU Active Labour Market Policy](#), 2022, p. 293.

⁴² CIRCABC, [Youth Guarantee data collection – MS factsheets](#), July 2025.

Although the YG has been progressively mainstreamed into the policy frameworks of many Member States since its introduction in 2013 and reinforcement in 2020, this has also **limited the visibility of the RYG** as a distinct policy instrument. Conversely, when considering Member States' **preparedness** to implement the RYG, it emerges that **implementation capacity**, rather than financial resources committed to the schemes themselves, **is the main constraint in several national systems**.

3.2.1. Awareness among implementing public authorities and business

Awareness of the RYG and its reinforced elements among the implementing public authorities varies considerably across the Member States observed. In several countries, the mainstreaming of YG-related measures into existing policy frameworks has strengthened institutional integration, albeit at the expense of the RYG's visibility as a distinct instrument with links to EU policy.

In **Italy**, awareness among public authorities was quite high during the initial implementation of the YG.⁴³ However, **the absence of direct references to the reinforced YG in official documents could imply a decrease in explicit visibility of the scheme**. Similarly, in **the Netherlands**,⁴⁴ **Germany**,⁴⁵ and **Finland**,⁴⁶ where the programme is implemented through existing policies, explicit awareness of the YG as an EU-level initiative is quite limited. As a result, mainstreaming the YG into national policy frameworks would appear to have the benefit of improving its coherence with pre-existing, complementary policy instruments, though at the expense of the visibility of the scheme's 'brand' (i.e., the Youth Guarantee).

In **Ireland**, the national YG coordinator highlighted that public authorities are well aware of the scheme as it is integrated into the national employment strategy.⁴⁷ Similarly, in **Hungary**, awareness of public authorities is considered high,⁴⁸ while the national YG coordinator of **Spain** highlighted the strong communication and data exchange that takes place to support their YG scheme between autonomous communities, the state and regional and local authorities, indicating strong institutional awareness and engagement overall.⁴⁹ A similarly high level of awareness is also evident in **Bulgaria**, where a national framework agreement was signed in 2023 between various ministries (e.g., Labour, Education, Youth and Sports), social partners, as well as youth organisations to coordinate implementation at both national and local levels.⁵⁰ Likewise, in **Poland**, the RYG is implemented through a well-defined structure involving the Ministry of Family and Social Policy, regional and local

⁴³ Interview with a Senior Evaluator at INAPP (the National Public Policy Analysis Institute), conducted on 17.07.2025; interview with an employee of the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, conducted on 30.07.2025.

⁴⁴ Interview with the Netherlands' national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 28.07.2025.

⁴⁵ Written input from Germany's Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, received on 29.08.2025.

⁴⁶ Interview with Finland's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 31.07.2025.

⁴⁷ Interview with Ireland's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 13.08.2025.

⁴⁸ Interview with Hungary's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 30.07.2025.

⁴⁹ Interview with Spain's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted 04.08.2025.

⁵⁰ Interview with a representative of the Bulgarian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies (MLSP), conducted on 04.07.2025.

labour offices, the Voluntary Labour Corps, and a dedicated Youth Guarantee Monitoring Team, representing a coordinated institutional approach.⁵¹ In **Sweden**, the evidence suggests that there is a strong level of institutional awareness as well.⁵² For instance, there are school-based campaigns, information sessions and cooperation between the PES and schools, suggesting **a high level of awareness, mainly among those in contact with public services.**

Regarding the **level of engagement among social partners**, ETUC indicated that general awareness of the scheme among young trade unionists and workers representatives is very low.⁵³ Furthermore, they noted that trade unions are not meaningfully involved in the implementation of the RYG across the EU, with their participation often being reduced to a **superficial 'box-ticking exercise' rather than genuine consultation** that would allow their expertise to inform the knowledge base of labour market needs.

Awareness within the business community remains mixed. For instance, BusinessEurope reported that its members in **Sweden and Hungary** were critical of the level of business involvement in implementation.⁵⁴ The situation in Hungary may be attributed to a challenging environment for cooperation, illustrating how the level of engagement is often contingent upon the broader context of social dialogue and government-business relations.⁵⁵ Another determining factor identified is the degree of **proactivity in outreach efforts.** Where businesses are integrated into the coordination of national YG schemes, they tend to play a more prominent role in the outreach activities.⁵⁶

3.2.2. Awareness of available support services among young people

The awareness of available youth employment support services among the target beneficiaries of the RYG, i.e. young people aged 15–29, is inherently more difficult to assess by comparison. Yet, based on the limited evidence available, it appears to be uneven across the selected Member States observed. In **Italy**, the coverage of the national YG scheme remains low, reaching only 10.6% of the total NEET population aged 15–29, which could indicate that a large share of the youth population might be unaware of these services.⁵⁷ This challenge may well persist, as following the conclusion of the dedicated national operational programme (PON IOG) in 2023, Italy no longer implements the YG as a single, branded initiative.⁵⁸ Instead, support for young people is now mainstreamed into broader active labour market policy frameworks that are funded primarily by the ESF+ and RRF. These new instruments, such as the GOL (*Garanzia di Occupabilità dei Lavoratori*, Guarantee of

⁵¹ Ministry of Family and Social Policy, [The Implementation Plan for the Youth Guarantee](#), August 2022.

⁵² Ministry of Employment of Sweden, [Youth unemployment policies in Sweden - the Swedish response to the Council recommendation on a bridge to jobs - Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee](#), June 2022.

⁵³ Interview with ETUC, conducted on 22.07.2025.

⁵⁴ Interview with BusinessEurope, conducted on 03.07.2025.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 - Country fiche: Italy](#), November 2024.

⁵⁸ Interview with a Senior Evaluator at INAPP (the National Public Policy Analysis Institute), conducted on 17.07.2025; interview with an employee of the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, conducted on 30.07.2025.

Workers' Employability) programme and the National Programme for Youth, Women and Labour (PN GDL), lack one unified, branded entry point for the YG, which may in turn reduce its visibility to intended beneficiaries.⁵⁹

In **Ireland**, the coordinator considers awareness of the Intreo OSS among young people to be high, given its prominence.⁶⁰ However, in **Hungary**, the national YG coordinator finds that gauging young people's knowledge of the scheme is more complex due to the existence of several youth employment related measures in parallel, such as personal income tax exemptions for those aged 25 and under as well as reduced social security contributions for young workers.⁶¹ This challenge may be reflected in the national YG scheme's low uptake: of the estimated NEET population, only 1% entered the YG. By contrast, both public authorities and young people in **Bulgaria** are considered to be well-informed of the national services on offer.⁶² For instance, the Employment Agency and other authorities inform youth of different support opportunities and **organise information days, career forums and use various information channels**, including through the deployment of youth and Roma mediators for direct outreach, cooperation agreements with youth organisations, and mobile employment bureaus to reach remote settlements.⁶³

As indicated by their national YG coordinator, public authorities in **Spain** have implemented a **wide range of actions aimed at increasing the programme's visibility**.⁶⁴ Despite these efforts, recent research highlights that social organisations still play an important role in bridging the information and support gap left by public institutions, which includes providing the personalised guidance that is necessary for vulnerable youth to navigate and access their YG scheme.⁶⁵ In **Sweden**, many citizens know of the activities of the PES, even if they would not know of the YG per se.⁶⁶ At the same time, young people distant from the labour market, particularly those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, have very limited contact with PES and educational institutions. Similarly, while the knowledge of young people on the YG in **Poland** is very limited, especially among those who are most distant from the labour market, a national communication strategy has been developed to improve outreach using multiple channels, including social media campaigns, establishing dedicated youth service points, and leveraging the extensive network of the Voluntary Labour Corps (OHP). Despite these efforts, national stakeholders note that communication mainly reaches students, employers, relevant stakeholders and labour market institutions.⁶⁷ Consequently,

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Interview with Ireland's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 03.07.2025.

⁶¹ Interview with Hungary's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 30.07.2025.

⁶² Interview with a representative of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, conducted on 04.07.2025.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Interview with Spain's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted 04.08.2025.

⁶⁵ Escamilla, A., & Molina, M., ['The Youth Guarantee: learning from the experiences of young migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Spain', *Transitions on hold?*](#), October 2023, p. 139.

⁶⁶ Interview with Sweden's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted 24.09.2025.

⁶⁷ Interviews with Poland's national Youth Guarantee experts, conducted on 17.07.2025, 22.07.2025 and 01.08.2025.

the hardest-to-reach remain the least aware of such schemes and services that are available to them.

The **EYF** highlights recurring feedback regarding a lack of programme awareness among both its members and young people themselves.⁶⁸ Indeed, many beneficiaries remain unaware that they are participating in a YG scheme.⁶⁹ Furthermore, a key barrier to engagement might be that many young people do not self-identify with the 'NEET' label, rendering outreach based on such terminology potentially ineffective.⁷⁰ Consequently, visibility and ownership of the scheme vary considerably across stakeholders and administrative levels.

3.2.3. Preparedness: implementation capacity of YG service providers

Beyond awareness, the capacity of national YG service providers to effectively implement the RYG represents a critical success factor. Based on stakeholder consultations at EU level, representatives from both EYF and BusinessEurope indicate that the staff capacity of YG implementers is inadequate, suggesting that **PES require greater resources and support**. This lack of resources is seen as a key barrier to effective implementation and more personalised service delivery that the RYG intended.⁷¹ Recent academic literature corroborates this, suggesting that in order to effectively engage vulnerable NEETs, YG service providers must not only have the time but the specific set of skills required to adopt a 'caring approach', building the trusting, non-judgemental relationships that are key to fostering motivation among the target group.⁷² The national and EU-level evidence gathered also indicates that **PES staff need to be better equipped to engage effectively with young people facing complex barriers**, as better staff capacity would also address the problem of absorption capacity, which hinders the effective use of available EU funds. Moreover, literature suggests that the professional status and support for frontline staff are also key factors, as research finds that practitioners working with NEET youth often perceive their status as lower than that of teachers.⁷³ This perception can directly impact the advice provided, as practitioners may be more inclined to encourage young people to accept low-skilled and low-paid jobs similar to their own perceived standing, which in turn can negatively influence the quality of career guidance that they provide to vulnerable youth.⁷⁴ Furthermore, feedback obtained from BusinessEurope suggests that funding itself is not the issue, but rather the **implementation and use of such funding**.⁷⁵

⁶⁸ Interview with European Youth Forum, conducted on 03.07.2025.

⁶⁹ European Youth Forum, [Youth Guarantee: how to support young people finding a pathway](#), April 2025.

⁷⁰ Paabort, H., Flynn, P., Beilmann, M., & Petrescu, C., [Policy responses to real world challenges associated with NEET youth: a scoping review](#), May 2023, p. 4.

⁷¹ Interview with European Youth Forum, conducted on 03.07.2025.

⁷² Jonsson, F., Gotfredsen, A. C., & Goicolea, I., [How can community-based \(re\)engagement initiatives meet the needs of 'NEET' young people? Findings from the theory gleaning phase of a realist evaluation in Sweden](#), June 2022, p. 3.

⁷³ Paabort, H., Flynn, P., Beilmann, M., & Petrescu, C., [Policy responses to real world challenges associated with NEET youth: a scoping review](#), May 2023, p. 7; Beck, V., [Learning providers' work with NEET young people](#), August 2015.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Accordingly, administrative capability appears to be a binding constraint in many of the national YG implementing systems observed.

However, while EU-level stakeholders point to widespread capacity constraints, the findings from the national-level research conducted for this study reveal a more nuanced picture. Indeed, **staff capacity – at least in terms of numbers – has been found to be adequate in Ireland, Sweden, Hungary, Finland and Bulgaria**, despite the range of different service delivery models between them. In **Ireland**, case officers are assigned based on **geographical needs**, and while there are no specialist staff, officers can opt to take part in **additional training** in order to provide better support in response to specific needs. The Irish system is also flexible and can bring in additional workers if unemployment suddenly rises.⁷⁶ In **Sweden**, the PES employs around 6 500 case workers **across regions and age groups** who support unemployed individuals of all ages rather than focusing exclusively on youth.⁷⁷ Even so, caseload pressure is a recurring issue.⁷⁸ In **Hungary**, by contrast, staff numbers are generally found to be adequate, but **youth support specialists** are difficult to find and keep as the public sector is not as attractive as other sectors.⁷⁹

In **Spain, Italy** and **Poland**, staff capacity is found to be inadequate for meeting the specific objectives of the RYG. In Spain, for example, studies indicate that **insufficient staffing levels for guidance and support** services represent an ongoing barrier to effective implementation.⁸⁰ This challenge is then compounded by complex registration processes and a lack of user-friendly communication, which together limit the provision of the face-to-face, individualised support that is needed by the most vulnerable youth. Similar challenges can be observed in **Poland**, where **staff shortages occur in smaller and rural PES offices**, which are also faced with the increasing complexity of support needs such as mental health.⁸¹ Complementing this finding, the OECD observes that, while staff capacity improved over time, there is the need to hire more specialised, frontline employees to engage new client groups.⁸² More broadly, comparative studies on Italy, Poland and Romania confirm that the effectiveness of PES is constrained by a lack of financial and sufficiently personalised resources, as well as inadequate tools that are needed for the profiling of beneficiaries' needs.⁸³ Collectively, these factors hinder the PES from effectively reaching the most vulnerable youth.

Actions taken to combat this issue have included increasing staff training and upskilling and developing standardised service procedures and quality benchmarks. For instance, in **Italy**, PES

⁷⁶ Interview with Intreo, Ireland's Public Employment Service, conducted on 13.08.2025.

⁷⁷ Interview with Sweden's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted 24.09.2025.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Interview with Hungary's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 30.07.2025.

⁸⁰ Jiménez, N., & Sánchez, S., [El impacto de la Garantía Juvenil Reforzada en la juventud en pobreza y vulnerabilidad social](#), 2022.

⁸¹ Interviews with Poland's national Youth Guarantee experts, conducted on 17.07.2025, 22.07.2025 and 01.08.2025.

⁸² OECD, [Developing Public Employment Services for Economically Inactive People](#), September 2025.

⁸³ Neagu, G., Pizzolante, F., Rocca, A. & Smoter, M., [The role of public employment services in young people's job search: a comparative study of Italy, Poland, and Romania](#), January 2025, p. 3.

have **long-standing structural weaknesses linked to understaffing, digitalisation, specialised training and fragmented governance**, especially in less developed regions.⁸⁴ Analysis from the literature also finds that public employment offices (PEOs) in Italy have been chronically underfunded and understaffed over the past two decades.⁸⁵ This lack of administrative capacity has measurable consequences on, for example, the timeliness of service delivery, as data indicates that Italian PEOs often fail to ensure prompt service, starting 151 days after the signing of the 'activation pact' on average, compared to 63 days for private employment agencies.⁸⁶ These weaknesses, including the inability to engage in adequate networking with key labour market actors,⁸⁷ affect the ability to support jobseekers, leading to under-utilisation of the YG scheme by potential beneficiaries and ultimately lower employment outcomes.⁸⁸

Finally, the remaining national cases present yet another picture. Implementation of the YG in **Germany** relies on a robust institutional framework, including the Federal Employment Agency (BA) alongside a nationwide network of Youth Employment Agencies (*Jugendberufsagenturen*), and staff capacities were not identified as a significant bottleneck.⁸⁹ On the other hand, staff capacity was identified as a point of concern in **the Netherlands**, even though the country does not have a dedicated national scheme in response to the YG.⁹⁰

3.3. Assessing the effectiveness and equity of the RYG

Having examined national trends in the implementation of the RYG within the selected Member States, this section now examines the **effectiveness and equity of national YG schemes**. Revised in 2021, the *Indicator Framework for Monitoring the Youth Guarantee* provides a standardised set of indicators that allow for a comparative assessment of schemes' performance across Member States and over time.⁹¹ In turn, subsection 3.3.1. will start with a quantitative assessment of whether the national schemes were effective in achieving their core objectives through the lens of the Indicator Framework's three main indicators. This is followed by subsection 3.3.2, which considers

⁸⁴ Interview with a Senior Evaluator at INAPP (the National Public Policy Analysis Institute), conducted on 17.07.2025; interview with an employee of the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, conducted on 30.07.2025.

⁸⁵ Gaspani, F., Recchi, S., Rio, A., [Young People NEET in Italy: Exploring the Phenomenon and Evolving Policies](#), in Pulcher, S., et al. (eds) *Diversity and Inclusion in Italy*, May 2025, p. 647.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Eleveld, A., Bazzani, T., De Le Cour, A., & Staszewska, E., [Implementation of the European Youth Guarantee and the Right to Work: A Comparative Analysis of Traineeship Programmes Under the EU Active Labour Market Policy](#), 2022, p. 286.

⁸⁸ Interview with a Senior Evaluator at INAPP (the National Public Policy Analysis Institute), conducted on 17.07.2025; interview with an employee of the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, conducted on 30.07.2025.

⁸⁹ Based on the written input from Germany's Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS) and desk research conducted for this study, which did not identify staff capacity as a major implementation barrier.

⁹⁰ Interview with the Netherlands' Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 28.07.2025.

⁹¹ European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, [Indicator Framework for Monitoring the Youth Guarantee](#), March 2021.

the **equity** of the schemes by investigating whether they **cater to diverse beneficiaries** and the extent to which they **serve both urban and rural** users.

3.3.1. Assessing effectiveness: Indicator Framework for Monitoring the RYG

Following the 2020 Council Recommendation, the Indicator Framework for Monitoring the Youth Guarantee was revised in March 2021 to align with the policy instrument's expanded scope,⁹² including the widening of the target age range to 15–29-year-olds. The revised Indicator Framework is therefore structured to assess the performance of the RYG at three distinct levels, each of which provides a different perspective on the scheme's impact. Specifically, these are **aggregate monitoring**, which tracks the overall macroeconomic context that the scheme operates within, **direct monitoring**, which tracks the efficiency of the scheme's delivery in the Member States concerned, and **follow-up monitoring**, which assesses the sustainability of outcomes for participants that are generated by the scheme itself. Accordingly, analysis from the literature emphasises the importance of robust monitoring of actual labour market integration as a core requirement for achieving a rights-based approach to the YG, ensuring that traineeships effectively enhance employability rather than serve as a precarious stopgap.⁹³

Aggregate monitoring indicators

Box 1 – Revised Indicator Monitoring Framework for the Youth Guarantee, Aggregate monitoring indicators

Defining aggregate monitoring

'**Macroeconomic indicators** based on the EU-LFS are intended to monitor the general situation of young people in the EU. They represent an **indirect means of monitoring the effects of implementing the YG** and may also be taken to reflect the impact of **preventive measures** to avoid young people falling into unemployment or inactivity in the first place.'

'[the indicators] describe the context for YG implementation in each country and their evolution through time may give some indication of the impact of the YG.'

Source: European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, [Indicator](#)

While progress has slowed, the aggregate monitoring indicators indicate a **continued positive trend in the EU youth labour market**. Concretely, the main indicator, the NEET rate for young people aged 15–29, saw its lowest recorded level in 2024.⁹⁴ This positive trajectory is further corroborated by the supplementary indicators, which show that the youth employment rate, unemployment rate, and unemployment ratio have all reached their most favourable levels since the introduction of the

⁹² Ibid.

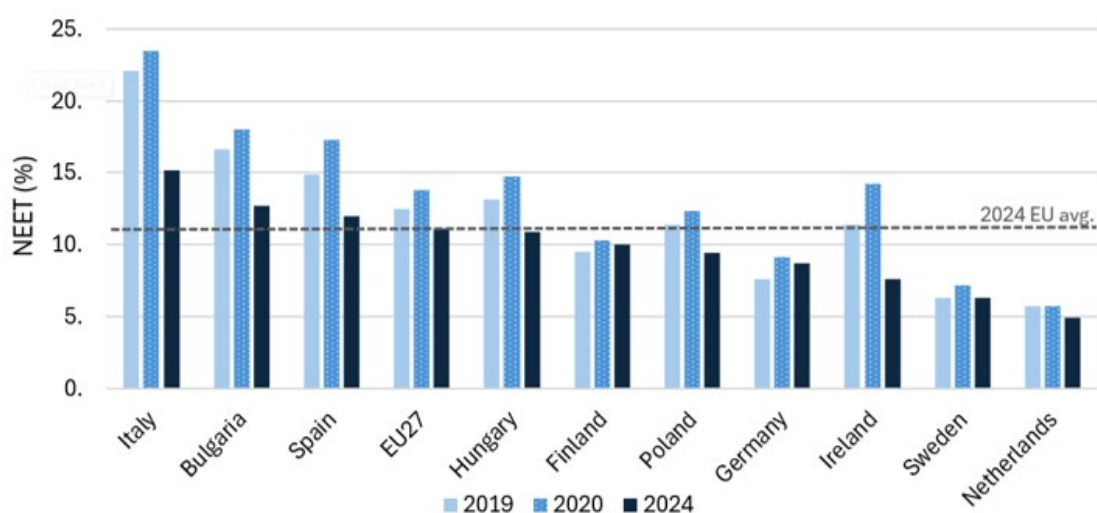
⁹³ Eleveld, A., Bazzani, T., De Le Cour, A., & Staszewska, E., [Implementation of the European Youth Guarantee and the Right to Work: A Comparative Analysis of Traineeship Programmes Under the EU Active Labour Market Policy](#), 2022, p. 277.

⁹⁴ European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes: 2023](#), March 2025.

YG.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, this overall improvement at EU level masks considerable disparities in performance in several of the selected Member States.

At the EU level, the NEET rate for 15–29-year-olds fell marginally from 11.3% in 2023 to a new low of **11.1% in 2024** (see Figure 2).⁹⁶ Looking at the trend over the last five years, a clear **positive trajectory** can be seen for **most of the selected Member States**. Their 2024 NEET rates are now well below both the 2020 pandemic peak and their pre-pandemic levels in 2019. **Italy**, for instance, despite having one of the highest NEET rates in 2024 (15.2%), has made the most significant progress, reducing its NEET rate by 6.9 percentage points since 2019. Similarly, **Ireland** (-3.8 p.p.), **Bulgaria** (-3.9 p.p.) and **Spain** (-2.9 p.p.) have all made notable progress from their relatively high pre-pandemic levels. At the same time, consistent strong performers such as the **Netherlands** (4.9%) and **Sweden** (6.3%) have generally maintained their positions. However, the positive trend is not universal, with countries such as **Germany** indicating an uptick from 7.6% in 2019 to 8.7% in 2024, running counter to the broader EU-level trend. **Finland** has also experienced a slight increase over the same period, rising from 9.5% to 10.0%.

Figure 2 – NEET rate of selected Member States, 2019, 2020 (COVID-19), & 2024



Source: Eurostat, [NEET rates \[edat_lfse_20\]](#)

These findings must be contextualised within the methodological design of the Indicator Framework. For instance, these aggregate indicators are drawn from the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS), thereby providing an **indirect measure of the YG's effectiveness**.⁹⁷ While they can provide a valuable overview of the broader macroeconomic environment in which the national YG schemes operate, they cannot be used to ascribe changes in certain labour market indicators (e.g., youth unemployment) directly to the YG itself. Rather, delineating the specific impact of YG policies from

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes: 2023](#), March 2025.

broader macro-level trends requires analysis of the **direct and follow-up indicators**, which will be addressed accordingly.

Direct monitoring indicators

Box 1 – Revised Indicator Monitoring Framework for the Youth Guarantee, Direct monitoring indicators

Defining direct monitoring

'Direct monitoring is reliant on administrative data following individual pathways through YG schemes. Such data were not systematically collected at European level before the establishment of this Indicator Framework but are now routinely available for all Member States.'

'A key objective of the monitoring is to assess the compliance of Member States with the Council Recommendation, which requires that every young person should receive a good quality YG offer within a period of 4 months.'

Source: European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, [Indicator Framework for Monitoring the Youth Guarantee](#), March 2021, p.7.

In clear contrast to the modestly positive trends observed from the NEET rate as part of the Indicator Framework's aggregate monitoring data, the direct monitoring indicators suggest the presence of **significant and persistent operational challenges in delivering YG schemes** across the EU. Specifically, the data indicates that national YG schemes are facing difficulties in meeting the 2020 Council Recommendation's core objectives concerning reach, with **fewer than half of the total NEET population covered by the scheme**, and timeliness, as a majority of registered young people are waiting **longer than the four-month target** for an offer.⁹⁸

Table 1 – Performance of direct monitoring indicators, 2023⁹⁹

Member State	In YG beyond 4-month target (%)	Timely & positive exits (%)
Italy	86.1	61.1
Ireland	78.8	38.4
Netherlands	73.2	30.2
Bulgaria	67.4	46.1
Spain	61.9	9.6
Poland	58.1	47.5
Germany	55.6	47.7

⁹⁸ European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes: 2023](#), March 2025.

⁹⁹ Note: data presented in this table is limited to the 10 selected Member States that are the focus of this study.

Member State	In YG beyond 4-month target (%)	Timely & positive exits (%)	
Finland	55.2	42.5	
EU average	53.6	45.6	
Sweden	47.3	39.1	
Hungary	33.3	91.7	
Legend	10 p.p. < EU	Worse than EU avg.	Better than EU avg.

Source: European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes: 2023](#), March 2025.

Focusing on the main **direct monitoring indicator**, a look at the share of young people aged 15–29 in the YG preparatory phase for more than four months reveals a challenge related to the effectiveness of the national schemes (see Table 1). For instance, in 2023, the EU average was 53.6%, indicating **that over half of young people registered with a national YG scheme had not yet taken up an offer within the four-month timeframe**,¹⁰⁰ despite this being a core element of the 2020 reinforcement.¹⁰¹

This finding is heavily shaped by **weak performance in some of the largest Member States**, particularly **Italy** (86.1%) and **France** (72.0%). The issue is then compounded further by the data on timely and positive exits: only 45.6% of young people leaving a YG scheme did so to take up an offer within the four-month window. Accordingly, these results highlight a dual challenge in implementation: a large proportion of participants remain in the preparatory phase for too long, meanwhile, the share of those who do successfully exit with a timely offer is less than half.

¹⁰⁰ It is important to note the divergence between the target of the RYG and the indicator used to measure it. While the Council Recommendation establishes a target for young people to *receive* an offer within four months of entering a YG scheme, the indicator measures those who *take up* an offer (i.e. successfully exit the preparatory phase to a positive destination). As such, offers that are made by the provider but declined by the beneficiary are not captured by this indicator.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Follow-up monitoring indicators

Box 3 – Revised Indicator Monitoring Framework for the Youth Guarantee, Follow-up monitoring indicators

Defining follow-up monitoring

'**Follow up indicators** are needed to show whether **sustainable labour market outcomes** were achieved for individuals passing through the YG system. They contribute to monitoring the **quality of the offers** received by young people going through the YG scheme.'

'The indicators defined below aim to identify the labour market status of individuals some time after exiting the YG preparatory phase... The main follow-up indicator covers all young people who have been through the YG scheme, irrespective of whether they took up an offer or not.'

Source: European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, [Indicator Framework for Monitoring the Youth Guarantee](#), March 2021, p.9.

Designed to assess the long-term sustainability of outcomes for participants, the YG follow-up monitoring indicators present a mixed and methodologically limited picture in terms of the effectiveness of the national YG schemes.

Although the available data suggests that the **majority of young people are in a positive situation six months after leaving a YG scheme**, at the same time, this finding is undermined by **considerable data gaps**. The issue of incomplete reporting is particularly pronounced for the Netherlands and Finland, which have not provided follow-up data since the introduction of the RYG in 2020. A similar challenge can be observed for Germany, where the latest available follow-up data is from 2022. This persistent gap remains a weak point of the YG's Indicator Monitoring Framework which, in turn, limits the ability to draw definitive conclusions about the scheme's effectiveness.

Examining the 2023 data, it was found that **58.3%** of young people in the EU who had left a national YG scheme were in a **positive situation** (i.e., in employment, continued education, an apprenticeship, or a traineeship) **six months later**. This overall figure contains outcomes from different exit pathways, whose effectiveness varies. For instance, of those who originally exited into an apprenticeship, 81% were in a positive situation six months later, compared to 74.3% for those who took up an employment offer, 63.4% for traineeships, followed by 58.3% for continued education.¹⁰² While these figures are encouraging at first glance, they must be interpreted with caution, as the capacity of Member States to track young people after they exit the scheme varies considerably, resulting in issues with the quality of the data observed. For example, six Member States failed to report follow-up data in 2023, while in others, a **substantial share of individuals was categorised as 'unknown'**, such as in Romania (70.0% unknown) and Luxembourg (53.9%). Furthermore, in **Bulgaria**, monitoring is structurally exclusionary, omitting approximately 80% of the country's NEET population due to their tracking system only covering youth registered with the

¹⁰² European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes: 2023](#), March 2025.

National Employment Agency, leaving a significant data gap regarding the true effectiveness of their national YG scheme.¹⁰³

More broadly, country-level monitoring often fails to account for regional disparities. For instance, research on the implementation of the YG in Italy finds that national-level data can mask the scheme's true impact, as key factors related to multilevel governance and disparate regional labour market conditions are ignored.¹⁰⁴

Table 2 – Situation of young people (15–29) 6 months post YG scheme, 2023

Member State	Positive situation (%)	Negative situation (%)	Unknown situation (%)
Ireland	66.9	11.7	21.4
Italy	66.3	32.0	1.6
Hungary	63.3	19.3	17.4
Spain	61.6	33.6	4.8
Poland	58.7	13.2	28.1
EU average	58.3	14.3	27.4
Sweden	49.1	21.5	29.3
Bulgaria	41.7	4.5	53.9
Germany	N/A	N/A	N/A
Finland	N/A	N/A	N/A
Netherlands	N/A	N/A	N/A
Legend	10 p.p. < EU	Worse than EU avg.	Better than EU avg.

Source: European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes: 2023](#), March 2025.

Shifting focus to the selected Member States in particular (see Table 2), the results indicate that YG scheme performance and data quality are linked. For instance, countries that report a high share of positive outcomes, such as Italy (66.3%), Ireland (66.9%), and Poland (58.7%), also report very low proportions of unknown cases (at 1.6%, 21.4%, and 28.1% respectively). Accordingly, this would suggest the presence of robust national tracking systems that are able to link PES registers with employment registers. By contrast, **Bulgaria** reports a lower positive outcome rate of 41.7%, which is directly correlated with a very high proportion of unknown cases (53.9%), indicating that in

¹⁰³ Yakova, L., [The Youth Guarantee in Bulgaria and its uptake among Roma youth](#), 2018, p. 25.

¹⁰⁴ Monti, L., [The Italian Puzzle of the European Youth Guarantee](#), August 2022, p. 9.

Member States with weaker national tracking systems, the reported effectiveness of the YG could be significantly understated, as many positive outcomes may simply be going unrecorded.

The results of the three tiers of the Indicator Framework highlight a **discrepancy between the improving macroeconomic context and the operational performance of the YG** itself, even with the reforms of the RYG. Despite various national YG schemes benefiting from a favourable macro-level environment of falling NEET rates over the past several years, the investigation of more direct monitoring data indicates that the **RYG often falls short of its core delivery objectives** in terms of **timeliness** and **reach**. This issue is then exacerbated by the observed methodological weaknesses in the form of data gaps in the follow-up monitoring indicators, which in turn prevents a complete assessment of the scheme's long-term impact on sustainable employment. Ultimately, while underlying conditions for the youth labour market have improved, the RYG's own performance benchmark via the revised Indicator Monitoring Framework indicates that its **delivery mechanisms often struggle to operate effectively**.

These challenges in achieving the RYG's core objectives raise important questions regarding the equity of the scheme's delivery for different vulnerable subgroups within its target NEET population. The following analysis will therefore assess how national YG schemes cater to diverse beneficiaries and adapt to different local contexts.

3.3.2. Assessing equity: a diversity of beneficiaries and the urban-rural divide

Another dimension by which the effectiveness of the RYG must be assessed is whether and to what extent it provides equitable support to all young people, regardless of their circumstances or location. Accordingly, this principle of equity was highlighted as a key tenet of the 2020 Council Recommendation, which placed an emphasis on those most at risk of being left behind as well as the provision of help tailored to local needs. Despite these initial aims of the policy, the evidence suggests the presence of **gaps between the policy ambition and the reality on the ground**. Many of the selected Member States have formally adopted various strategies with an intended focus to cater to different groups of beneficiaries. However, structural barriers and inconsistent national implementation limit equitable access, particularly for vulnerable youth and those living in rural areas.

Reaching a diversity of beneficiaries

The approaches taken by Member States in **supporting vulnerable subgroups** of the NEET population **vary widely** among the select cases observed, ranging from those that are **highly targeted**, pathway-based models, to more **universalist systems**.

Italy, for example, has designed its GOL programme to prioritise individuals facing multiple barriers, including the more fragile and vulnerable (such as NEETs).^{105, 106} This is achieved through the creation of a dedicated '*Employment and Inclusion*' pathway that activates a network of relevant social,

¹⁰⁵ Interview with a Senior Evaluator at INAPP (the National Public Policy Analysis Institute), conducted on 17.07.2025; interview with an employee of the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, conducted on 30.07.2025.

¹⁰⁶ Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, [Il Programma di Garanzia di Occupabilità dei Lavoratori](#), December 2021.

health and educational services. In parallel, this network is complemented by a profiling system that categorises target groups according to how far they are from the labour market in order to ensure that intensive support is provided to those who need it most.¹⁰⁷ The National Programme 'Giovani, Donne e Lavoro' (2021–2027) also supports the implementation of the RYG, partly by promoting the development of skills and improving employment prospects for young people, women and disadvantaged individuals.¹⁰⁸ **Spain** has adopted similarly extensive measures for certain vulnerable subgroups of the population, namely LGBTI youth, migrants, people with disabilities and young people with family responsibilities, directly into the pillars of its YG Plus Plan which was introduced shortly following the 2020 reinforcement of the YG.¹⁰⁹ Less extensively, the approach taken by **Poland** identifies certain vulnerable subgroups, including women raising young children and young people leaving foster care, and tracks their participation in active labour market programmes.¹¹⁰

Beyond these more targeted systems, the national evidence also identified several **cross-cutting approaches**. For example, rather than having a separate YG outreach programme, **Ireland** provides support to vulnerable groups primarily via synergies with existing national strategies, including the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy.¹¹¹ More specifically, the Irish approach is comprised of specific measures such as enhanced financial incentives for employers who hire from certain vulnerable groups. Alternatively, **Finland takes a more universalist approach**.¹¹² Rather than providing programming tailored to specific groups, the Finnish model operates on the principle that improvements to the accessibility and quality of services more broadly will benefit all vulnerable young people as well. While this approach contributes to a more resilient system from the perspective of service delivery, it has also been acknowledged to result in slower progress for certain vulnerable groups.¹¹³ Similarly, some Member States, such as **Hungary**, have **yet to implement specific outreach strategies for vulnerable individuals** beyond the existing profiling tools made available to counsellors to determine the support needs of potential YG scheme beneficiaries.¹¹⁴

In addition to the targeted support for specific vulnerable groups, an analysis of EU-level monitoring data reveals the presence of significant disparities along demographic lines, particularly as they concern gender and age (within the target range of the RYG).¹¹⁵ For instance, there is a **clear gender gap** in the ability of YG schemes across the EU to reach target beneficiaries. In 2023, the average coverage rate for **young men participating in a YG scheme (43%) was notably higher** than for young women (37.3%). Yet the gap widens further when focusing on some Member States in

¹⁰⁷ Interview with a Senior Evaluator at INAPP (the National Public Policy Analysis Institute), conducted on 17.07.2025; interview with an employee of the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, conducted on 30.07.2025.

¹⁰⁸ Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, [PN Giovani, donne e lavoro 2021-2027](#), 2021.

¹⁰⁹ Gobierno de España, [Youth Guarantee Plan Plus 2021 - 2027 of decent work for young people](#), June 2021.

¹¹⁰ Interviews with Poland's national Youth Guarantee experts, conducted on 17.07.2025, 22.07.2025 and 01.08.2025.

¹¹¹ Government of Ireland, [National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II 2024-2028](#), July 2024; Interview with Ireland's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 13.08.2025.

¹¹² Interview with Finland's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 31.07.2025.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Hungary's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 30.07.2025.

¹¹⁵ European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes: 2023](#), March 2025.

particular, such as **Germany**, where the coverage rate for men (73.5%) is nearly double that for women (40.6%). A **similar trend can be observed across age cohorts as well**, where coverage is highest for the 15–19 age group at 55.2%, before progressively declining for older NEETs, dropping to just 32.0% for those aged 25–29. This age-related drop-off is especially stark **in Spain**, where the coverage rate falls from 98% among the 15–19 age cohort, to 50.2% among 20–24 year olds, and just 22.1% for those aged 25–29, which represent the upper end of the RYG's expanded age range.¹¹⁶ These findings may indicate that, in addition to the challenges of reaching vulnerable sub-groups of the NEET population, broader **structural barriers may be hindering access for women and older NEETs** to access their national YG schemes. At the same time, however, another look into the data presents a more complex picture in terms of outcomes. Specifically, 2023 reporting finds that while women on average wait slightly longer to receive an offer (e.g., 63.8% of women in Poland wait longer than four months compared to 48.9% of men), their positive outcomes six months after leaving a scheme are comparable to those of men.¹¹⁷

Despite the wide range of formal strategies, both targeted and universalist, the findings suggest that some of the YG's **prior challenges in reaching the most vulnerable persist**. As the EYF has noted, national YG schemes often remain passive and largely dependent on who is **registering at the PES**, leading to a 'creaming effect' where those closer to the labour market benefit most.¹¹⁸ Recognising that it is often the most vulnerable who are furthest from these formal bodies responsible for YG implementation, such as the PES, it follows that Member States lacking targeted outreach measures for these vulnerable groups will then continue to underserve them. At the same time, official monitoring and statistics may also undercount these groups for similar reasons. Additionally, challenges remain in supporting young people with **migrant backgrounds**. This was confirmed in **the Netherlands**,¹¹⁹ where this vulnerable group is disproportionately represented in poor-performing segments of employment and education statistics.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Interview with the European Youth Forum, conducted on 03.07.2025.

¹¹⁹ Interview with the Netherlands' national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 28.07.2025.

Addressing the urban-rural divide

Box 2 – Cross-cutting barriers for youth in rural and remote areas

By synthesising the evidence gathered from the national-level research, stakeholder consultations, and literature, several cross-cutting barriers for young people in rural and remote areas emerge:

Limited access to services. There are fewer physical PES offices and support centres, which often require long and costly travel.

Limited transport options. There is a lack of reliable and affordable public transportation options that can be used to access employment, training, or support services.

Fewer job opportunities. Rural and remote areas are faced with less diverse local labour market with fewer available jobs, apprenticeships and traineeships, particularly in high-skill sectors.

Digital proficiency gaps. Online portals and digital service delivery are limited in their effectiveness due to rural and remote areas having inconsistent access to high-speed internet.

Reduced social support infrastructure. There are fewer specialised social support services (e.g. mental health and disability services) available, coupled with a smaller network of civil society organisations to partner with for much needed outreach.

The **urban-rural divide poses a distinct and widespread challenge** to ensuring equitable access to national YG schemes. One study notes that as rural NEETs are not defined as a priority target within the RYG, no measures dedicated to this group have been introduced in most countries.¹²⁰ Looking further, comparative analysis indicates that rural NEETs as such are generally not a priority target group in national RYG plans. However, while **Poland's** RYG does not define NEETs as a distinct priority group, it does specifically focus on enhancing the outreach capabilities of PES to better serve individuals in rural or remote locations.¹²¹ These challenges are highlighted in a 2022 report by the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) on the local implementation of the RYG, which found that while 61% of **Bulgarian** PES at the local level had implemented support measures for remote and rural areas in particular, just 31% of local PES in other EU Member States had done so.¹²²

At first glance, this finding suggests that, rather than tailored territorial approaches being the universal standard, rural and remote youth who are already struggling to access the labour market or education also face additional disadvantages. These include limited access to services via their national YG scheme or equivalent service, limited awareness of such services, and fewer education and training opportunities in their local context. More concretely, in **Italy**, this divide is quantifiable, with research finding that the employment rate for YG beneficiaries in Southern regions is 26.1

¹²⁰ Simoes F. and Erdogan E., [NEETs in European rural areas. Individual features, support systems and policy measures](#), February 2024.

¹²¹ Petrescu, C., et al., [Rural Dimension of the Employment Policies for NEETs. A Comparative Analysis of the Reinforced Youth Guarantee](#), February 2024, pp. 70-71.

¹²² European Committee of the Regions, [The local implementation of the Reinforced Youth Guarantee](#), 2022.

percentage points lower than in the North-East, which directly correlates with a lower programme coverage index in those territories.¹²³

Further investigation at the Member State level reveals that a variety of strategies have been adopted with the aim of mitigating these geographic barriers, often combining physical infrastructure with digital solutions. The CoR report highlights several local initiatives, such as **Spain's** *Agrotreballa al Solsonès* project which, via the national YG scheme, provides training for young people in rural areas to prepare them for self-employment in the agriculture sector.¹²⁴ Looking into the Spanish context further, their YG scheme is notable for explicitly linking the creation of youth employment opportunities to the regeneration of declining rural and urban spaces, framing the YG as a tool for broader territorial development rather than offering solely individual support.¹²⁵ **Romania's** approach is also highlighted, which categorises support programmes by 'territorial scope', with specific projects targeting NEETs in less developed regions in particular.¹²⁶ While the ability of national YG schemes to carry out effective outreach to rural areas is generally acknowledged as a challenge, evidence from **Hungary** offers an opposing view, with the results of an impact evaluation suggesting that rural participants in YG programmes may actually see lower drop-out rates than their counterparts in urban settings, indicating that while access is difficult, programme retention for those beneficiaries reached can be positive.¹²⁷

The national-level research carried out for this study reinforces many of these findings, which found that **Ireland** is developing a 'blended' delivery model that uses online meetings in order to overcome travel-related barriers preventing potential beneficiaries from accessing their PES.¹²⁸ Even so, these initiatives may ultimately struggle to overcome the structural limitation of simply having fewer access points to such services (often via the PES) in rural and remote areas. As the EYF warns, providing an online portal alone is insufficient to ensure genuine accessibility in the absence of physical infrastructure.¹²⁹

3.4. Synthesis of benefits, shortcomings and barriers

Having examined the Member State level trends, including the effectiveness and equity of the implementation of the RYG, this section synthesises these findings to provide an evidence-based overview of how the scheme operates in practice. To do so, subsection 3.4.1. will start by outlining the **primary benefits and noteworthy best practices** that have emerged from across the selected Member States. This is followed by subsection 3.4.2., which will present an analysis of the scheme's

¹²³ Monti, L., [The Italian Puzzle of the European Youth Guarantee](#), August 2022, p. 8.

¹²⁴ European Committee of the Regions, [The local implementation of the Reinforced Youth Guarantee](#), 2022.

¹²⁵ Petrescu, C., et al., [Rural Dimension of the Employment Policies for NEETs. A Comparative Analysis of the Reinforced Youth Guarantee](#), February 2024, p. 69.

¹²⁶ European Committee of the Regions, [The local implementation of the Reinforced Youth Guarantee](#), 2022.

¹²⁷ Petrescu, C., et al., [Rural Dimension of the Employment Policies for NEETs. A Comparative Analysis of the Reinforced Youth Guarantee](#), February 2024, p. 71.

¹²⁸ Government of Ireland, [Pathways to Work Strategy 2021-2025](#), July 2021.

¹²⁹ Interview with European Youth Forum, conducted on 03.07.2025.

key shortcomings and the persistent implementation barriers that continue to limit its effectiveness overall.

3.4.1. Main benefits and best practices

Evidence gathered from both national and EU-level stakeholders indicates that the YG framework, particularly in its reinforced form (RYG) as set out via the 2020 Council Recommendation, has established itself as an important and resilient policy instrument. More specifically, the main benefit of the instrument is that it has served as a **catalyst for institutional reform and innovation** in youth employment policy within Member States.

According to the EYF, the YG is one of the biggest youth employment initiatives at EU level, and its role as a stabilising force was proven by the fact that youth unemployment rates did not skyrocket during COVID.¹³⁰ This assessment is echoed by DG EMPL, which considers the scheme instrumental in establishing comprehensive youth employment support structures where, in many Member States, this was lacking completely.¹³¹ This has had a significant impact on shaping national systems, leading to tangible developments such as the creation of 'youth one-stop shops' offering holistic support to programme beneficiaries.

At the Member State level, the implementation of the RYG has led to significant and varied improvements, which can be broadly categorised into several key areas of best practice:

- **Institutional innovation and systemic reform.** The RYG has often provided the impetus for the development of new public service infrastructure. Notably, the One-Stop Guidance Centres (OSGCs) that are central to delivery of the YG in Finland utilise an innovative structure,¹³² through which they bring together employment, education, social welfare and health services under one, more easily accessible hub.¹³³ Another example is Italy's Information System for Social and Labour Inclusion (SIISL), a transformative digital platform that connects previously separate administrative systems (e.g. social security, PES and training providers).¹³⁴ More broadly, academic research suggests that the YG has provided an opportunity to reflect on the reorganisation of responsibilities and operational governance mechanisms in the ALMP domains, even if the reform path remains incomplete and has not led to full-fledged structural changes across all Member States.¹³⁵
- **Strengthening policy coherence and mainstreaming.** In certain Member States, a key benefit has been the successful integration of the RYG into broader national policy. Ireland is a leading example in this regard, as the YG is not a standalone initiative, but is instead

¹³⁰ Interview with European Youth Forum, conducted on 03.07.2025.

¹³¹ Interview with DG EMPL, conducted on 26.06.2025.

¹³² Ohjaamo, [What is a One-Stop Guidance Center?](#), n.d.

¹³³ Interview with Finland's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 31.07.2025.

¹³⁴ INPS (Italian National Institute for Social Security), [Sistema Informativo per l'Inclusione Sociale e Lavorativa – SIISL](#), August 2023.

¹³⁵ Vesan, P., Lizzi, R., [The Youth Guarantee in Italy and the New Policy Design Approach: Expectations, Hopes and Delusions](#), December 2017.

operationalised through the national employment services strategy, 'Pathways to Work'.¹³⁶ More specifically, this delivery via the 'Intreo' one-stop-shop (OSS) model ensures RYG objectives are embedded within the primary vehicle for labour market activation.¹³⁷

- **Strengthened partnerships and decentralised delivery.** The significance of multi-level collaboration emerges as a recurring theme for two of the best performing selected Member States. Specifically, the Netherlands benefits from a highly decentralised model in which municipalities play the central role, enabling them to apply tailored responses to local needs.¹³⁸ Beyond the municipal level, in Germany, the focus has been on strengthening existing partnership frameworks and the network of decentralised Youth Employment Agencies (*Jugendberufsagenturen*).¹³⁹ This aligns with the perspective offered by SMEunited,¹⁴⁰ who observed that the greatest benefits of the RYG are realised when partnerships address local labour market needs. Accordingly, this finding is supported by Eurocities as well,¹⁴¹ which emphasised how the YG enables cities to 'improve cooperation between local stakeholders (e.g. education providers, employers, businesses, NGOs, etc.)'.
- **Development of tailored and individualised support models.** In line with the reinforced elements of the RYG, several Member States have developed tools to further individualise the services provided by their national YG schemes. Namely, Poland has strengthened its use of Individual Action Plans (IAPs) and skills profiling to better align the support it provides with the personal needs of the beneficiary.¹⁴² This approach is complemented by more data-driven models, such as in Sweden, which moved towards more individualised case management, with the support of an automated assessment tool that evaluates multiple factors to determine support needs.¹⁴³ Similarly, Ireland uses its Probability of Exit (PEX) statistical profiling tool to enable evidence-based service segmentation and better inform the type of support that is best suited for the beneficiary.¹⁴⁴ The importance of implementing tailored approaches in interventions supporting NEETs is also underscored in recent academic research.¹⁴⁵

These national-level developments demonstrate the **capacity of the RYG framework to be adapted to diverse institutional contexts**, while still resulting in tangible improvements to service delivery. Although the specific approaches differ, they all share a common thread: the use of the YG

¹³⁶ Government of Ireland, [Pathways to Work Strategy 2021-2025](#), July 2021.

¹³⁷ Interview with Intreo, Ireland's Public Employment Service, conducted on 13.08.2025.

¹³⁸ Interview with the Netherlands' national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 28.07.2025.

¹³⁹ Written input from Germany's Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, received on 29.08.2025.

¹⁴⁰ SMEunited, [Position paper on the council recommendation on a bridge to jobs - reinforcing the youth guarantee](#), 2020.

¹⁴¹ Eurocities, [Cities role in fighting youth unemployment. Reinforcing Youth Guarantee. Lessons learnt by cities in implementing the Youth Guarantee 2014-2020 – technical report](#), March 2020.

¹⁴² Interviews with Poland's national Youth Guarantee experts, conducted on 17.07.2025, 22.07.2025 and 01.08.2025.

¹⁴³ Interview with Sweden's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 24.09.2025.

¹⁴⁴ Government of Ireland, [Pathways to Work Strategy 2021-2025](#), July 2021.

¹⁴⁵ Paabort, H., Flynn, P., Beilmann, M., & Petrescu, C., [Policy responses to real world challenges associated with NEET youth: a scoping review](#), May 2023, p. 4.

framework to build more coherent, integrated and user-centric support systems for young people seeking employment, education or training opportunities.

Taken together, the benefits and best practices identified from the range of Member State approaches demonstrate the extent to which the RYG has **advanced youth employment and skills policy across the EU**, as well as **driven further institutional reforms** among the authorities responsible for implementing such national YG schemes. Even so, this positive assessment must be balanced against the significant and persistent operational challenges that limit the scheme's effectiveness overall, which will be examined in the following section.

3.4.2. Key shortcomings and implementation barriers

The national level evidence collected and analysed has revealed clear benefits and effective practices in working towards the intended aims of the RYG. However, the Member State-level findings show that the scheme's overall success remains hindered by recurring challenges and shortcomings in national implementation, which vary in scope and severity across the Member States studied. While the 2020 Council Recommendation aimed to address many of these same issues, the evidence presented throughout this chapter has revealed that notable gaps remain between the policy ambition of the EU level instrument versus its practical implementation on the ground.

The most prevalent recurring challenges can be categorised into the following key themes:

- **Structural barriers to outreach and equity.** A primary and recurring shortcoming is the limited capacity of national YG schemes to reach the most marginalised and inactive NEETs. EU-level stakeholders, such as the EYF, describe a systemic 'creaming effect', whereby schemes tend to support individuals who are already closer to the labour market, leaving the most vulnerable behind. This described effect is in large part rooted in the operational design of such national schemes. In Ireland, for example, there is a structural dependency on the unemployment 'live register' as its main entry point which, in turn, systematically excludes the majority of inactive NEETs as a result.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, in Spain, outreach efforts prove far less effective for older NEETs (25–29) who typically face more complex barriers. The underlying barrier, as noted by DG EMPL and others, is that the PES often lacks the specific capacity and resources for the proactive, community-oriented outreach that is often needed in order to meaningfully engage these groups.¹⁴⁷ In this respect, recent comparative research notes that Italian and Romanian PES struggle to reach out to vulnerable youth, such as those with lower educational level or living in certain regions, reinforcing the 'creaming effect' mentioned above.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 - Country fiche: Ireland](#), November 2024.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with DG EMPL, conducted on 26.06.2025.

¹⁴⁸ Neagu, Gabriela, Federica Pizzolante, Antonella Rocca, & Mateusz Smoter, [The role of public employment services in young people's job search: a comparative study of Italy, Poland, and Romania](#), January 2025.

- Operational challenges and capacity constraints.** Even when young people are registered with national YG schemes, such systems often struggle to provide timely and effective support. Frequent delays in the ability of such schemes to result in an offer remains a key issue, undermining a key principle of the 2020 reinforcement in particular. This can be seen in Spain, where only 9.6% of participants took up a timely offer within the four-month target in 2023,¹⁴⁹ while in Ireland, the share of participants waiting longer than four months has even worsened since the reinforcement.¹⁵⁰ These operational challenges are often linked to capacity issues. For instance, as noted by ETUC and BusinessEurope, the PES and other public services in Member States are under-resourced, lacking the staff, training, and 'pedagogical capacity' to manage complex cases effectively, an issue exacerbated by the RYG's expanded target age group.¹⁵¹ This is noted in Italy, where the YG's limited impact is primarily linked to low management skills within PES and poor digitalisation.¹⁵² Capacity challenges can be compounded by structural fragmentation, as in Finland and Spain, where decentralised governance without strong national coordination sometimes leads to regional disparities in both service quality and access.¹⁵³
- Quality and relevance of offers.** A recurring criticism from EU stakeholders is the low quality of offers that national YG schemes provide, which, as the EYF notes, can trap young people in a cycle of precarious employment rather than fulfilling the RYG's intended aim of sustainable labour market integration.¹⁵⁴ This critical point is further corroborated by findings from the literature, which argue that traineeships under the YG are often more precarious than regular jobs, raising the risk of systematically disadvantaging the beneficiaries of the scheme.¹⁵⁵ The evidence from several Member States supports this concern, such as in Italy, where despite the national model placing formal emphasis on apprenticeships, stakeholders report that practical implementation often results in an over-reliance on traineeships that are of lower quality.¹⁵⁶ Similarly, the evidence gathered also indicates that the Spanish YG scheme is over-reliant on subsidised employment offers.¹⁵⁷

¹⁴⁹ European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 – Country fiche: Germany](#), November 2024.

¹⁵⁰ European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 – Country fiche: Ireland](#), November 2024.

¹⁵¹ Interview with Business Europe, conducted on 03.07.2025; Interview with ETUC, conducted on 22.07.2025.

¹⁵² Monti, L., [The Italian Puzzle of the European Youth Guarantee](#), August 2022.

¹⁵³ Jiménez, N., & Sánchez, S., [El impacto de la Garantía Juvenil Reforzada en la juventud en pobreza y vulnerabilidad social.](#), October 2022.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with European Youth Forum, conducted on 03.07.2025.

¹⁵⁵ Eleveld, A., Bazzani, T., De Le Cour, A., & Staszewska, E., [Implementation of the European Youth Guarantee and the Right to Work: A Comparative Analysis of Traineeship Programmes Under the EU Active Labour Market Policy](#), 2022, p. 293.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with a Senior Evaluator at INAPP (the National Public Policy Analysis Institute), conducted on 17.07.2025; interview with an employee of the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, conducted on 30.07.2025.

¹⁵⁷ Analysis of data from: European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes: 2023](#), March 2025.

While this can be useful for activating participants and absorbing funds, it also raises concerns in terms of the ability of national YG schemes to achieve long-term employment sustainability and transitions into the labour market. Furthermore, there is often a disconnect between the RYG's stated emphasis on skills and the actual outcomes. In Ireland, despite a significant policy focus on upskilling, just 0.4% of exits in 2023 were to education offers, with direct employment remaining the dominant outcome.¹⁵⁸ This suggests the skills component of the RYG relative to its focus on employment, is not functioning as a primary pathway for registered youth.

In overview of the findings presented throughout this chapter, it is clear that the 2020 Council Recommendation, which reinforced the initial YG instrument, has further strengthened the value of the policy instrument as a catalyst for institutional reform at Member State level. Accordingly, these key benefits have given rise to a number of best practices in the form of different institutional arrangements and delivery models across the EU, adapted to their respective national contexts. At the same time, this chapter has also demonstrated that the effectiveness of the RYG is impeded by multiple factors, ranging from structural barriers that limit outreach to key target groups (e.g. NEETs and vulnerable subgroups) to the operational capacity of the implementing authorities and the quality offers, as well as limited monitoring.

Having now established a detailed picture of how the RYG has been implemented on the ground, the next chapter will assess the impact of the 2020 reinforcement itself. This will involve assessing the reforms introduced via the Council Recommendation and determining the extent to which these reforms address the long-standing challenges previously identified in key EU-level evaluative reports.

¹⁵⁸ European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 – Country fiche: Ireland](#), November 2024.

4. The impact of the RYG

Key findings

- The 2020 Council Recommendation on the RYG formally addressed many structural weaknesses identified by past evaluative reports, namely inadequate funding, ambiguous criteria concerning offer quality, and incomplete monitoring frameworks. Still, gaps remain between the Council Recommendation's policy ambition, and its material impacts on the ground. While reforms in terms of offer quality standards, monitoring framework, and ESF+ thematic concentration have been welcome, underlying challenges with implementation remain.
- The 2023 review of the RYG by EMCO identified three key challenges that largely remain valid today: 1) persistent difficulties in outreach to vulnerable NEETs; 2) a mixed picture in terms of service delivery with a shift towards generalised services in some Member States offset by renewed personalisation efforts in others; and 3) patchy monitoring paired with declining scheme coverage rates.
- The adoption of the RYG's five core reinforced elements has been uneven among the selected Member States. While the broadening of the target age group to 15-29 was already in place in several Member States before 2020 (e.g., Bulgaria, Finland, Italy), certain Member States have yet to implement this reform (e.g. the Netherlands). Conversely, the requirement for a detailed mapping of supporting social services appears to be poorly evidenced across the selected Member States. Similarly, the emphasis on skills yielded mixed results: while it aligned with major investments in Italy and Spain, this trend was not universal. Finally, although inclusion components spurred targeted measures in some Member States, fundamental barriers persist.

This chapter provides an assessment of the impact of the RYG following its introduction via the 2020 Council Recommendation. The chapter is divided into three sections. First, it **revisits the initial critiques and weaknesses** of the instrument that were made against the original 2013 YG, prior to its reinforcement. This is achieved through an in-depth analysis of each of the three key evaluations from EU-level bodies, namely a pair of reports from the **European Court of Auditors (ECA) in 2015¹⁵⁹ and 2017¹⁶⁰** (Section 4.1.), as well as a review from the **Employment Committee (EMCO) in 2023** (Section 4.2.).¹⁶¹ Having then established a clear baseline of the pre-existing challenges that the RYG sought to address, Section 4.3. then aims to **assess the impact of the initiative's key reforms** on implementation, including the broadening of the target age group (4.3.1.) as well as of the four-phased implementation approach (4.3.2-5). In doing so, this will aim to determine whether the identified challenges, both pre-and-post-reinforcement, have been substantively addressed.

¹⁵⁹ European Court of Auditors, [Special Report No 3/2015: EU Youth Guarantee: first steps taken but implementation risks ahead](#), March 2015.

¹⁶⁰ European Court of Auditors, [Special Report No 5/2017: Youth unemployment – have EU policies made a difference? An assessment of the Youth Guarantee and the Youth Employment Initiative](#), May 2017.

¹⁶¹ Employment Committee, [EMCO review of the implementation of the Youth Guarantee – Key Messages](#), February 2024.

4.1. Identifying challenges: ECA reports

As the independent external auditor of the EU, the ECA is responsible for assessing the '**economy, efficiency and effectiveness**' of EU policies and programmes, thereby enhancing accountability and promoting sound financial management throughout the Union.¹⁶² In this capacity, shortly after the inception of the YG in 2013, the ECA undertook its first audit to assess the appropriateness and sufficiency of the Commission's support for Member States in setting up their national schemes, and to review potential risks arising from their initial implementation. A follow-up audit was then conducted to assess the performance of the scheme. The resulting Special Reports, published in 2015 and 2017 respectively, provide an authoritative overview of the scheme's key structural weaknesses prior to its reinforcement in 2020.

4.1.1. 2015 ECA report

The core commitment of the original 2013 YG was to ensure that all individuals under the age of 25 would receive a high-quality offer, education, apprenticeship or traineeship within four months of becoming inactive. Shortly after its establishment, the ECA carried out the **first key external evaluation of this policy instrument** in Special Report 03/2015, titled '*EU Youth Guarantee: first steps taken but implementation risks ahead*'.¹⁶³ The audit focused on the instrument's setup phase from April 2013 to June 2014 and reviewed the initial YGIPs. While the report recognised that the Commission had provided timely support, the ECA concluded that **three major implementation risks** had the potential to jeopardise the scheme's success from the outset.

Risk 1: Adequacy of funding

The first risk identified concerned the **adequacy of total funding available to support implementation** of the Youth Guarantee. Specifically, the ECA found that insufficient information was available on the potential total cost of implementing the instrument, noting that no impact assessment had been carried out prior to its establishment. For instance, the 2015 audit revealed a significant gap between the available EU funding, which the report estimated at €12.7 billion for the 2014–2020 period, versus external cost estimates for the scheme, such as the annual figure produced by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) of €21 billion for the EU-27.

Compounding these concerns, the report also found that the YGIPs submitted by Member States, which were intended to provide detailed breakdowns of precisely how the instrument would be implemented in their jurisdiction, often failed to provide credible estimates on costs, and lacked clear information on the sources of complementary national funding. This finding is supported by analysis from the literature, which suggests that the 'funding gap' identified by the ECA in 2015 was further exacerbated by an 'additionality gap'.¹⁶⁴ Even where EU funding was available, research

¹⁶² European Court of Auditors, [Guide to our methodology](#), July 2023, p. 18.

¹⁶³ European Court of Auditors, [Special Report No 3/2015: EU Youth Guarantee: first steps taken but implementation risks ahead](#), March 2015.

¹⁶⁴ Caliendo, M., Kluve, J., Stöterau, J., & Tübbicke, S., [Study on the Youth Guarantee in light of changes in the world of work: Part 1 – Youth Guarantee: Intervention Models, Sustainability and Relevance](#), November 2018, p. 13.

indicates that it often substituted national spending on pre-existing measures rather than creating new capacity or additional coverage, thereby limiting the scheme's ability to scale up to meet demand.¹⁶⁵ In view of these findings, the ECA concluded that **'there is a risk that total funding may not be adequate to implement the Youth Guarantee scheme'** as its establishing Council Recommendation intended.¹⁶⁶

Risk 2: Definition of a 'good quality offer'

Next, the ECA drew attention to a key discrepancy emerging from the **absence of a clear definition of what constitutes a 'good quality offer'**. While the 2013 Council Recommendation established the provision of such offers as the scheme's core objective, it simultaneously failed to provide operational criteria defining precisely what a 'good quality' offer entails. In turn, the audit warned that this gap could result in inconsistent and ineffective implementation across Member States, whereby some offers may not lead to sustainable labour market integration as the instrument intended.

Furthermore, in its assessment of the YGIPs, the ECA found that the Commission itself had accepted offers of temporary employment as 'good quality', even in cases where the remuneration provided was below the national poverty threshold of the Member State concerned. As a result, the ECA emphasised that **'absence of a set of qualitative attributes for a good quality job offer leads to the risk that the Youth Guarantee schemes might be implemented inconsistently and ineffectively'**.¹⁶⁷

Risk 3: Monitoring and reporting framework

Third and finally, the ECA report indicated that the **monitoring and reporting framework surrounding the Youth Guarantee was incomplete**. Specifically, the audit found that, while monitoring and evaluation requirements were being implemented for the aspects of the scheme that were EU-funded, primarily via the YEI, no monitoring systems had been put in place to ensure consistent reporting on the *nationally funded* components of the Youth Guarantee. The result was an accountability gap which, the ECA warned **'carries the risk that stakeholders will not have a clear overview of how and to what extent the Youth Guarantee as a whole contributes to tackling youth unemployment'**.¹⁶⁸ Without a robust monitoring system in place to track the results achieved by the instrument in the relevant Member State, the capacity to implement timely, evidence-based reforms would be severely limited.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ European Court of Auditors, [Special Report No 3/2015: EU Youth Guarantee: first steps taken but implementation risks ahead](#), March 2015, p. 34.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 32.

The key risks identified in the 2015 ECA report are summarised in Table 3 below.

Table 3 – Summary of key implementation risks identified in ECA Special Report 03/2015

Identified risk area	ECA's key finding and observations	Implications for the Youth Guarantee
Adequacy of funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No EU-level impact assessment was conducted to estimate the overall cost to fund the instrument. Clear gaps between EU funding available versus cost estimated generated externally (e.g., from the ILO). Member State YGIPs lacked detailed costings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ High likelihood of an EU-wide funding gap, which would have undermined the scheme's capacity to reach all eligible young people and deliver on its main objective.
Definition of a 'good quality offer'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council Recommendation did not provide a clear definition of what constitutes a 'good quality offer', nor were any EU-level qualitative criteria provided for jobs, traineeships, or apprenticeships filled by the scheme. This led to inconsistent standards in offer quality being applied both across and within the Member States. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Effectiveness of the scheme was at risk, as the offers may not have led to long-term employment, but instead temporarily reduce unemployment figures.
Data and monitoring framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The monitoring framework focused only on EU-funded measures, mainly via the YEI. No requirements for Member States to report national funding for measures implementing the Youth Guarantee, limiting EU-wide comparisons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The lack of complete data would limit the ability to make evidence-based policy decisions and prevent a full assessment of the scheme's overall impact and value for money.

This initial assessment by the ECA focused on the design and structural integrity of the 2013 YG, identifying fundamental risks relating to its sufficiency and stability of funding, as well as the quality of interventions and monitoring. These findings then formed the basis of a subsequent, more in-depth evaluation of the instrument's initial results and performance against its objectives, which the ECA presented in its 2017 follow-up report.

4.1.2. 2017 ECA report

Following its initial review of the design of the YG, the ECA then conducted a more in-depth performance audit of the instrument two years later, and published its findings in Special Report 05/2017, entitled '*Youth unemployment – have EU policies made a difference?*'.¹⁶⁹ The report assessed the implementation of the scheme as well as its early results over a more extended period, from April 2013 to May 2016, drawing on evidence from in-depth look across seven Member States.

¹⁶⁹ European Court of Auditors, [Special Report No 5/2017: Youth unemployment – have EU policies made a difference? An assessment of the Youth Guarantee and the Youth Employment Initiative](#), May 2017.

While acknowledging that some progress has been made, the ECA's conclusion was ultimately critical, stating that the situation on the ground **'falls short of initial expectations'**,¹⁷⁰ adding that the YG had not fully met its core objectives. More concretely, the 2017 report identified a series of persistent shortcomings, many of which confirmed the risks highlighted in the prior 2015 audit, while also drawing attention to new setbacks in implementation of the scheme.

Implementation setback 1: Inadequacy of funding and limited reach

Confirming the risks it had identified in the 2015 report, the ECA found in its 2017 follow-up that **funding was persistently inadequate** and, consequently, that the **reach of the instrument was limited**. Furthermore, the ECA determined that **'it is not possible to address the whole NEET population with the resources available from the EU budget alone'**.¹⁷¹ At the same time, Member States had not stepped in to fill this funding gap, as none of the countries visited were able to provide an estimate of the total cost of implementing their national scheme. Due to this shortfall, Member States were failing to reach the entirety of their scheme's target group.

This assessment was reinforced by stakeholder analysis arguing that the lack of funding resulted in 'very poor outreach' strategies.¹⁷² Empirical research further builds on this finding, observing that while headline NEET rates did improve over this period, the reduction was largely a result of a decrease in youth unemployment, while the share of inactive NEETs remained effectively unchanged.¹⁷³ Accordingly, these findings indicate that the funding shortfall identified by the ECA may have contributed to a structural 'creaming effect', where limited resources were directed to the most easy-to-reach beneficiaries, leaving the most vulnerable and inactive cohorts untouched by the scheme.

The 2017 audit also found that national strategies in place to identify and register the most disengaged and inactive NEETs were insufficient. Compounding these issues, the ECA revealed that in some cases, national schemes deliberately targeted a narrower, more easily reachable target group, thereby excluding up to 30% of their NEET population from the outset. Turning to the literature, research finds that consistently across Member States, the subgroups of young NEETs who are most vulnerable (e.g., those with disabilities) are the least likely to register with their PES, which in turn renders their national YG scheme inaccessible to them.¹⁷⁴

Implementation setback 2: Lack of timely and good-quality offers

Next, the audit found that Member States were failing to deliver timely and good quality offers within four months. This **four-month window**, which is a central feature of the policy, was **still not being**

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 71.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁷² European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), [Resolution on Reinforced Youth Guarantee; The revisited fight against youth unemployment](#), July 2020, p. 8.

¹⁷³ O'Higgins, N., & Brockie, K., [The Youth Guarantee, Vulnerability, and Social Exclusion Among NEETs in Southern Europe](#), January 2024, p. 3.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 19.

met consistently. Rather, average performance among the selected Member States had fallen since 2015.

Additionally, the issue of 'offer quality' remained a significant concern, as the ECA observed that Member States had not consistently analysed skills mismatches in order to align their interventions with the needs of the labour market. This, in turn, resulted in a **mismatch between participants' qualifications and the offers they received**, contributing to poor outcomes while reinforcing concerns that offers were not leading to sustainable labour market integration on the required scale.

Key findings from the literature supports the ECA's noted concerns, providing evidence that the YG failed to meaningfully increase the uptake of skills-based pathways such as apprenticeships. Specifically, one study shows that in 2016, just 3.4% of timely exits from the YG in Portugal were the result of apprenticeship offers, with the share being close to zero in several other Member States.¹⁷⁵ This, in turn, indicates that the implementation of the YG in certain Member States followed a work-first approach that prioritises subsidised employment offers over upskilling opportunities, which then risks trapping young people in cycles of precarious work. Evidence from Spain quantifies this risk, finding that 76% of contracts subsidised by the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) were temporary full-time positions between 2013 and 2017, with young workers in subsidised contracts being more likely to leave their jobs within two years than those in non-subsidised roles.¹⁷⁶

Implementation setback 3: Insufficient data quality and monitoring systems

The 2017 report then revealed major **shortcomings in the quality of data and monitoring systems in place.** To start, the ECA noted considerable inconsistencies and reliability issues in the data reported by Member States, hindering the ability to compare and assess results at EU level. One major issue was the large share of 'unknown' exits of young people leaving the scheme, making it **impossible to establish whether their integration into the labour market was sustainable.** Simultaneously, the available follow-up data showed that the positive status of participants often deteriorated over time, with many returning to NEET status 12 or 18 months after exiting the scheme.

Recommendations to the European Commission

In response to these key setbacks, the ECA concluded their audit by detailing a series of recommendations to the European Commission, with the aim of addressing the identified structural issues. Specifically, the Commission was advised to:¹⁷⁷

- 1 'together with EMCO, develop and propose standards for quality criteria for offers to be made under the Youth Guarantee';

¹⁷⁵ Caliendo, M., Kluve, J., Stöterau, J., & Tübbicke, S., [Study on the Youth Guarantee in light of changes in the world of work: Part 1 – Youth Guarantee: Intervention Models, Sustainability and Relevance](#), November 2018, p. 26.

¹⁷⁶ Cabasés, M. À., & Úbeda, M., [The Youth Guarantee in Spain: A worrying situation after its implementation](#), 2021, pp. 96-97.

¹⁷⁷ European Court of Auditors, [Special Report No 5/2017: Youth unemployment – have EU policies made a difference? An assessment of the Youth Guarantee and the Youth Employment Initiative](#), May 2017, p. 9.

- 2 'identify and diffuse good practice in monitoring and reporting based on its overview of the existing systems';
- 3 'ensure through its approval process for Operational Programme (OP) amendments that Member States perform a global assessment of the characteristics of the NEET population in order to ensure that the YEI measures included in the OPs will adequately address the needs of young person'; and
- 4 'revise its guidance on data collection to minimise the risk of overstatement of results. Member States should revise their baselines and targets accordingly'.

Taken together, the 2015 and 2017 ECA reports reached consistent conclusions in terms of the original YG's structural issues, finding that the instrument was well-intentioned, yet under-resourced, facing challenges related to NEET outreach, the timeliness and quality of its interventions, and its capacity to monitor and demonstrate sustainable results. To tackle these challenges, the 2017 report and its recommendations provided a potential roadmap for reform. It is in this context that the RYG must be assessed. In doing so, the following subsection analyses the extent to which the 2020 Council Recommendation addressed the weaknesses identified by the initial ECA assessments.

4.1.3. Responsiveness of the Youth Guarantee's Reinforcement

The 2020 Council Recommendation, '*A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee*', emerged as a response to many of the structural challenges that were identified during the initial years of the policy.¹⁷⁸ This subsection will therefore investigate the extent to which the 2020 reforms have addressed the three key challenges noted above, considering the content of the proposed reforms and the views of key EU-level stakeholders on its practical impact over the five years that have followed since.

Addressing funding adequacy

The consistent findings of the ECA over its two key publications regarding the extent of underfunding in national implementation of the scheme were addressed by the 2020 reinforcement through two channels. First, the 2020 Recommendation calls on Member States explicitly to '**dedicate adequate national resources**' and to 'make full and optimal use of the current Union instruments',¹⁷⁹ including the **ESF+**.¹⁸⁰ Second, the accompanying ESF+ regulation for the 2021–2027 period introduced a key provision in which Member States with a NEET rate above the EU average were legally obligated to allocate **at least 12.5% of their ESF+ funding to youth employment measures** which, in many cases were channelled through the YG scheme of the Member State

¹⁷⁸ Council of the European Union, [Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs - Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee](#), November 2020.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ European Parliament and Council of European Union, [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus \(ESF+\) and repealing Regulation \(EU\) No 1296/2013](#), June 2021.

concerned. This change, which coincided with the merging of the YEI into the ESF+, appeared to target securing a more appropriate level of investment where it was needed most.

However, stakeholder feedback indicates that these reforms have not resolved such underlying issues. For instance, the EYF maintains that post-reinforcement, total EU-level funding remains insufficient and has advocated for a considerably higher budget to address what they view as the actual scale of the challenge. More specifically, the EYF cites a 2015 Eurofound estimate that an effective YG would cost €50 billion per year.¹⁸¹ At the same time, however, BusinessEurope notes that the main challenge has shifted from the *amount* of funding to its **effective absorption and implementation at the national level**. Furthermore, they highlight a persistent lack of necessary administrative and human resources in some Member States, thereby impeding their ability to utilise the available funds efficiently. Together, these views would suggest that, although the 2020 reinforcement marks an improvement on paper, barriers facing its practical implementation continue to limit the amount and impact of the funding that is available to the scheme.

Defining and implementing a 'good quality offer'

The ambiguity surrounding what a 'good quality offer' entails emerged as core criticism of both ECA reports. In response, the 2020 Council Recommendation introduced more specific criteria. As detailed in Table 4, the RYG states that offers of employment should be aligned with the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights and, that traineeships and apprenticeships adhere to established EU Quality Frameworks.¹⁸² Beyond this, the Recommendation then introduces new principles, including the requirement to **'expand continued post-placement support... to ensure a quality offer was provided'**.¹⁸³

Table 4 – Assessment of the reinforced 'good quality offer' framework

ECA (2015/17) identified issue	Key provision in the 2020 Council Recommendation	Stakeholder perspective on the practical impact
<p>Lack of a clear, operational definition of a 'good quality offer'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aimed to align employment offers with relevant principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights & EU Quality frameworks Ensure offers for apprenticeships and traineeships adhere to the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ETUC: No significant improvement observed, as traineeships continue to have poorly designed learning objectives. Simultaneously, the four-month offer deadline remains a challenge, with some reports of it being considerably longer. BusinessEurope: Finds that long-standing issues persist, namely in regard to the use of wage subsidies, critical of their ability to ensure

¹⁸¹ Eurofound, [Beyond the Youth Guarantee: Lessons learned in the first year of implementation](#), July 2015.

¹⁸² Specifically: Council of the European Union, [Council Recommendation of 10 March 2014 on a Quality Framework for Traineeships](#), March 2014; and [Council Recommendation of 15 March 2018 on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships](#), March 2018.

¹⁸³ Council of the European Union, [Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee](#), November 2020.

ECA (2015/17) identified issue	Key provision in the 2020 Council Recommendation	Stakeholder perspective on the practical impact
	minimum standards as per the EU Quality Frameworks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand continued post-placement support for young people 	sustainable employment considering such positions often end when the subsidy does. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> EYF: Notes that 'Low quality of offers' remains a central issue, resulting in precarious employment, rather than providing a path to sustainable integration into the labour market.

Despite these reforms, stakeholder feedback and national-level evidence suggest that **progress on the ground has been limited**. As Table 4 demonstrates, stakeholders representing trade unions and youth groups have seen few material improvements. ETUC, for example, finds that traineeships continue to lack meaningful learning content, while the EYF identifies the **low quality of job offers as a persistent issue**. BusinessEurope also raised a key point of contention: the continued reliance on wage subsidies, which echoes the ECA's original concern that it is often unclear whether these subsidies are creating sustainable jobs or merely temporary positions that end once their public funding does. This concern is validated by analysis from the literature which sees beneficiaries in Spain cycle between YG measures and NEET status rather than exiting the system.¹⁸⁴ In turn, beneficiaries are caught transitioning between different forms of precarity rather than entering long-term, sustainable labour market integration as intended by the scheme.

This assessment is supported by limited findings from the Member States as well, which demonstrate a lack of consistent definitions in addition to gaps in offer quality in certain cases. For instance, while **Poland** has introduced clearer standards in line with the aims of the 2020 reinforcement,¹⁸⁵ **Italy** has not introduced major changes regarding the definition of offer quality,¹⁸⁶ and the **Netherlands** still lacks national criteria to verify the quality of YG offers.¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, specific cases from the national research appear to validate EU-level stakeholder concerns, as in the case of Ireland's Work Placement Experience Programme (WPEP),¹⁸⁸ which does not include certification for traineeships, echoing a critique made by ETUC. Ultimately, feedback from these key stakeholder groups and national evidence indicates that, while the reinforcement has provided a clearer definition on paper, it has not yet been successfully translated into consistent 'good quality offers', as intended.

¹⁸⁴ Cabasés, M. À., & Úbeda, M., [The Youth Guarantee in Spain: A worrying situation after its implementation](#), 2021, pp. 93.

¹⁸⁵ Ministry of Family and Social Policy, [The Implementation Plan for the Youth Guarantee](#), August 2022.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with a Senior Evaluator at INAPP (the National Public Policy Analysis Institute), conducted on 17.07.2025; interview with an employee of the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, conducted on 30.07.2025.

¹⁸⁷ European Commission, [Dutch initiatives to prevent and tackle youth unemployment](#), April 2014.

¹⁸⁸ European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 – Country fiche: Ireland](#), November 2024.

Improving the monitoring and reporting framework

The ECA's critique of the initial youth guarantee's monitoring framework called for a more robust system capable of tracking long-term employment outcomes. In response, the 2020 Council Recommendation explicitly calls on Member States to '**step up efforts to enrich follow-up data by strengthening systems that allow young people to be tracked after taking up an offer**, in order to monitor long-term, sustainable labour market integration'.¹⁸⁹ This new requirement aimed to address the ECA's issues concerning what constitutes a 'quality' offer in a data-driven way by using a participant's long-term status as an indicator of quality. A sustainable outcome, such as a young person remaining in employment 18 months after leaving, is used as evidence that the initial offer was of good quality. This approach was intended to shift the focus towards tangible, lasting results, thereby creating the results-oriented framework that the ECA had called for.

Nevertheless, as highlighted in Table 5, although stakeholders view this progress as a step in the right direction, they ultimately consider it insufficient to address the core problem.

Table 5 – Evolution of the RYG monitoring framework – policy change vs. stakeholder views

ECA (2015/17) identified issue	Key provision in 2020 Council Recommendation	Commission's view on progress (DG EMPL)	Stakeholder assessment of practical impact
<p>Weak data quality</p> <p>Lack of long-term tracking</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member States are recommended to 'step up efforts to enrich follow-up data' to 'monitor long-term, sustainable labour market integration' The Indicator Framework was subsequently updated to track outcomes at 6, 12, and 18 months 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The new long-term tracking capability was specifically designed to provide a proxy for the quality of the youth guarantee offers and their ability to lead to sustainable labour market outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EYF: The monitoring framework does not reflect the <i>quality</i> of employment offers, focusing instead on certain quantitative indicators, e.g., NEET rates, rather than <i>qualitative</i> outcomes, such as contract type and wages. Also, data comparability remains weak. BusinessEurope: The lack of an ex-post evaluation of the first Youth Guarantee means that the 2020 reinforcement was not based on sufficient evidence.

While acknowledging the updated monitoring framework represents an improvement, the EYF finds that the RYG remains flawed due to its focus on certain quantitative performance indicators, such as NEET rates, rather than on indicators that serve as a better proxy for the quality of outcomes (e.g., contract type, wage levels, and job stability). They also point out that **inconsistent data**

¹⁸⁹ Council of the European Union, [Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee](#), November 2020.

collection practices persist among Member States, thereby undermining the comparability of the new long-term data. Additionally, BusinessEurope identifies another concern: the **absence of an ex-post evaluation of the original YG by the European Commission** meant that the design of its 2020 reinforcement was not informed by a complete evidence basis of what did and did not work.

In light of the above findings, it would appear as though the 2020 Council Recommendation formally addressed each of the core challenges identified in the initial ECA reports: funding adequacy, quality of offers, and data monitoring. However, considering the view of the consulted stakeholders, there remains a clear discrepancy between the intended ambitions of such reforms and their reality on the ground. Although the reinforcement introduced key structural changes, particularly through the ESF+ thematic concentration, **persistent challenges regarding national implementation capacity, the quality of offers, and the depth of monitoring frameworks, indicate that the RYG has not yet resolved the long-standing issues that have limited the ultimate effectiveness of the scheme since its inception.**

4.2. 2023 review by the EMCO

In addition to external audits conducted by the ECA, the implementation of the YG is subject to ongoing monitoring by EMCO. Positioned as the main advisory committee for EU Employment and Social Affairs Ministers (EPSCO), EMCO carries out multilateral surveillance and peer reviews among Member States, thereby providing a distinct and complementary perspective to that of the ECA by focusing on the current situation, progress achieved, and the longstanding operational challenges faced by national authorities. Several years after the 2020 Council Recommendation that reinforced the Youth Guarantee, EMCO conducted its latest review of the enhanced instrument in late 2023, with its 'Key Messages' subsequently endorsed by the Council (EPSCO) in February 2024.

The following subsections analyse the key findings of this recent review, providing an up-to-date assessment of the scheme. This assessment is based on national and EU-level data collection, focusing on the scheme's performance and the challenges that persist despite the reforms introduced in 2020.

4.2.1. Key issues identified

While recognising that Member States had maintained a 'strong political commitment to the scheme', and that the share of young NEETs had resumed its downward trend in the post-pandemic period, the 2023 EMCO review (hereinafter 'the review') ultimately found that considerable challenges and data gaps remain.¹⁹⁰ Specifically, its key messages highlight several areas where the implementation of the RYG continues to fall short, indicating that many of the policy's long-standing barriers persist.

Implementation setback 1: Outreach to vulnerable NEETs

First, the review identified the need to **strengthen outreach measures, particularly for the most vulnerable NEET individuals, including those in rural areas.** Despite the renewed focus on

¹⁹⁰ Council of the EU, [EMCO review of the implementation of the Youth Guarantee – Key Messages](#), February 2024.

inclusion, this finding suggests that activating those furthest from the labour market remains a primary implementation challenge. This assessment is shared by the literature as well, which notes that addressing the heterogeneity of the NEET population requires more individualised and evidence-based engagement, yet local outreach initiatives that are capable of delivering such tailored support under national YG schemes have been largely overlooked.¹⁹¹ This lack of evidence-based outreach is identified as a key gap among subgroups facing different school-to-work transitions, for which singular support mechanisms are often insufficient. Furthermore, scoping reviews indicate that a significant knowledge gap remains regarding exactly which specific subgroups of the NEET population are out of reach, thereby preventing the development of the precise outreach strategies that are called for by EMCO.¹⁹²

The EMCO review, in turn, calls for greater coordination between the main implementing bodies in the Member States, ministries and PES to address this issue, as existing structural arrangements are not yet fully effective in identifying and engaging with all segments and subgroups within the target population. This corroborates a long-standing weakness: both the 2015 and 2017 ECA reports identified inadequate outreach as a key barrier inhibiting the scheme's success.

Implementation setback 2: Shift in approach to service delivery

The next key issue highlighted by the EMCO review is the **significant variation in both quality and effectiveness of service delivery on the ground**. Notably, there is an observed 'shift from the provision of personalised services to more generalised services', which carries the 'risk of considering young NEETs as regular job seekers and of leaving inactive NEETs behind.'¹⁹³ This trend therefore stands in stark contrast to the intended emphasis of the RYG on more individualised, person-centred support, as set out in the 2020 Council Recommendation. Findings from the research offer a complementary explanation for this observed shift, suggesting that the failure to personalise RYG service delivery may also be due to programme designs that fail to account for the structural problems that inform the individual's situation.¹⁹⁴ By basing such measures on the acquisition of individual skills and competencies, schemes may leave the beneficiary 'responsible for his or her precarious situation', while at the same time, failing to consider factors such as gender, social class, or origin. Consequently, these omissions can create a disconnect between the generalised approach of such individual measures and the heterogeneous reality of the implementation that is needed on the ground. Therefore, what is required are personalised services that actively account for the socio-economic and individual context of beneficiaries.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ Jonsson, F., Gotfredsen, A.C. & Goicolea, I., [How can community-based \(re\)engagement initiatives meet the needs of 'NEET' young people? Findings from the theory gleaning phase of a realist evaluation in Sweden](#), June 2022, p. 1.

¹⁹² Paabort, H., Flynn, P., Beilmann, M., & Petrescu, C., [Policy responses to real world challenges associated with NEET youth: a scoping review](#), May 2023, p. 10.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Cabasés, M. À., & Úbeda, M., [The Youth Guarantee in Spain: A worrying situation after its implementation](#), 2021, p. 100.

¹⁹⁵ Paabort, H., Flynn, P., Beilmann, M., & Petrescu, C., [Policy responses to real world challenges associated with NEET youth: a scoping review](#), May 2023, p. 1.

Accordingly, these findings suggest there is a gap between the intended ambition of the policy to provide more tailored support versus the operational reality observed in Member States, where institutional constraints, for example, may limit its impact.

Implementation setback 3: Data monitoring and a declining coverage rate

The final core challenge identified by the review concerns the **ongoing weakness in monitoring and data collection for the RYG** which limits its capacity to assess effectiveness over time. While recognising that the proportion of timely and positive exits from the scheme has improved, EMCO notes that 'waiting times remain too long', and at the same time, the **'coverage rate also decreased'** (the specific implications of these trends on the EU monitoring framework are discussed further in Chapter 5 on Governance).¹⁹⁶ In response, the review states that, in order to achieve improved and sustainable outcomes, 'efforts are still needed, in general, to improve the quality of follow-up data in many Member States.'¹⁹⁷

This conclusion, provided in 2023, echoes the persistent issues identified by the pair of ECA reports on the initial YG in 2015 and 2017, indicating that, even with the updated Indicator Framework introduced alongside the 2020 reinforcement, challenges in collecting high-quality, comparable follow-up data remain a considerable challenge.

In light of these new and longstanding challenges, the 2023 EMCO review provides a valuable and timely look at the state of the RYG's implementation, highlighting longstanding issues related to outreach, service delivery quality, as well as data monitoring and coverage rates. This raises the question: to what extent do these challenges, as noted in 2023, persist within the Member States in 2025?

4.2.2. Assessing the current state of play

To achieve a complete understanding of the impact of the RYG, the key messages of the 2023 EMCO review must be tested against the operational reality in the Member States concerned. To do so, the subsequent analysis is informed by the most recent national-level research findings and consultations with EU-level stakeholders to assess the extent to which the 2023 EMCO review's findings remain valid today.

The enduring challenge of outreach to vulnerable NEETs

In view of the national-level research and stakeholder consultations, the findings suggest that **effective outreach to the most vulnerable and inactive NEETs remains one of the most prominent unresolved issues facing the RYG**, thereby validating the key message of the 2023 EMCO review. The EYF partly attributes the persistence of this challenge to a 'creaming effect', whereby schemes primarily benefit those closer to the labour market while struggling to engage individuals facing multiple barriers. In part, this is due to a lack of capacity and specific competencies within PES to carry out the proactive, community-based work that is required to overcome

¹⁹⁶ Council of the EU, [EMCO review of the implementation of the Youth Guarantee – Key Messages](#), February 2024.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 3.

institutional distrust among vulnerable groups. Although the situation varies from one Member State to another, the core challenge is widespread, as demonstrated by the national examples in Box 5.

As evidenced in Box 5 (below), the RYG's renewed focus on vulnerable groups has yet to materialise in consistent, effective outreach mechanisms across the Member States. Moreover, **in Spain**, one study finds that administrative and legal barriers, such as the lack of work permits, continue to prevent young migrants and refugees from accessing job offers through the YG, even when they are formally registered in the national scheme.¹⁹⁸ Alongside these national-level considerations, BusinessEurope notes that this challenge is closely linked to the **resources and capacity of national PES**. They cite the reform of the Italian PES as a good blueprint for improving engagement, as it substantially improved both how they operate as well as how they engage with the target audience. At the same time, however, the stakeholder also emphasises that such deep reforms are not widespread as of yet.

Box 3 – National examples of persistent outreach challenges

Ireland: structural barriers to reaching inactive NEETs

Due to the national scheme's **reliance on the 'live register'** of the unemployed as its primary entry point, this creates a structural barrier to reaching the most disengaged. Under this system, the majority of inactive NEETs who are not claiming unemployment benefits are not targeted, resulting in a significant disadvantage, particularly given the increasing share of inactive individuals within the NEET population, and is exacerbated by a **gender disparity**, with women being substantially less likely (38.6%) to be covered than men (58.2%).

Source: Interview with Ireland's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 13.08.2025; European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 – Country fiche: Ireland](#), November 2024.

Spain: the demographic gap

While the Spanish scheme achieves a very high coverage rate (98%) among the youngest NEET cohorts (15-19-year-olds), this figure **drops sharply for older age groups** (50.2% for 20-24 and just 22.1% of 25-29-year-olds). Together, these findings indicate longstanding challenges in reaching disengaged youth, particularly as they grow older, pointing to a demographic gap in the effectiveness of their outreach strategies.

Source: European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 – Country fiche: Spain](#), November 2024.

Sweden: fragmented division of responsibilities for outreach

The Swedish PES does not conduct outreach activities for its national scheme. Instead, this responsibility lies with the municipalities. In turn, this division of labour can hinder the development and implementation of a coherent, unified national strategy for effectively reaching all NEETs, particularly those who are not actively seeking support from public institutions.

Source: Interview with Sweden's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 24.09.2025.

¹⁹⁸ Escamilla, A., & Molina, M., [The Youth Guarantee: learning from the experiences of young migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Spain](#), October 2023, p. 138.

Personalised versus generalised services: diverging national approaches

The 2023 EMCO review identified a trend of national implementation shifting away from personalisation towards more generalised service delivery. However, based on evidence gathered from the selected Member States, the situation on the ground appears to be more complex and, in certain cases, contradictory. Countering this trend, national level evidence suggests that several Member States are in fact implementing or reinforcing their implementation systems to ensure that support is more personalised, often as a direct response to the 2020 Council Recommendation itself.

In **Poland**, for example, the government is taking steps to **restore and reinforce more individualised support**, in part by re-prioritising IAPs and launching training for PES counsellors to promote tailored, person-centred pathways to employment.¹⁹⁹ In a similar vein, **Spain's** 'Youth Guarantee Plus 2021–2027 Plan' places **personalisation as a core tenet of their renewed scheme**, including through the promotion of tailored pathways for each participant based on their specific needs and barriers.²⁰⁰ Shifting focus to **Ireland**, their service model is **centred on a profiling tool** (the PEX score) in addition to the development of a Personal Progression Plan for every jobseeker that takes part in the scheme.²⁰¹ Conversely, in **Italy**, literature suggests that the YG faced setbacks precisely because it treated the diversity of the NEET population as a 'substantially homogeneous category', resulting in standardised service delivery packages that did not respond to the specific risk profiles of its beneficiaries.²⁰²

Nevertheless, despite some of the positive national examples identified, the challenges raised by the 2023 review remain prevalent among the EU level stakeholders consulted. BusinessEurope offers one such example, stating that its national members have reported a **concerning trend towards more generalised service delivery**. In parallel, the EYF expressed a similar view, noting a tendency for certain Member States to **apply the same policy to different groups of young people**, citing France's use of RRF funding for youth employment as an example of a more 'universal' approach, which in turn risks leaving the most vulnerable at an even greater disadvantage.²⁰³ Considering both the national and EU level perspectives, these findings suggest that despite signs certain countries embraced personalisation, as intended by the 2020 reinforcement, others may have in fact shifted towards more generalised service provision, resulting in inconsistent implementation across the EU-27.

Data monitoring and the coverage rate

The EMCO review's finding that monitoring systems and coverage rates remain inadequate is strongly corroborated by national data collected from the selected Member States. Despite one of the intended purposes of the RYG being to improve follow-up data, significant gaps persist, and coverage remains low in several countries observed. For instance, **Bulgaria's** national YG scheme

¹⁹⁹ Sejm, [Labour Market and Public Employment Services Act](#), March 2025.

²⁰⁰ Gobierno de España, [Youth Guarantee Plan Plus 2021 - 2027 of decent work for young people](#), June 2021.

²⁰¹ Government of Ireland, [Pathways to Work Strategy 2021-2025](#), July 2021.

²⁰² Gaspani, F., Recchi, S., & Rio, A., [Young People NEET in Italy: Exploring the Phenomenon and Evolving Policies](#), in Pulcher, S., et al. (eds) *Diversity and Inclusion in Italy*, May 2025, p. 646.

²⁰³ Interview with European Youth Forum, conducted on 03.07.2025.

only reached 14.3% of NEETs in 2023, falling far short of the EU average of around 40%.²⁰⁴ This low coverage is largely due to the fact that the monitoring framework of the scheme does not include inactive NEETs who are not registered with employment offices, effectively rendering a large portion of the target population invisible. Meanwhile, although **Poland**²⁰⁵ and **Spain**²⁰⁶ report coverage rates above the EU average alongside **Ireland**²⁰⁷ seeing a significant increase since the 2020 Council Recommendation, these positive cases are not representative of the wider trend among the Member States observed.

The comparative analyses presented in this chapter, covering both the pre-reinforcement ECA audits and the 2023 EMCO review, find that **many of the challenges identified** in these key assessment documents are **still relevant today**. Nevertheless, the findings at the national level reveal that many of **these trends**, both positive and negative, **cannot be applied uniformly to the implementing Member States**. This asymmetric outcome suggests that, although the 2020 reinforcement provided an improved policy framework, its specific elements have yet to be implemented consistently and effectively across all Member States to resolve the scheme's most persistent challenges.

Table 6 – Summary of 2023 EMCO review challenges versus the current state of play

EMCO challenge	Current state of play in selected Member States
Strengthen outreach to vulnerable NEETs	Validated: This remains a key challenge. For instance, Italy and Ireland report persistent difficulties in reaching inactive and peripheral youth, while EU-level stakeholders confirm the existence of a 'creaming effect' that leaves the most vulnerable behind.
Trend from personalised to generalised services	Mixed: Although stakeholders confirm that this trend is a real concern, some Member States (e.g. Spain, Poland and Ireland) have reinforced personalisation as a core part of their national strategy, indicating there may be diverging approaches to implementation among the Member States observed.
Weak monitoring & declining coverage rate	Validated: National data would appear to confirm that coverage rates remain low in many Member States, such as Italy and Bulgaria, indicating that outreach strategies remain insufficient. In parallel, monitoring challenges persist, as stakeholders still highlight weaknesses in the quality and comparability of long-term follow-up data.

²⁰⁴ European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 – Country fiche: Bulgaria](#), November 2024.

²⁰⁵ European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 – Country fiche: Poland](#), November 2024.

²⁰⁶ European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 – Country fiche: Spain](#), November 2024.

²⁰⁷ European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 – Country fiche: Ireland](#), November 2024.

This raises the question of how the specific elements introduced by the 2020 Council Recommendation have performed in practice and what impact they have had since their introduction. The following section will therefore turn to a detailed analysis of these policy reforms.

4.3. Impact of the 2020 reinforcement elements

The preceding analysis, drawing on key EU-level evaluations, has established that many of the YG's original structural challenges remain relevant today. This section now shifts from a broad assessment of the scheme's performance to a detailed analysis of the **five key reinforcement elements introduced via the 2020 Council Recommendation that aimed to both expand and strengthen the YG**. These elements can be understood as follows:

First, the broadening of the target group to 15–29 years of age represents a core reform impacting all four phases of the structured implementation approach. Next, the remaining four key elements of the 2020 reinforcement focus on strengthening each phase of the RYG's implementation pathway:

- 1 **Mapping:** The comprehensive mapping of services and identification of NEETs (4.3.2.);
- 2 **Outreach:** Enhanced inclusion components for harder-to-reach NEETs as their vulnerable subgroups (4.3.3.);
- 3 **Preparation:** An emphasis on individualised approaches, such as through profiling tools and more tailored support (4.3.4); and
- 4 **Offer:** The focus on skills improvement and the provision of quality offers aligned with EU quality frameworks (4.3.5.).

The objective is to assess the discernible impact of each of these elements, drawing on evidence gathered from interviews with EU level stakeholders as well as national research.

4.3.1. Broadening the target group to 15–29 years of age

Expanding the YG target group to include all young people up to the age of 29, an increase from the previous age limit of 25, formed a key pillar of the 2020 reinforcement (see Box 6), and represents a **cross-cutting change that impacts all four phases of implementation**. At the EU level, this expansion of the instrument has had a clear and tangible impact on the numbers of beneficiaries, as data for 2023 indicates that the inclusion of the 25–29 age group represents a significant share of the scheme's reach. While the total average stock of young people aged 15–29 registered in YG schemes was approximately 3.2 million in 2023, the stock for the 15–24 age group stood at 2.0 million.²⁰⁸ Accordingly, this would suggest that the expansion of the scheme's target age range to 29 resulted in approximately 1.2 million additional beneficiaries, representing nearly **one-third of the registered beneficiaries in total**. Nevertheless, reaching this older cohort remains a challenge,

²⁰⁸ European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes: 2023](#), March 2025.

as data shows that YG schemes across the EU only covered 32% of NEETs aged 25–29 in 2023, compared to 55.2% for those aged 15–19.²⁰⁹

Box 6 – Reinforced element of the 2020 Council Recommendation, expanding the target group

A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee: Key provisions broadening the target group to 15–29 years of age

- (22) 'Widening the age bracket to include young people aged 25–29 acknowledges that school-to-work transitions and sustainable labour market integration are taking longer because of the changing nature of work, extended periods spent in education and the skills in demand. It is important to recognise that the economic downturn resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic will lead to a larger proportion of 25–29-year-olds falling into unemployment and requiring support.'

The Council recommends that Member States:

- (1) 'ensure that all young people under 30 years of age 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...'

Source: Council of the European Union, [Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs - Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee](#), November 2020.

The Council Recommendation itself was widely welcomed by stakeholders as a reform that brought the policy in line with what had become the well-documented reality of an expanding and increasingly complex transition from education to the labour market. In practice, however, **the resulting impact of this reinforced element has been uneven**, particularly among the selected Member States examined in this study. As both national and EU-level evidence shows, the effect of the 2020 reinforcement has ranged from being a driver of policy reform and increased scheme participation in some countries, to a more incremental centralisation of existing practices in others.

Based on the evidence collected from certain Member States, **the formal extension of the age range had a direct and measurable impact on the scale and scope of their national schemes**. In **Ireland**, for example, the national strategy explicitly sought to widen the target age range, which led to a significant effect on overall participant numbers. More specifically, in 2022, the inclusion of the 25–29 age group added 19,106 individuals to Ireland's national scheme, nearly doubling the total number of participants.²¹⁰ This expansion, in turn, has been credited with contributing to a reduction in the NEET rate for the 25–29 age group, falling from approximately 14% in 2019 to 11%.²¹¹ Interestingly, **Spain** had already introduced a temporary extension to their national scheme in 2015 which, following the 2020 Council Recommendation, then made a structural feature of their renewed

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 - Country fiche: Ireland](#), November 2024.

²¹¹ Ibid.

'Youth Guarantee Plus Plan'.²¹² In part, this change responded to the reality that YG coverage of a significant share of inactive or unemployed youth declined within the 25–29 age bracket in particular. According to 2023 data, 44.8% of all NEETs aged 15–29 in Spain were covered by the national YG scheme, a figure slightly above the EU average (39.6%).²¹³

Yet, for other countries, the 2020 reinforcement served primarily as a means to formalise their existing practices, rather than introduce entirely new measures. Accordingly, national legislation in **Bulgaria** had considered 'youth' as those aged 15–29 since the scheme's inception in 2014,²¹⁴ while the target age group of the national scheme in **Finland** had also been 15–29 all along as well.²¹⁵ Representing a unique case, in **Germany**, most YG-related offers were already not subject to a strictly defined age limit. Nevertheless, their public authorities saw the age expansion as the right decision, as it more accurately reflects the German context, where young people typically take longer to enter the labour market.²¹⁶ However, not all Member States have implemented this key element of the reinforcement. **The Netherlands**, for example, continues to focus its national YG monitoring on persons aged 15–26,²¹⁷ while **Hungary** has not made changes to the target age group of their national YG scheme.²¹⁸

Table 7 – National implementation of the broadened RYG target age range

Member State	Implementation status of the broadened target age range	Key impact(s) observed
Spain	Fully implemented: made temporary since 2015, then structural in 2021.	Contributed to the formalisation of the temporary extension of the target age group. Although implemented, coverage is highly skewed towards younger cohorts. While coverage for 15–19-year-olds reaches 98.0%, it drops to 50.2% for those aged 20–24 and falls significantly to just 22.1% for the 25–29 age group.
Ireland	Fully implemented in 2021.	Participant numbers nearly doubled, resulting in a reduction of the NEET rate for the 25–29 age group.
Italy	Already in place before 2020.	The 2020 reinforcement confirmed existing national policy.
Germany	Implemented.	It was considered the correct decision by certain public authorities, as it reflects the usually longer period for youth to enter the labour market in Germany.

²¹² Gobierno de España, [Youth Guarantee Plan Plus 2021 – 2027 of decent work for young people](#), June 2021.

²¹³ European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 – Country fiche: Spain](#), November 2024.

²¹⁴ Interview with Bulgaria's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 04.07.2025.

²¹⁵ Interview with Finland's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 31.07.2025.

²¹⁶ Written input from Germany's Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, received on 29.08.2025.

²¹⁷ Interview with the Netherlands' national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 28.07.2025.

²¹⁸ European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 – Country fiche: Hungary](#), November 2024.

Member State	Implementation status of the broadened target age range	Key impact(s) observed
Sweden	Implemented.	This change is considered useful given that even older youth (aged 25–29) often lack work experience despite having university degrees.
Finland	Already in place before 2020.	The 2020 reinforcement confirmed existing national policy.
Bulgaria	Already in place before 2020.	The 2020 reinforcement confirmed existing national policy.
Poland	Already in place before 2020	The 2020 reinforcement confirmed existing national policy.
Netherlands	Not fully implemented.	Despite the 2020 reinforcement, national monitoring and outreach efforts remain focused on the 15–26 age group.
Hungary	Not fully implemented.	No discernible changes for the 25–29 age group in particular.

Source: National-level research findings.

The demonstrably wide range of approaches in national implementation and outcomes is reflected in the perspectives of EU-level stakeholders as well.²¹⁹ While the EYF welcomed broadened target age range, which it had long advocated for, it noted that implementation was not immediate, with some Member States taking two to three years to make the adjustment. In a similar vein, BusinessEurope found that the widened age range has generally been helpful, though its positive effect has not been universal. More critically, however, ETUC finds that in certain respects, the impact has been negative, as the target age group was expanded while, at the same time, the financial and human resources for PES responsible for implementation were not increased proportionately. This results in a system under greater strain, where the same number of staff have more people to serve.

²¹⁹ Interview with ETUC, conducted on 22.07.2027; interview with European Youth Forum, conducted on 03.07.2025; interview with DG EMPL, conducted on 26.06.2025; Interview with DG EMPL, ESF+ Unit, 23.07.2025.

4.3.2. Mapping phase: requirement for mapping available services and identification of NEETs

Key to the RYG's new four-phased implementation approach is the '**Mapping**' phase, which requires that Member States better identify and understand the NEET population (including its hard-to-reach subgroups), the support services that are available, and the current needs of the labour market (see Box 7).

Box 7 – Reinforced element of the 2020 Council Recommendation, mapping services

A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee: Key provisions on mapping services

The Council Recommends that Member States:

- (2) 'map the services available for different support needs, use national skills forecasts together with available local skills forecasts (informed by, for example, big data labour market intelligence) to identify skills in demand on the labour market, with particular attention to regional labour market specificities and the barriers faced by young people living in rural, remote or disadvantaged urban areas.'

Source: Council of the European Union, [Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs - Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee](#), November 2020.

Together, these factors would ensure that the scheme's outreach is more effective, and its offers are more relevant. In practice, however, the evidence collected indicates that, despite this renewed emphasis, **the implementation and impact of mapping mechanisms vary considerably across the Member States**. For example, evidence from national and EU-level stakeholders suggests that while some progress has been made, evidence of that comprehensive mapping of services as envisioned by the Council Recommendation remains limited.

The national research reveals relatively few instances in which the mapping of services has been carried out across the selected Member States. Focusing on these cases, in **Italy**, the national YG scheme evolved from a single, standalone instrument (the PON IOG) into a broader framework of active labour market policies which includes a specific focus on mapping and outreach.²²⁰ Conversely, while **the Netherlands** has not implemented any significant structural changes in direct response to the 2020 reinforcement, related reforms were introduced. These include the 2023 Proposal for a law entitled 'From School to Sustainable Work' (*Wetsvoorstel van school naar duurzaam werk*), which includes proactive and early intervention mechanisms necessitating a certain degree of mapping.²²¹ Furthermore, the focus in **Germany** has been on improving coordination rather than creating new mapping systems. This work has included strengthening the existing network of 365 different youth employment agencies. Specifically, in 2021, the national government (BMAS) established a central Service Centre for these agencies to promote information

²²⁰ Interview with a Senior Evaluator at INAPP (the National Public Policy Analysis Institute), conducted on 17.07.2025; interview with an employee of the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, conducted on 30.07.2025.

²²¹ Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, [Wet van school naar duurzaam werk \(36.667\)](#), December 2024.

exchange and the sharing of best practices, thereby enhancing mapping as well as the level of understanding of needs and services across its different regions.²²²

Beyond these few national examples, the limited frequency with which such reforms can be observed suggests that the mapping of available services has not been a prominent aspect of the reinforced elements of the 2020 Council Recommendation, nor has it been well documented. This observation is strongly supported by scoping reviews of the literature, which find that there is highly limited research aiming to identify the specific groups of young people who are out of reach of YG interventions, thereby indicating the presence of a knowledge gap regarding specific NEET subgroups.²²³

In turn, this finding aligns with perspectives from EU-level stakeholders, such as SMEunited, which emphasised prior to the 2020 reinforcement that mapping needed to be strengthened in order better understand NEET sub-groups and regional job market specificities.²²⁴ Similarly, the EYF has identified mapping and outreach as persistent challenges with implementation of the RYG, even leading to cases in which beneficiaries are unaware that they are participating in a YG scheme.²²⁵

²²² Written input from Germany's Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, received on 29.08.2025.

²²³ Paabort, H., Flynn, P., Beilmann, M., & Petrescu, C., [Policy responses to real world challenges associated with NEET youth: a scoping review](#), May 2023, p. 10.

²²⁴ SMEunited, [Position paper on the council recommendation on a bridge to jobs - reinforcing the youth guarantee](#), 2020.

²²⁵ European Youth Forum, [Youth Guarantee: How to support young people finding a pathway](#), April 2025, p.7.

4.3.3. Outreach: inclusion components for harder-to-reach NEETs

As part of the **outreach phase**, activating the most marginalised and hard-to-reach young NEETs was a core objective of the RYG's inclusion components. Specifically, the 2020 Council Recommendation called for a stronger focus on reaching vulnerable groups, as well as improved outreach strategies and more holistic support in partnership with social services (see Box 8).

Box 4 – Reinforced element of the 2020 Council Recommendation, inclusion components A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee: Key provisions on inclusion components

The Council Recommends that Member States:

- (7) 'strengthen the focus on NEETs (in particular those belonging to vulnerable groups, including those with disabilities and with multidimensional problems), using specifically-trained service providers and complementary strategies such as youth work, young "ambassadors" and cooperation with partners that are in contact with specific groups of young people.'
- (14) 'allow for a more holistic approach to counselling, guidance and mentoring by referring young people to partners (such as education and training institutions, social partners and youth organisations, as well as youth work, health and social services), who can help to motivate and support those young people in overcoming other barriers to employment.'

Source: Council of the European Union, [Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs - Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee](#), November 2020.

However, despite this policy emphasis, the practical impact of these inclusion components in terms of outcomes has been relatively limited. For example, the period following the 2020 reinforcement has seen many Member States introduce new targeted measures in line with this reinforced element of the YG, yet fundamental structural barriers and the persistent 'creaming effect' continue to hinder effective outreach to those furthest from the labour market.²²⁶ In response to the 2020 reinforcement, several Member States developed more specific strategies to support vulnerable groups and hard-to-reach groups. For example, **Spain** introduced a range of targeted measures under its 'Youth Guarantee Plus Plan',²²⁷ including dedicated programmes for marginalised youth, support for young women with family responsibilities, and tailored guidance for migrants as well as people with disabilities. Meanwhile, the post-reinforcement period saw **Ireland** launch plans such as the 'Early Engagement Roadmap for young people with disabilities' and the 'Traveller and Roma Training, Employment and Enterprise Plan', reserving at least 1,000 places on state employment schemes for young people.²²⁸ In **Italy**, the GOL programme was designed to prioritise individuals facing multiple barriers with a dedicated 'Employment and Inclusion' pathway that activates

²²⁶ Interview with the European Youth Forum, conducted on 03.07.2025.

²²⁷ Gobierno de España, [Youth Guarantee Plan Plus 2021 - 2027 of decent work for young people](#), June 2021.

²²⁸ Government of Ireland, [Pathways to Work Strategy 2021-2025](#), July 2021.

territorial networks of social and health services.²²⁹ Similarly, **Germany** has built on its existing close cooperation between careers advice and specialist rehabilitation services, and is piloting more intensive careers guidance in special schools.²³⁰

However, **these strategies may not achieve their intended outcomes in practice**. In **Ireland**, for instance, the outreach strategy primarily targets the registered unemployed, which, by definition, excludes the majority of inactive NEETs. One potential consequence of this is the gender gap in coverage: in 2023, the coverage rate for young men was 58.2%, compared to 38.6% for young women, which suggests that a significant proportion of the NEET population remains unreached.²³¹ Yet this challenge is not unique to Ireland either, as several YG schemes across the EU cover a higher share of male NEETs (44.6%) than females (35.9%).²³² Among the selected Member States, a significant gender gap in coverage can be observed in **Germany** (73.5% vs 40.6%) and **Finland** (72.7% vs 50.4%), while **Spain** shows the inverse, with a higher coverage for women (46.0% vs 43.6%), thereby highlighting the heterogeneity of the challenge.²³³ Moreover, studies on YG implementation in Spain have also shown that outreach strategies have not adapted sufficiently to the linguistic or digital realities of the most excluded youth, while institutional fragmentation inhibits effective coordination efforts from taking place.²³⁴

In the **Netherlands**, **no clear policy changes in outreach or support for vulnerable groups** have been identified, as YG-related implementation is left to the discretion of municipalities and therefore lacks national coordination or monitoring.²³⁵ Even where there has been a focus on outreach to hard-to-reach groups, as in **Hungary** where PES employees are tasked with this work, coordination with organisations and programmes serving vulnerable groups depends heavily on local implementers.²³⁶ Conversely, the impact of this reinforced element appears to be weakest among the selected Member State of **Sweden**, where the **PES explicitly does not conduct outreach**, while its service model has no specific inclusion components.²³⁷ This aligns with the broader finding from the literature that national YG implementation can overlook local outreach initiatives, resulting in a

²²⁹ Council of the European Union, [ANNEX to the COUNCIL IMPLEMENTING DECISION amending Implementing Decision of 13 July 2021 on the approval of the assessment of the recovery and resilience plan for Italy](#), November 2023.

²³⁰ Written input from Germany's Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, received on 29.08.2025.

²³¹ European Commission, 2020, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 - Country fiche: Ireland](#), November 2024.

²³² European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes: 2023](#), March 2025.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Jiménez, N., & Sánchez, S., [El impacto de la Garantía Juvenil Reforzada en la juventud en pobreza y vulnerabilidad social](#), October 2022.

²³⁵ Interview with the Netherlands' national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 28.07.2025.

²³⁶ Interview with Hungary's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 28.07.2025.

²³⁷ Interview with Sweden's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 24.09.2025.

key gap for vulnerable subgroups who require contextualised, multi-component support rather than standardised solutions.²³⁸

EU-level stakeholders strongly echo this gap between policy and practice.²³⁹ According to the EYF, the reinforcement has had a **limited impact on activating hard-to-reach youth**, whereby schemes primarily benefit those already closer to the labour market, persisting as 'one of the biggest issues'. BusinessEurope also acknowledges that **engaging with the most vulnerable remains a significant challenge**, attributing this to the varying capacity and competence of national PES staff in being able to engage with young people facing complex barriers. Research supports these findings by highlighting the existing knowledge gap regarding the effectiveness of outreach to specific subgroups of the NEET population.²⁴⁰ While the 'NEET' label covers a wide range of multifaceted individual conditions and needs, they are often not met with targeted solutions within a high-level policy design. The fact that many NEETs do not self-identify with the label further amplifies difficulties in effective outreach.²⁴¹ Taken together, these findings suggest that, although the RYG provided a stronger mandate for inclusion, certain institutional and structural barriers continue to prevent effective engagement with the hardest-to-reach NEETs.

²³⁸ Jonsson, F., Gotfredsen, A.C. & Goicolea, I., [How can community-based \(re\)engagement initiatives meet the needs of 'NEET' young people? Findings from the theory gleaning phase of a realist evaluation in Sweden](#), June 2022, p. 1.

²³⁹ Interview with ETUC, conducted on 22.07.2027; interview with European Youth Forum, conducted on 03.07.2025; interview with DG EMPL, conducted on 26.06.2025; Interview with DG EMPL, ESF+ Unit, conducted on 23.07.2025.

²⁴⁰ Paabort, H. et al., [Policy responses to real world challenges associated with NEET youth: a scoping review](#), May 2023.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

4.3.4. Preparation: focusing on individualised approach and tailored support

Key to **the preparation phase**, the 2020 reinforcement placed significant emphasis on shifting from a 'one-size-fits-all' model to a more **individualised approach**, acknowledging the wide range of circumstances and needs of the NEET population that the instrument is intended to support (see Box 9).

Box 5 – Reinforced element of the 2020 Council Recommendation, an individualised approach

A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee: Key provisions on an individualised approach

- (23) '...A reinforced Youth Guarantee should recognise that NEETs require an individualised approach: for some NEETs a lighter approach may be sufficient, whereas other, more vulnerable, NEETs may need more intensive, lengthy and comprehensive interventions.'

The Council Recommends that Member States:

- (8) 'improve profiling and screening tools and practices to match needs and responses, by adopting a multivariate, gender-sensitive approach...'
- (10) 'step up the preparatory phase with person-centred counselling, guidance and mentoring by trained advisors in response to the needs of the individual concerned and with due attention to gender bias and other forms of discrimination.'

Source: Council of the European Union, [Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs - Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee](#), November 2020.

The intention was for this reform to result in more tailored support through, for example, improved profiling, person-centred counselling, and individualised action plans. However, in practice, the research findings reveal a **notable discrepancy between this policy ambition and its implementation**. While many of the selected Member States appear to have formally incorporated the principle of individualised service delivery into their YGIPs or equivalent national strategies, the **practical impact of these changes has been inconsistent**. Beyond these observations at Member State level, EU-level stakeholders report a competing trend **towards more generalised service delivery**, raising greater questions about the extent to which the intended shift towards personalisation has materialised (see examples on the following pages).

Even before the 2020 reinforcement, several Member States had introduced the principle of individualisation into their YG-relevant measures (see Table 8).

Table 8 – Reinforcement as consolidation of pre-existing individualised approaches

Member State	Mechanism for individualisation	Key impact(s) observed
Bulgaria	Already part of national implementation plan since 2014.	The 2020 reinforcement confirmed and continued a pre-existing approach.
Finland	Has historically provided individualised coaching and counselling pre reinforcement.	The RYG reinforced a pre-existing national trend toward individualised support.
Germany	Individualisation is a key principle of the national labour market administration system.	Individualisation was already a consistent practice. The RYG therefore reinforced this existing principle.

For example, **Germany's** labour market administration system has long been based on providing customised, needs-based support.²⁴² Similarly, the competent authorities in **Finland** have a long-standing tradition of providing **individualised coaching and counselling**,²⁴³ while in **Bulgaria**, the use of IAPs was established via its 2014 YGIP, with public authorities confirming that this mechanism continues to underpin service delivery, including the use of labour intermediaries for developing personalised profiles for youth registered under their scheme.²⁴⁴ For these countries, the RYG thus served to confirm and reinforce existing practices rather than introduce a new paradigm.

In other Member States, however, the 2020 Council Recommendation prompted more concrete changes to the operational arrangements of the implementing bodies (see Table 9).

Table 9 – Formal operational shifts towards individualisation post-2020 reinforcement

Member State	Mechanism for individualisation	Key impact(s) observed
Ireland	Personal Progression Plans, dedicated case officers, and the PEX profiling tool.	Although formal commitment is strong, system-level outcomes such as waiting times for offers have worsened since the 2020 reinforcement.
Poland	Strengthened use of IAPs.	The legislative changes observed reflect a formal shift towards a more individualised approach.
Spain	The 'Youth Guarantee Plus Plan' (e.g., Re-Orienta network, a focus on individualised pathways).	Although the formal adoption of individualisation is significant, its practical implementation remains partial and is limited by operational barriers.
Sweden	An automated assessment tool, evaluating around 30 factors, as well as a return to individualised case management.	There has been a clear shift towards a more data-driven and individualised model.

²⁴² Written input from Germany's Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, received on 29.08.2025.

²⁴³ Jokinen, E., Spangar, T. and Ihanainen, P., [Monenkeskinen dialoginen koordinaatio: Kohtaamo-hankkeen kehittävä arviointi \[Multilateral dialogical coordination: Developmental evaluation of the Kohtaamo project\]](#), October 2020.

²⁴⁴ Republic of Bulgaria, [National Implementation Plan for European Youth Guarantee \(NIPEYG\) 2014-2020](#), April 2014; Interview with a representative of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP), conducted on 04.07.2025; and Yakova, L., [The Youth Guarantee in Bulgaria and Its Uptake among Roma Youth](#), 2018.

Accordingly, **Spain** formally introduced reforms to strengthen the provision of tailored support through its 'Youth Guarantee Plus Plan 2021–2027', including **personalised guidance via the 'Re-Orienta' network** alongside the design of individualised training pathways.²⁴⁵ Furthermore, **Poland** strengthened its use of IAPs to better tailor service delivery to the needs and professional situation of the individual.²⁴⁶ In **Ireland**, the RYG placed a greater emphasis on providing tailored support as well, committing to assign a **dedicated Case Officer** to every unemployed person alongside **the development of a Personal Progression Plan** for each individual.²⁴⁷ Similarly, **Sweden** has also seen a clear shift, moving back towards more individualised case management supported by an automated assessment tool as of 2020.²⁴⁸ More specifically, this tool evaluates around thirty key factors, including education, work experience and place of residence, to better identify the exact needs of jobseekers.

Despite these formal commitments, the effective implementation of a truly individualised approach has encountered significant obstacles in many instances. In **Spain**, for example, studies indicate that the practical implementation of individualisation is limited by complex registration processes, inadequate staffing levels, and digital exclusion, with the impact being uneven across its decentralised regions.²⁴⁹ Furthermore, in **Ireland**, the aforementioned emphasis on more tailored support has not resulted in more timely service delivery. Rather, the proportion of **participants waiting longer than four months for an offer has risen** since the 2020 reinforcement, from 57.5% in 2019 to 78.8% in 2023, although it must be noted that this increase is partly attributed to methodological changes in national data collection over this same period.²⁵⁰ A similar mixed picture emerges in **the Netherlands**, where no shift towards a more individualised approach has been observed,²⁵¹ and **Hungary**, where there is **little evidence that greater individualisation has been realised** in practice.²⁵² While Italy has an established profiling mechanism, its effectiveness is yet to be determined.²⁵³

²⁴⁵ Gobierno de España, [Youth Guarantee Plan Plus 2021 – 2027 of decent work for young people](#), June 2021.

²⁴⁶ Sejm, [Labour Market and Public Employment Services Act](#), March 2025.

²⁴⁷ Interview with Ireland's national Youth Guarantee Coordinator, conducted on 03.07.2025.

²⁴⁸ Ministry of Employment of Sweden, [Youth unemployment policies in Sweden - the Swedish response to the Council recommendation on a bridge to jobs - Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee](#), June 2022.

²⁴⁹ Jiménez, N., & Sánchez, S., [El impacto de la Garantía Juvenil Reforzada en la juventud en pobreza y vulnerabilidad social](#), October 2022.

²⁵⁰ European Commission, 2020, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 – Country fiche: Ireland](#), November 2024.

²⁵¹ Interview with the Netherlands' national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 28.07.2025.

²⁵² Interview with Hungary's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 30.07.2025.

²⁵³ Interview with a Senior Evaluator at INAPP (the National Public Policy Analysis Institute), conducted on 17.07.2025; interview with an employee of the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, conducted on 30.07.2025.

Table 10 – Member States with limited or undocumented impact on individualisation

Member State	Key mechanism for individualisation	Key impact(s) observed
Hungary	There have been several policy changes made since 2023 that could lead to a more individualised approach, primarily due to the increased guidance provided during the preparatory phase of the scheme.	While certain formal mechanisms exist, there is little evidence of increased individualisation in practice.
Italy	A quali-quantitative profiling mechanism was integrated into the national GOL programme.	A formal profiling mechanism is in place, but evidence of its effectiveness is not yet available.

These national-level findings are corroborated by EU-level stakeholder feedback, as both BusinessEurope and the EYF report that the intended focus on individualisation has not materialised, instead pointing to a problematic trend towards more generalised service delivery in some countries.²⁵⁴ The ETUC, meanwhile, views the reinforced element as largely theoretical: a concept 'written on paper', but not implemented in practice. These concerns are also reflected in a recent study, which finds that the scheme lacks individualised support as participants are expected to proactively seek opportunities rather than being offered tailored guidance.²⁵⁵

4.3.5. Offer: emphasis on skills improvement and quality offers

Another key pillar of the 2020 reinforcement was the sharpened **focus on improving skills**, as part of the **offer phase**, focusing on ensuring good quality offers for employment, continued education, apprenticeships or traineeships (see Box 10). In this respect, Member States were urged to align their national YG schemes with the demands of the digital and green transitions. Concretely, the aim was to move beyond basic labour market activation measures and ensure that youth are equipped with the relevant, future-proof skills in demand from employers. In practice, the available evidence has since revealed that many **Member States have launched new initiatives that integrate skills development** more deeply into their labour market policies since the 2020 Council Recommendation.

²⁵⁴ Interview with ETUC, conducted on 22.07.2027; interview with European Youth Forum, conducted on 03.07.2025; interview with DG EMPL, conducted on 26.06.2025; Interview with DG EMPL, ESF+ Unit, 23.07.2025.

²⁵⁵ Escamilla, A. and Molina, M., [The Youth Guarantee: learning from the experiences of young migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Spain](#), October 2023.

Box 6 – Reinforced element of the 2020 Council Recommendation, skills improvement

A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee: Key provisions on skills improvement

- (21) 'A reinforced Youth Guarantee should strive to support young people in gaining valuable work experience and developing the right skills for a changing world of work, in particular those skills relevant to growth sectors and the green and digital transitions.'

The Council Recommends that Member States:

- (14) 'ensure that the preparatory phase facilitates upskilling and re-skilling where deemed appropriate, geared mainly towards digital, green, language, entrepreneurial and career management skills, using existing competence frameworks... to help young people seize the opportunities in growing sectors, and preparing them for the needs of the changing labour market.'

Source: Council of the European Union, [Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee](#), November 2020.

Nevertheless, this strategic shift has **yet to result in significant improvements in terms of continued education or training outcomes** for beneficiaries of YG schemes, with direct employment remaining the most common exit route rather than dedicated upskilling or education pathways.

At the national level, several Member States have made significant advances in integrating a stronger focus on skills improvement into their national YG frameworks. Looking at one such example, **Italy's GOL programme** introduced dedicated pathways for upskilling and reskilling alongside a €600 million investment in its 'Sistema Duale' programme.²⁵⁶ The programme aims to increase the number of enrolments into vocational training programmes by 90 000 between 2021 and 2025 by introducing training activities, increasing funds for training in marginalised territories and creating an inclusive governance system with economic and social partners.²⁵⁷ In close alignment with the intended aim of the Reinforcement, **Spain's** 'Youth Guarantee Plus Plan' explicitly prioritises professional, technical, and digital skills, including programmes for personalised training itineraries, all of which is supported by a dedicated €600 million investment for alternating employment-training schemes.²⁵⁸ Beyond funding, **Poland's** national YG scheme has adopted a more **targeted approach to skills development** by embedding skills profiling in its IAPs, as well as by granting young people access to competence screenings, allowing YG interventions to be tailored based on the real skill gaps identified.²⁵⁹ In addition, **Germany** expanded its careers portal to include '**green skills**', in line with the intended focus of the reinforcement, and introduced new internship programmes focusing on climate protection and sustainability.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁶ Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, [Il Programma di Garanzia di Occupabilità dei Lavoratori](#), December 2021.

²⁵⁷ Italiadomani, [Sistema Duale](#), n.d.

²⁵⁸ Gobierno de España, [Youth Guarantee Plan Plus 2021 – 2027 of decent work for young people](#), June 2021.

²⁵⁹ Sejm, [Labour Market and Public Employment Services Act](#), March 2025.

²⁶⁰ Written input from Germany's Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, received on 29.08.2025.

Despite these policy investments and reforms, the **impact on the types of offers taken up by young people** participating in the scheme **appears to be more limited in certain cases**. In **Ireland**, for instance, the national strategy includes funding an additional 50,000 places in further and higher education, as well as establishing a 'Skills to Compete' initiative.²⁶¹ Yet, monitoring data shows that dedicated skills measures had a minimal impact on exit pathways for unemployed youth in 2023, as direct employment (88.6%) and apprenticeships (11.0%) were the dominant exit routes, while offers related to continued education accounted for just 0.4% of timely and positive exits.²⁶²

This reliance on employment over training is mirrored in **the Netherlands**, where research finds that traineeships provided by municipalities for young unemployed people via the national YG scheme do not need to ensure vocational training, instead focusing on instilling basic workplace discipline (e.g., being on time) rather than valuable transferable skills.²⁶³ At the same time, key stakeholders expressed scepticism regarding the material impact of this reinforced measure.²⁶⁴ The EYF, for example, noted that, while certain skills programmes exist, their direct link to the 2020 reinforcement of the YG is often unclear. Similarly, ETUC also expressed doubt concerning the impact of the reinforcement on skills improvement, noting that the advancements in terms of digitalisation have focused more on administrative aspects, such as online portals, rather than on the content of the training provided.

²⁶¹ Government of Ireland, [Pathways to Work Strategy 2021-2025](#), July 2021.

²⁶² European Commission, 2020, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 - Country fiche: Ireland](#), November 2024.

²⁶³ Eleveld, A., et al., [Implementation of the European Youth Guarantee and the Right to Work: A Comparative Analysis of Traineeship Programmes Under the EU Active Labour Market Policy](#), 2022, pp. 290-291.

²⁶⁴ Interview with ETUC, conducted on 22.07.2027; interview with European Youth Forum, conducted on 03.07.2025; interview with DG EMPL, conducted on 26.06.2025; Interview with DG EMPL, ESF+ Unit, conducted on 23.07.2025.

5. EU funding and governance of the RYG

Key findings

- The provision of EU funding has evolved between the 2014–2020 and 2021–2024 programming periods, with YEI and ESF covering YG-related interventions in the former period and mostly ESF+, with modest contributions from the JTF and Interreg programmes in the latter period. The main challenges identified relate to administrative capacity issues facing beneficiaries, insufficient interinstitutional cooperation (2014–2020) and the lack of clear guidance and procedures (2021–2027), while the impact of merging the YEI into ESF+ appears to be mixed. Uptake of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) is mixed, with some MAs reporting none. In some cases, RRF funding is linked to targeted interventions (e.g. Finland and Ireland), while in others, it finances broader youth-related programmes (e.g. Italy). National funding allocations have increased both in absolute and relative terms.
- The RYG is monitored via the revised Indicator Framework for Monitoring the Youth Guarantee using three sets of indicators: aggregate, direct, and follow-up. While aggregate and direct monitoring indicators are broadly sufficient, with data available for all Member States, follow-up monitoring indicators contain gaps in the form of inconsistent national reporting and structural limitations.
- Governance within the European Semester heavily utilises social monitoring tools, such as the Social Scoreboard and Joint Employment Report, to track RYG objectives, while the Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure has recalibrated its focus by downgrading youth unemployment to an auxiliary indicator. At the same time, the Commission's direct political engagement with Member States through the issuance of Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs) has been limited primarily to 2013 and 2014, with few subsequent follow-ups surrounding the 2020 period. The sensitivity of the CSRs to the on-the-ground outcomes in terms of key YG indicators appear to be weak, suggesting limited responsiveness of the tool.
- Following the RYG, most Member States have integrated their national YG schemes into broader youth and labour activation policies. At the EU level, the RYG's interoperability with the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, ALMA, the European Child Guarantee and the Roma Strategic Framework offer potential complementarities, yet awareness among stakeholders of these synergies remains quite limited.

Following the launch of the RYG and the merger of the YEI into the ESF+ for the 2021–2027 programming period, the EU-level funding and governance of this instrument has evolved considerably since the 2013 Council Recommendation that established the original YG.²⁶⁵ At the same time, the Indicator Framework for Monitoring the Youth Guarantee, the European Semester, and synergies between the RYG and other instruments at both EU and Member State level play a key role in promoting the alignment of national YG schemes with the 2020 Council Recommendation. Against this backdrop, this chapter examines the various EU funding and governance mechanisms that support the RYG.

First, Section 5.1. analyses the **utilisation and adequacy of EU funds**, providing an overview of the evolution of relevant EU funding instruments from the 2014–2020 to 2021–2027 programme periods,

²⁶⁵ Council of the European Union, [Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee](#), April 2013.

their adequacy and accessibility, the **impact of the merging of the YEI into the ESF+**, as well as the use of funds from the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). Next, Section 5.2. reviews the **monitoring and data collection tools** used to track the implementation of the RYG, followed by Section 5.3., which assesses the engagement of the RYG with the European Semester, examining its process, the use of economic and social monitoring instruments, the timing of the Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs), and the effectiveness of CSRs based on the actual conditions on the ground. Finally, Section 5.4. concludes with assessing RYG's **synergies with other EU and national level instruments**.

5.1. Utilisation and adequacy of EU funds

Funding for the YG, both before and after its 2020 reinforcement, has evolved over the last decade. This subsection reviews this context and assesses the **utilisation and adequacy of EU funds**. Starting with an overview of the relevant EU funding streams, examining their evolution across the two most recent programming periods, the subsection then assesses the sufficiency and accessibility of financial resources to support YG-related policy measures and interventions.

5.1.1. Cohesion Policy funding, 2014–2020 and 2021–2027

The transition from the 2014–2020 to the 2021–2027 programming period has led to important changes in the key funding streams responsible for financing YG-related interventions in the Member States observed. To better understand the material impact of such changes, this subsection quantifies funding allocation across the two programming periods, examining the main tools used for each, and then assessing the impact of merging the YEI into ESF+.

2014–2020 programming period

During the 2014–2020 period, EU-funded interventions in support of the YG were primarily financed via the **Intervention Field 103 (IF 103)** (*'Sustainable integration of youth into the labour market'*). At the EU level, IF 103 was supported by a mix of two EU funding sources:

- **The YEI.** This funding instrument was launched in 2013 to support NEETs, including the long-term unemployed and young people not registered as jobseekers, particularly in NUTS-2 regions where youth unemployment rates exceeded 25%.²⁶⁶ Actions supported by the YEI only cover IF 103.
- **The ESF.** Included as one of the European Structural Investment Funds, the ESF sought to enhance employment and fairer life opportunities for all.²⁶⁷ More specifically, the fund also supported interventions linked to the IF 103, matching YEI funding, while also covering regions that were not supported by the YEI.

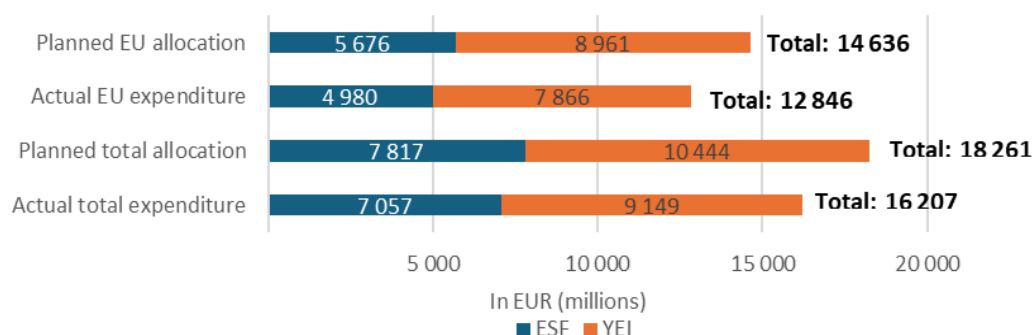
According to 2023 European Commission data (see Figure 3), the planned EU allocation reported for **IF 103** amounted to €14.64 billion (€5.68 billion from the ESF and €8.96 billion from the YEI).

²⁶⁶ European Commission, [Youth Employment Initiative](#), n.d.

²⁶⁷ Fi-compass, [The European Social Fund – Financial instruments](#), 2015.

National co-financing topped up EU funding for a planned total allocation of €18.26 billion.²⁶⁸ As the funding period concluded, actual EU expenditure reached **€12.85 billion** (€4.98 billion covered by the ESF and €7.87 billion from the YEI), for a total expenditure **of €16.21 billion** including national co-financing. For both funding streams, the absorption rate, i.e. the share of funding spent over funding allocated, is about 88%.

Figure 3 – Planned allocation and expenditure for IF 103, 2014–2020, breakdown by programme (EUR millions)

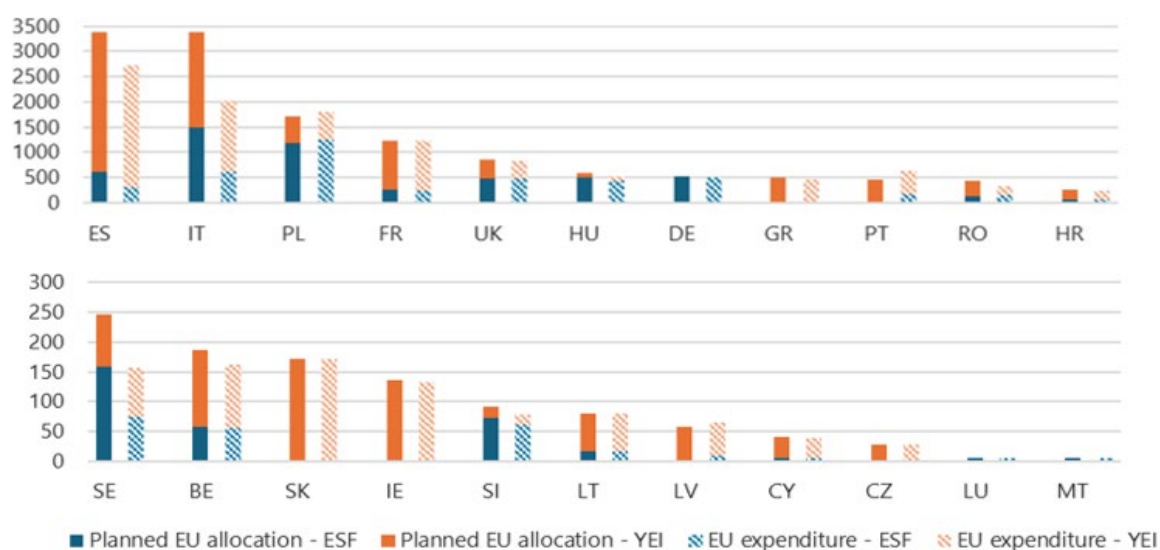


Source: Cohesion Data, [ESIF 2014–2020 categorisation ERDF–ESF–CF planned vs implemented](#), April 2024.

Country-level patterns reflect this split between the YEI and the ESF (see Figure 4), with those having more regions with higher youth unemployment rates more likely to have higher shares of YEI funding. In total, Member States allocated just over 11% more funds than they actually spent (including both EU funds and national contribution), indicating a lower absorption capacity than expected; this is discussed further in the following section.

²⁶⁸ Cohesion Data, [ESIF 2014–2020 categorisation ERDF–ESF–CF planned vs implemented](#), April 2024.

Figure 4 – Planned allocation and expenditure for IF 103, 2014–2020, breakdown by programme and Member State (EUR millions)²⁶⁹



Source: Cohesion Data, [ESIF 2014–2020 categorisation ERDF-ESF-CF planned vs implemented](#), April 2024.

2021–2027 programming period

Under the 2021–2027 programming period, YG-linked projects are supported through the **Intervention Field 136 (IF 136)** ('*Specific support for youth employment and social economic integration of young people*'). A key reform distinguishing the 2014–2020 programming period from the next is the merging of the YEI into the newly created **ESF+**, which now represents the **main source of funding** for IF 136. Furthermore, the ESF+ Regulation mandates Member States with a NEET rate above the EU average over 2017–2019 to spend at least 12.5% to support youth-related measures and programmes.²⁷⁰ Additionally, other Cohesion policy instruments can also support youth unemployment beyond what is provided by ESF+ via IF 136. These include, for example, the **JTF** and **Interreg Programmes**.

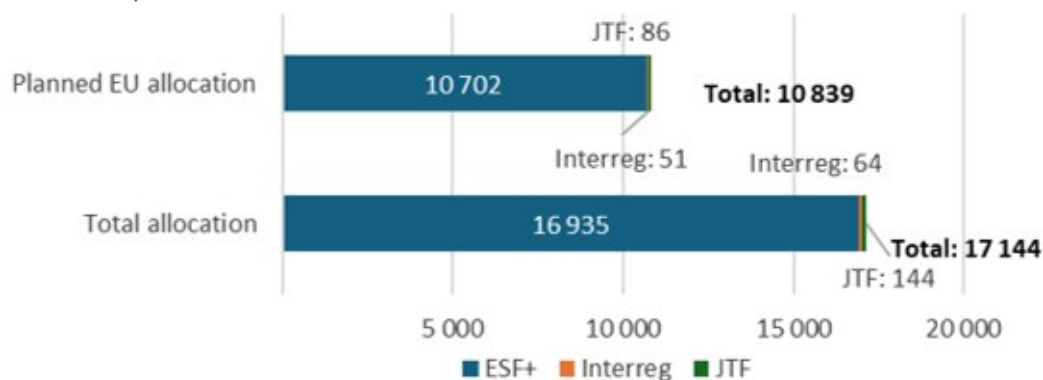
Data provided by the European Commission gives an estimate of the planned amounts for 2021–2027 but does not specify actual expenditure, as the programming period is still ongoing (Figure 5). The **planned EU allocation** for IF 136 based on 2023 data amounts to €10.84 billion, almost entirely channelled through the ESF+ (€10.70 billion), with far more modest contributions flowing from the JTF (€86 million) and Interreg programmes (€51 million), respectively. The planned **total allocation**, including national co-financing, **reaches €17.14 billion**. As with the 2014–2020 period, Italy and Spain are set to become the largest beneficiaries of EU-level funding for youth unemployment, receiving €2.77 billion and €1.99 billion respectively via the ESF+. Furthermore, the ESF+ serves as

²⁶⁹ Note: For each Member State, the first stacked bar indicates the amount allocated, while the second indicates the amount spent.

²⁷⁰ European Commission, [REGULATION \(EU\) 2021/1057 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus \(ESF+\) and repealing Regulation \(EU\) No 1296/2013](#), June 2024.

the exclusive EU-level funding instrument in support of the RYG across nearly all Member States observed, apart from the Netherlands, whose entire allocation is covered by the JTF, and Interreg projects.

Figure 5 – Planned EU and total allocation for IF 136, 2021-2027, breakdown by programme (EUR millions)



Source: [European Commission, 2021-2027 Planned finances detailed \(categorisation, multi funds\)](#).

Figure 5 – Planned allocation for IF 136, 2021-2027, breakdown by programme and Member State (EUR millions)²⁷¹



Source: [European Commission, 2021-2027 Planned finances detailed \(categorisation, multi funds\)](#).

The impact of merging the YEI into the ESF+

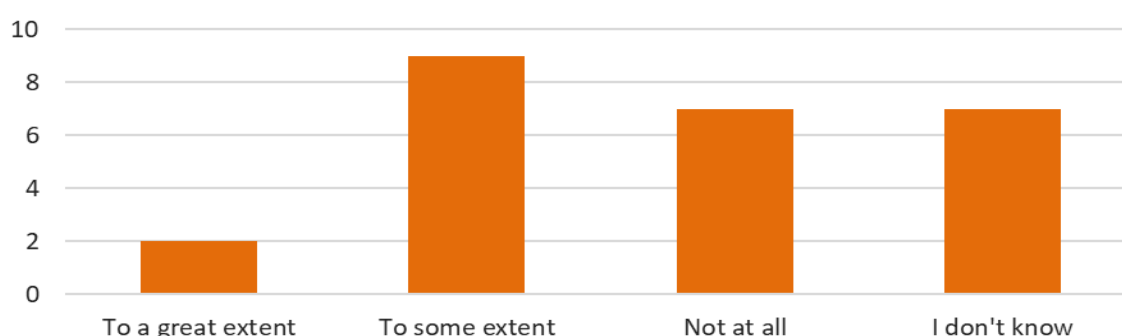
When moving from the 2014-2020 to 2021-2027 programming period, the YEI was merged into the ESF+, becoming the primary EU-level financial instrument for channelling EU funds to Member

²⁷¹ Note: 'TC' indicates Interreg projects.

States in order to implement the RYG, as well as youth employment and skills measures more broadly.

Based on the survey of MAs, **opinions are mixed** as to the impact of this change, with a mostly positive reception, yet some criticisms as well (see Figure 7). Specifically, 11 out of 25 respondents find that the merging simplified procedures to either a great or some extent, while 7 do not know, and 7 believe that this has not been the case.²⁷²

Figure 6 – Has the merging of the YEI into the ESF+ led to a simplification of procedures and a reduction of the administrative burden?



Source: Survey with MAs.

When given the opportunity to elaborate further, additional responses on this same question by the 25 MAs who took part in the survey point out several positive impacts, including an **end to double reporting, an extended target group due to an increased age threshold, the removal of the obligation to include only NEETs, and unified reporting rules**. Furthermore, these changes seem to have reduced the administrative burden, making project implementation easier and more streamlined. At the same time, the noted criticisms highlight the need for **more frequent reporting rounds** in the post-RYG period and draw attention to the **ongoing complexity of national rules**, as well as the **difficulty of identifying YG-linked expenditure within broader policy priorities**.

In parallel, findings from the Member State-level research reflect the evidence from the MAs, indicating that the merger of the YEI into the ESF+ has resulted in **both improvements and challenges**. In **Hungary**, the merger has led to simpler planning and monitoring of programme implementation.²⁷³ In **Poland**, three key positive effects are identified in the post-RYG period, namely greater flexibility, with the possibility of combining youth activation with broader labour and social objectives, simplified management thanks to a unified funding framework, and strategic integration, as YG-linked measures have a stronger connection to areas such as skills development, regional development and cross-sectoral services.²⁷⁴

²⁷² The survey targeted the Managing Authorities in all 27 EU Member States. Responses were received from 25 authorities located in the following 13 Member States: Poland (9), Portugal (2), Belgium (2), France (2), Italy (2), Malta (1), Slovenia (1), Cyprus (1), Ireland (1), Luxembourg (1), Spain (1), Latvia (1) and Lithuania (1).

²⁷³ Interview with Hungary's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 30.07.2025.

²⁷⁴ Interviews with Poland's national Youth Guarantee experts, conducted on 17.07.2025, 22.07.2025 and 01.08.2025.

EU-level interviews and survey responses align with this mixed picture, highlighting some positive elements while also raising certain challenges. One positive result identified is that the streamlined funding via the ESF+ is expected to reduce the risk of duplication and align more closely with the European Semester.²⁷⁵ However, respondents also highlight monitoring gaps as a challenge resulting from the current system not requiring Member States to report ESF+ funding that is allocated to the RYG in particular.²⁷⁶

5.1.2. Recovery and Resilience Fund

Looking beyond these core Cohesion Policy instruments, the **National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs)** funded by the RRF as part of the NextGenerationEU, are also supporting actions linked to the RYG over the 2021–2027 period. Both the Council and the Commission have recognised the crucial role of the NextGenerationEU in supporting youth employment measures²⁷⁷ and called on Member States to step up investment in this area with a target of €22 billion for the 2021–2027 period.²⁷⁸

However, as NRPPs are not delineated using specific intervention fields as the ESF+ or JTF, **it is difficult to provide precise estimates of the planned allocations covered by the NextGenerationEU** in support of the RYG.²⁷⁹ Still, according to the European Commission's estimates, about €56.4 billion has been allocated to NRRPs in support of the pillar '*Policies for the next generation, children and the youth, such as education and skills*'.²⁸⁰ Roughly 10% of this amount (approximately **€5.6 billion**) has been allocated to supporting and creating jobs for young people, out of which interventions linked to the national implementation of the YG are likely to be supported.²⁸¹

The survey of MAs reveals that the uptake of RRF to support the implementation of YG schemes is not uniform, at least across the 13 Member States in the sample. Furthermore, only seven MAs reported using the RRF for projects linked to the YG, while 17 said they do not use it.²⁸²

²⁷⁵ Interview with DG EMPL, conducted on 26.06.2025.

²⁷⁶ Interview with DG EMPL, ESF+ Unit, conducted on 23.07.2025.

²⁷⁷ Council of the European Union, [Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs - Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee](#), November 2020.

²⁷⁸ European Commission, [Youth employment support](#), n.d.

²⁷⁹ The European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility](#), February 2021.

²⁸⁰ European Commission, [Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility](#), October 2024.

²⁸¹ European Commission, [Policies for the next generation, children and the youth, such as education and skills](#), n.d.

²⁸² MAs that replied 'Yes' to the question on the use of the RRF to support national YG schemes are based in Italy, Poland, Lithuania, Cyprus, Belgium and Ireland. MAs that replied 'No' are based in Portugal, Malta, Poland, Spain, Slovenia, France, Latvia, Belgium and Italy.

5.1.3. Sufficiency of financial resources and accessibility of funds

As the previous section has shown, the planned total funding amounts for IF 103 exceeded actual expenditure in 2014–2020 by around 11 %. This could suggest that EU funding was adequate rather than constrained by scarcity or a lack of prioritisation by Member States. At the same time, however, the results of the survey found that a notable number of MAs report either **no major difficulties in spending the allocated funding, or were uncertain about it**, over both programming periods (9 out of 25 in 2014–2020, and 12 out of 25 in 2021–2027).

Sufficiency of EU funding

The Member State-level research, when triangulated with the findings from the MA survey as noted above, suggests that funding in support of the YG has been adequate across both programming periods, despite some divergences.²⁸³ Two main trends can be identified based on input from public authorities:

- **Sufficient resources, no major challenges identified.** This appears to be the case of Germany, Ireland, and Sweden. For instance, in Germany, financial resources are deemed sufficient, with ESF/ESF+ playing a supplementary role, being integrated into Länder and federal programmes and reinforcing existing statutory measures.²⁸⁴ Similarly, funding in Ireland is considered to be sufficient, with no periods suffering from underfunding, even throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁸⁵ The national YG coordinator for Sweden also finds that its youth-specific resourcing is adequate, with no significant bottlenecks reported, despite some municipalities requesting additional resources.²⁸⁶
- **Sufficient resources, with some challenges.** A generally positive view of their available resources is shared in Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Italy and Poland, albeit with some operational challenges. In Bulgaria,²⁸⁷ rising expenses related to project implementation (e.g. higher minimum wages) erode purchasing power despite rising nominal budgets. In Finland, funding was seen as strong in the 2010s due to the YG being a political priority backed by state funding during this period.²⁸⁸ However, national funding has since been reduced, with additional cuts being made by regional authorities in 2024. Despite these changes, the Finnish YG coordinator still considers funding levels to be manageable overall. In Poland, their multi-layered funding system, combining EU, state and local funding, is considered to be sustainable and flexible. However, uneven resource availability across regions can impact the quality and intensity of support that is provided to beneficiaries.²⁸⁹

²⁸³ Country-level research focuses on the 10 Member States covered by the study and is based on a mix of desk research and consultation with relevant stakeholders.

²⁸⁴ Written input from Germany's Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, received on 29.08.2025.

²⁸⁵ Interview with Intreo, Ireland's Public Employment Service, conducted on 13.08.2025.

²⁸⁶ Interview with Sweden's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 24.09.2025.

²⁸⁷ Interview with a representative of Bulgaria's Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, conducted on 04.07.2025.

²⁸⁸ Interview with Finland's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 31.07.2025.

²⁸⁹ Interviews with Poland's national Youth Guarantee experts, conducted on 17.07.2025, 22.07.2025, and 01.08.2025.

Taking these national perspectives into account, it would appear as though funding is generally considered adequate, though some challenges remain. The following section illustrates how some of these challenges shape Member States' access to EU funds.

Accessibility of EU funding

In terms of the accessibility of EU funds from the perspective of the implementing Member States, both the survey and the country-level research find that it is generally sufficient, while at the same time, highlighting several key issues as well (Figure 8). The main challenges identified include the following:

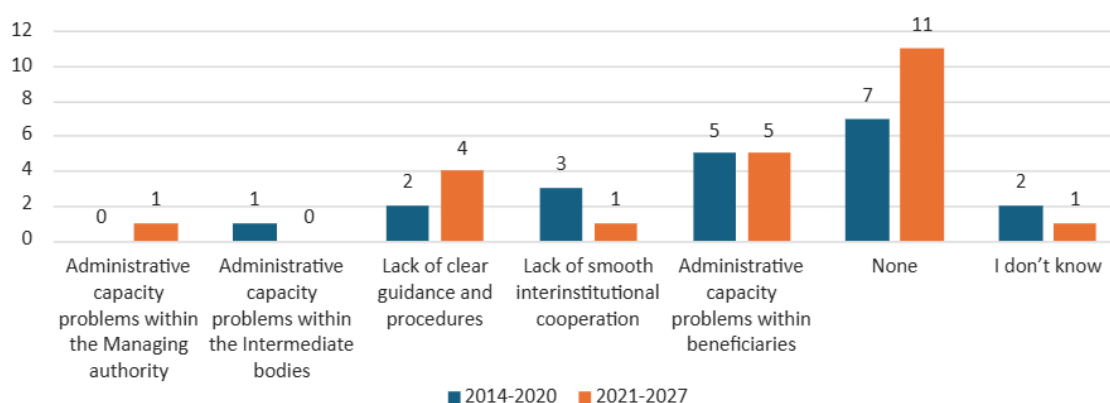
- **Administrative issues from the beneficiary side.** This is the main challenge identified for both the 2014–2020 and 2021–2027 periods. Investigating further, several MAs underscore issues with reporting requirements, long and complex procedures, and the limited capacity of those responsible for YG implementation (i.e., PES) as obstacles to accessing and spending YG-related funding. For instance, Italy's PES face long-standing structural weaknesses, such as understaffing, inadequate specialisation and inconsistent service delivery at the national level, particularly in less developed regions.²⁹⁰
- **Lack of smooth interinstitutional cooperation.** Focusing on the 2014–2020 period, one MA from Luxembourg points to weak coordination between ministries and other administrations, while a respondent from Lithuania connects inadequate coordination to the limited capacity of smaller actors (e.g. NGOs and municipalities). For 2021–2027, one MA from Poland reports that there is a lack of coordination and consistent guidance since the YG falls within the remit of another Ministry. At the national level, in Italy, territorial disparities and fragmented governance are identified as challenges.²⁹¹
- **Lack of clear guidance and procedures.** Polish MAs reported that a lack of guidance was found to hinder effective planning, implementation, and accountability. This resulted in delays and an inability to utilise available resources to their full potential.

Overall, these findings suggest that spending-related challenges are more likely to be operational in nature, being linked to issues such as limited administrative capacity, weak coordination and unclear procedures, rather than a result of insufficient allocations of EU funding.

²⁹⁰ Interview with a Senior Evaluator at INAPP (the National Public Policy Analysis Institute), conducted on 17.07.2025; interview with an employee of the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, conducted on 30.07.2025.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

Figure 7 – Challenges identified by Managing Authorities



Source: Survey MAs, n=25.

5.1.4. Funding YG-linked interventions

The national research carried out for this study found that there are a variety of ways in which Member States channel direct support from EU and national funding sources to YG-related plans and schemes. The table below provides several illustrative examples.

Table 11 – National funding, overview of illustrative approaches

Member State	Action and approaches	Programme period	Description
ES	Youth Guarantee Plus Plan & the Plan Estratégico Juventud Avanza	2021-2027	The programme (€4.95 billion) combines ESF+, RRF and other sources to support actions in the field of youth employment. ²⁹²
IT	GOL Programme	2021-2027	Introduced in 2021 under the NRRP, the programme aims to support labour market integration of various groups, including vulnerable workers, such as young ones. ²⁹³ It is further complemented by ESF+ funding, under the National Programme 'Giovani, Donne e Lavoro', allocating €2.8 billion to support youth labour market integration. ²⁹⁴

²⁹² Gobierno de España, [Youth Guarantee Plan Plus 2021 – 2027 of decent work for young people](#), June 2021.

²⁹³ ANPAL, [Garanzia di occupabilità dei lavoratori – Gol](#), n.d.

²⁹⁴ Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, [Facilitare l'ingresso dei giovani al lavoro](#), n.d.

Member State	Action and approaches	Programme period	Description
PL	Labour Fund (<i>Fundusz Pracy</i>)	2014-2020; 2021-2027	The Labour Fund can co-finance activities to support employment-related measures and vocational training. It complements ESF+ funding. ²⁹⁵
DE	Länder and federal frameworks	2014-2020; 2021-2027	Funding linked to the Youth Guarantee is embedded into the Länder- and Federal-led programmes, complementing them. ²⁹⁶
IE	Work Placement Experience Programme and the SOLAS Green Skills Action Programme	2021-2027	The RRF is providing €27 million to the Work Placement Experience Programme and €114 million to the SOLAS Green Skills Action Programme, both of which are central to the national YG scheme. ^{297, 298}
FI	One-Stop Guidance Centres	2021-2027	The RRF is providing €6.5 million to strengthen the almost 70 OSGCs across the country. ²⁹⁹
SE	Transfers to municipalities to expand <i>Sommarjobb</i> and <i>Jobb för ungdomar</i> programmes	2021-2027	The government tasked the Swedish PES (<i>Arbetsförmedlingen</i>) to transfer SEK 250 million in 2025 to high-unemployment municipalities to create jobs for young people, especially during summer. ^{300, 301}

²⁹⁵ Interviews with Poland's national Youth Guarantee experts, conducted on 17.07.2025, 22.07.2025 and 01.08.2025. Additionally, Article 270 of the Labour Market and Public Employment Services Act provide the basis for spending ESF+ at the regional level. The text of the legislation is available: Sejm, [Labour Market and Public Employment Services Act](#), May 2025.

²⁹⁶ Written input from Germany's Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, received on 29.08.2025.

²⁹⁷ Interview with Ireland's National Youth Guarantee Coordinator, conducted on 13.08.2025. based on investments highlighted in Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan

²⁹⁸ Government of Ireland, [Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021](#), June 2021.

²⁹⁹ European Commission, [Finland's Recovery and Resilience Plan](#), February 2024.

³⁰⁰ Interview with Sweden's Youth Guarantee representative, conducted on 24.09.2025.

³⁰¹ Swedish Government, [250 miljoner till sommarjobb och jobb för unga](#), April 2025.

5.2. Monitoring and data collection

As recognised by the 2013 Council Recommendation that established the YG, monitoring is an integral part of its successful implementation. This was echoed by the 2020 Council Recommendation reinforcing the YG, aiming to improve monitoring and data reporting further.³⁰² For this purpose, EMCO has established the **Indicator Framework for Monitoring the Youth Guarantee**, composed of aggregate monitoring (macroeconomic indicators), direct monitoring (YG delivery), and follow-up monitoring (participants who have exited the YG preparatory phase).³⁰³

Table 12 – Summary of YG monitoring indicators reported by Member States

Member State	Direct monitoring	Follow-up monitoring
Bulgaria	✓	✓
Finland	✓	X
Germany	✓	✓
Hungary	✓	✓
Italy	✓	✓
Ireland	✓	✓
Netherlands	✓	X
Poland	✓	✓
Spain	✓	✓
Sweden	✓	✓

Source: European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 - Country fiches for Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and Sweden](#), November 2024.

As noted in Section 3.3, the Commission is responsible for monitoring and reporting **aggregate data** on the macroeconomic situation of young people in the EU.³⁰⁴ Aggregate monitoring uses the NEET rate for young people aged 15–29, tracking the proportion of this age group who are NEET. As this indicator relies on the data from the EU Labour Force Survey (LFS), it ensures comparability across Member States. Accordingly, trends in this rate serve as a high-level proxy for the impact of YG implementation.³⁰⁵

This is complemented by **direct and follow-up monitoring** which aim to provide more direct insight into the performance of the national YG scheme, with data for these indicators provided by national

³⁰² Council of the European Union, [Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs - Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee](#), November 2020.

³⁰³ EMCO, [Indicator Framework for Monitoring the Youth Guarantee](#), March 2021.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

administrations at Member State level.³⁰⁶ The **direct monitoring indicators**, and in particular, the main indicator tracking the share of young people in the YG preparatory phase beyond the 4-month target, and the **supplementary indicator**, measuring positive and timely exits from the YG preparatory phase, are provided by all Member States, with some exceptions. For instance, in Finland, direct monitoring indicators use the national 3-month target, instead of the recommended 4 months.³⁰⁷

The follow-up monitoring is concerned with the sustainability of outcomes for beneficiaries of the YG scheme, including the quality of offers received.³⁰⁸ The main indicator tracks the situation of participants 6, 12, and 18 months after exiting the YG preparatory phase and is used by **8 out of the 10 selected Member States**. The Netherlands and Finland do not provide these data, which can be partly explained by certain national implementation measures, such as the Finnish OSGCs services. These centres operate as low-threshold services, often on a walk-in basis. Consequently, the anonymity afforded to its users precludes the systematic tracking of scheme beneficiaries.³⁰⁹

However, even among Member States providing follow-up monitoring, reporting practices remain inconsistent. For instance, Germany submits data only when full-year beneficiary exit figures are available at the time of collection, a condition that was not the case in 2023.³¹⁰ Similarly, while linking administrative datasets renders long-term tracking feasible, Hungary's regional PES focus predominantly on short-term (6 months) outcomes.³¹¹ Furthermore, **the quality of follow-up monitoring suffers from missing data** in several Member States, particularly in Sweden, Poland and Ireland, where there is a high proportion of 'unknown situations' after exiting (ranging from 24% to 30% at 6 months post-exist).³¹²

Additionally, several Member States have undertaken **methodological adjustments to their follow-up monitoring**. For instance, Ireland's statistics are affected by data quality issues, and the data is not comparable between 2014–2018 and between 2019–2021 due to database alterations.³¹³ The Netherlands implemented several methodological changes in 2021, such as providing breakdowns

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 – Country fiche: Finland](#), November 2024.

³⁰⁸ EMCO, [Indicator Framework for Monitoring the Youth Guarantee](#), March 2021.

³⁰⁹ Määttä, M., [One-Stop Guidance Center \(Ohjaamo\) – Ready to offer multi-agency services for the young](#), September 2018.

³¹⁰ European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 – Country fiche: Germany](#), November 2024.

³¹¹ Interview with Hungary's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 30.07.2025.

³¹² European Commission, 2020, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 – Country fiche: Ireland](#), November 2024; European Commission, 2020, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 – Country fiche: Poland](#), November 2024; European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 – Country fiche: Sweden](#), Novembre 2024.

³¹³ European Commission, 2020, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 – Country fiche: Ireland](#), November 2024.

by age for all variables and changing the reference period for stocks,³¹⁴ thus hampering data comparability over time.

Country-level monitoring is affected by structural limitations inherent in its design. One common constraint found across the monitoring systems observed is that **results can only be captured for beneficiaries formally enrolled within the national YG scheme**. This is a particular challenge in Member States where youth employment support is fragmented, such as Italy.³¹⁵ In such cases, the outcome of beneficiaries registered with PES beyond the YG are not recorded, despite them being able to receive offers and benefit from national and regional measures. Accurately capturing the situation of the NEETs is even more complex in countries with low baseline registration rates in the national employment agencies, such as Bulgaria, where the outcomes of 80% of NEETs are not captured and reported.³¹⁶ In addition to low national coverage rates, and despite policy-level commitments to addressing the specific needs of vulnerable populations such as the Roma, ethnicity is not systematically tracked within the current indicators.³¹⁷ Moreover, a significant limitation in national monitoring is that it often insufficiently captures the multi-level governance structures and regional disparities, both of which can materially affect the scheme's outcomes.³¹⁸

In light of the national reporting approaches and structural limitations described above, a discrepancy remains. Although the Commission's collection and reporting of aggregate data is robust and comparable, the **quality of the data provided by Member States varies**. While direct monitoring data is generally consistent, follow-up monitoring is frequently unavailable or subject to methodological changes. Consequently, this challenges the ability to make both national and cross-country comparisons.

5.3. Governance and monitoring within the European Semester

As the overarching framework for the coordination of economic and employment policies of the EU, the **European Semester** can serve as an important governance mechanism for steering the implementation of the RYG at Member States level. The Semester process itself advances over an annual cycle of policy guidance, technical monitoring, and political engagement. Against this background, this subsection examines the effectiveness of this governance framework across three key parts, starting in 5.3.1. by analysing the role of policy guidance and social monitoring tools such as the **Employment Guidelines** and **Joint Employment Report**, then assessing how youth employment is integrated within the EU's macroeconomic surveillance instrument via the **Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure** in 5.3.2., before concluding with an analysis of the

³¹⁴ Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 - Country fiche: Netherlands](#), November 2024.

³¹⁵ European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 - Country fiche: Italy](#), November 2024.

³¹⁶ Yakova, L., [The Youth Guarantee in Bulgaria and its uptake among Roma youth](#), October 2018.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Monti, L., [The Italian Puzzle of the European Youth Guarantee](#), August 2022.

Commission's engagement with Member States through the issuance and implementation of **Country Specific Recommendations**.

5.3.1. Policy guidance and social monitoring tools

The foundation of the European Semester's engagement in terms of youth employment in particular is established through the **Employment Guidelines** (the Guidelines). Proposed annually by the Commission and adopted by the Council, these Guidelines provide the legal basis for CSRs and set a common set of priorities for the national employment policies of the Member States. An analysis of the latest **Proposal for a Council Decision on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States** for 2025 reveals that,³¹⁹ while the text itself does not explicitly refer to the 'Reinforced Youth Guarantee', or even 'youth employment' more generally, it does offer specific guidance that is consistent with the objectives central to the implementation of the RYG. Specifically, **Guideline 6** ('Enhancing labour supply and improving access to employment, lifelong acquisition of skills and competences') calls on Member States to 'address labour and skills shortages and promote quality jobs as well as quality and inclusive education and training for all... especially among disadvantaged students and adults'.³²⁰ Furthermore, Recital 4 of the 2025 proposal emphasises the need for active labour market policies that are effective, offering another example of guidance directed to Member States that is consistent with the core aims of the RYG.

In terms of operational monitoring, the **Joint Employment Report (JER)** serves as a key instrument for tracking the implementation of these Guidelines, providing an overview of key employment and social developments, their corresponding policy measures, as well as identifying where and in which Member States there is a need for greater policy action.³²¹ It also functions as a key vehicle for monitoring the performance of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), which is operationalised through the range of indicators that are comprised by the **Social Scoreboard**, acting as a reference point for tracking progress towards upward social convergence across the EU.³²² Crucially for the governance of the RYG in particular, the Scoreboard includes the **NEET rate (for those aged 15-29)**, which also features as the main aggregate monitoring indicator under the YG Indicator Monitoring Framework, and as a headline indicator in the JER, alongside 'Early leavers from education and training'. These indicators enable the Commission and the Council to identify critical situations and divergences across Member States and within specific countries, providing the quantitative evidence base required to trigger policy interventions.

The effectiveness of this monitoring architecture has been recently strengthened by the addition of the **Social Convergence Framework (SCF)**. As detailed in the 2025 JER Proposal, this framework responds to Regulation (EU) 2024/1263 on the effective coordination of economic policies and on

³¹⁹ European Commission, [Proposal for a Council Decision on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States, COM\(2025\) 230 final](#), June 2025.

³²⁰ Ibid., p. 4.

³²¹ European Commission, [Proposal for a Joint Employment Report from the Commission and the Council, COM\(2025\) 958 final](#), November 2025.

³²² Ibid.

multilateral budgetary surveillance,³²³ and introduces a two-stage analysis designed to detect risks to upward social convergence.³²⁴ Concretely, the 'first-stage analysis' relies on the Social Scoreboard and the JER's traffic-light methodology to identify potential risks, where Member States flagged in this first stage are then subject to a deeper, 'second-stage analysis'. For the latest 2025 cycle of this analysis, nine Member States,³²⁵ including Bulgaria, Spain, Italy, and Finland were found to require greater scrutiny due to their potential risks to social convergence.³²⁶ This mechanism, in turn, ensures that key performance indicators, including those that are central to assessing effectiveness of the RYG, are not merely reported on, but are actively used to **flag negative structural changes in the youth labour market**. Consequently, the JER serves as an important mechanism through which the 'social' dimension of the European Semester enforces accountability for the RYG, ensuring that youth employment remains a priority, even in the absence of specific recommendations issued in this area (see Section 5.3.3).

While the JER and its use of the Scoreboard focus on social convergence, the monitoring of youth employment is also integrated into the broader economic surveillance mechanisms of the European Semester. As the following subsection explores, the inclusion of youth unemployment indicators within the **Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure** is another monitoring mechanism through which significant deteriorations in the youth labour market can be flagged as potential risks to macroeconomic stability.

5.3.2. Youth indicators in the Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure (MIP)

Complementing the social monitoring framework described above, the governance of youth employment is also embedded within the European Semester's macroeconomic surveillance instrument, the **Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure (MIP)**. Unlike the JER, which focuses on social convergence and employment performance, the MIP aims to identify, prevent, and correct trends that could adversely affect the proper functioning of the economy of a Member State or the EU as a whole.³²⁷ The detection of such imbalances relies on a **scoreboard of headline and auxiliary indicators**, which are used to trigger the publication of the **Alert Mechanism Report (AMR)**.³²⁸ Consequently, the specific inclusion and classification of youth-related datapoints within this scoreboard determines the extent to which challenges facing the youth labour market are framed not just as a social concern, but as a systemic risk to economic stability.

³²³ European Parliament and Council of European Union, [Regulation \(EU\) 2024/1263 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2024 on the effective coordination of economic policies and on multilateral budgetary surveillance and repealing Council Regulation \(EC\) No 1466/97](#), April 2024.

³²⁴ European Commission, [Proposal for a Joint Employment Report from the Commission and the Council, COM\(2025\) 958 final](#), November 2025, p. 3.

³²⁵ Note: these include Bulgaria, Spain, Italy, Greece, Luxembourg, Lithuania, Finland, Romania, and Latvia.

³²⁶ Ibid., p. 5.

³²⁷ European Commission, [The Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure. Rationale, Process, Application: A Compendium](#), November 2016.

³²⁸ Ibid.

Recent **technical adjustments to the MIP scoreboard**, as detailed in the Commission Staff Working Document on the 2024 review of the procedure, reveal a shift in how youth employment is prioritised within this economic surveillance instrument.³²⁹ Notably, the **youth unemployment rate** has been reclassified: while previously elevated to a headline indicator in 2015 to better capture the social consequences of the financial crisis, the latest review has downgraded it to an **auxiliary indicator** as part of an effort to 'streamline' the employment and social indicators block.³³⁰ Conversely, the revision of the **NEET rate** (also an auxiliary indicator) within the MIP demonstrates stronger alignment with the specific objectives of the RYG.³³¹ This revision saw the definition of the NEET rate within the scoreboard expand from 15–24 years of age to 15–29, thereby mirroring the change adopted in the 2020 Council Recommendation establishing the RYG (as well as the Social Scoreboard).

Taken together, these technical adjustments may signal a **recalibration of the MIP's role** in the governance of the RYG. For instance, the alignment of the NEET age definition strengthens the level of coherence between the social and economic surveillance instruments of the EU (i.e., the Employment Guidelines, JER, and Social Scoreboard), ensuring that the structural exclusion of young adults is measured consistently across both the JER and MIP. However, the simultaneous downgrading of youth unemployment from a headline to an auxiliary indicator would also signal that the European Semester's core economic instability surveillance instrument (i.e. the MIP) **no longer views youth-specific challenges** as a potential **standalone driver of macroeconomic stability** that could independently trigger an alert. From a governance perspective, this shifts responsibility for driving RYG-specific policy action away from the macroeconomic alert mechanism and more heavily onto the social monitoring tools discussed in the previous section. This change, in turn, would appear to frame **youth employment largely as a challenge of social convergence**, rather than of macroeconomic systemic risk. While data on youth unemployment will continue to be monitored via the auxiliary indicator, its removal from the headline set means it no longer carries an indicative threshold and therefore cannot independently signal a potential imbalance during the initial phase of the **AMR** screening, making it less likely to trigger an in-depth review as a result.

5.3.3. Engagement through Country-Specific Recommendations

Existing literature on the European Commission's engagement in other policy domains highlights specific limitations regarding the effectiveness of the European Semester, notably the weak implementation of guidelines by Member States.³³² Against this background, this subsection assesses the effectiveness of the Commission's engagement with Member States on the RYG through the issuance of Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs).

³²⁹ European Commission, [Commission Staff Working Document on the changes in the scoreboard of the Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure](#), December 2024.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3

³³¹ *Ibid.*

³³² Darvas, Z., [Countries are still slow to follow European Union policy recommendations](#), July 2024; Efstathiou, K. And G. Wolff, [Is the European Semester effective and useful?](#), June 2018.

Country Specific Recommendations

While subsections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2 examined the various component parts of the economic and social monitoring tools that are used throughout the various phases of the European Semester, the **process culminates in the issuing of CSRs**. Member States, in turn, are expected to act upon these recommendations by incorporating them into reform plans and budgets for the following year. The CSRs address a broad range of policy areas, translating EU-level priorities into the national context through tailored guidance for the subsequent 12 to 18-month period.³³³

Timing of CSRs' release

Table 13 – YG- and RYG- specific CSRs

Member State	2013	2014
	YG CSR	YG CSR
Bulgaria	✓	✓
Croatia		✓
France	✓	
Hungary	✓	
Ireland		✓
Italy	✓	✓
Latvia	✓	
Lithuania	✓	
Poland	✓	✓
Portugal		✓
Romania	✓	
Slovakia	✓	✓
Spain	✓	✓
Sweden	✓	

In order to assess the nature and effectiveness of this engagement regarding the RYG, both the CSRs and Member State actions over the 2013–2024 period are analysed below, focusing on the following three dimensions: the **timing of CSRs**, the **policy responsiveness of Member States**, and the **sensitivity of CSRs to the actual conditions observed** in the Member States concerned. Each dimension is assessed for both the pre- and post-YG reinforcement periods.

An examination of the release timing of relevant CSRs (see Table 13) reveals that YG-related recommendations were issued **exclusively in 2013 and/or 2014**, corresponding with the initial launch of the original YG. Overall, YG-specific CSRs were issued to 11 Member States in 2013 and 8 in 2014, including 3 Member States that received their first YG-related CSR in the latter year.³³⁴ Additionally, some Member States received CSRs related to youth employment more broadly without explicit mention of the YG: Finland between 2013 and 2015, and Sweden in 2013.³³⁵

Source: European Commission, [Country-specific recommendations](#), n.d.

Notably, **no new YG-specific CSRs were issued following the reinforcement of the YG in 2020**. Only Italy received a youth employment-related CSR during this later period, in 2024.³³⁶ This suggests that the initial CSRs served as a signalling mechanism to propose an overarching framework but did not follow-up with further guidelines explicitly related to the reinforced YG.

³³³ Delivorias, A., & C. Scheinert, [Introduction to the European Semester: Coordinating and monitoring economic and fiscal policies in the EU](#), December 2019.

³³⁴ European Commission, [Country-specific recommendations database](#), n.d.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Ibid.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the 2020 reinforcement introduced several key changes to the YG: an expanded target age group (up to 29 years of age), greater emphasis on the quality of offers, and enhanced monitoring requirements. The absence of reinforced YG-specific CSRs is therefore noteworthy for two reasons. First, as highlighted earlier in this report, Member States implemented these reinforced elements inconsistently. Second, data from the YG Indicator Monitoring Framework showed that certain direct monitoring indicators fell short of the ambition of the 2020 Council Recommendation.

Accordingly, the concentrated engagement of the European Semester in 2013–2014, followed by the absence of further YG-specific CSRs during and after the 2020 reinforcement, suggests limited effectiveness of the Commission's engagement with Member States using this specific mechanism.

Follow-up actions by national authorities

Examining Member State actions in response to the CSRs received provides another means by which the effectiveness of the Semester's engagement can be assessed. Accordingly, examining national-level actions highlights a few cases of alignment with the relevant CSRs, suggesting that there is **some degree of responsiveness to Commission recommendations**. These cases include the following:

- Following its 2014 CSR, which called for a stronger focus on youth employment issues in line with the core aims of the 2013 YG, **Ireland** adapted its existing instruments, such as the employer incentive, 'JobsPlus',³³⁷ and launched the Youth Employment Support Scheme in 2018,³³⁸ later replaced by the Work Placement Experience Programme.^{339, 340}
- In a similar vein, following its 2013 and 2014 CSRs, **Poland** focused on activation offers and their quality, extending the scheme to all young people under 29 years old in 2015.³⁴¹
- In response to its 2014 youth employment-related CSR, **Finland** established a network of OSGCs providing low-threshold multidisciplinary guidance services for youth.³⁴²
- Following its 2013 YG-specific CSR, **Hungary** established a three-month hiring subsidy in 2015 to allow employers to assess young jobseekers' skills in practice.³⁴³ In 2019, Hungary also reformed its vocational training and education system to better align with labour market needs through increased partnerships with companies and curricula adaptation.³⁴⁴

³³⁷ Government of Ireland, [JobsPlus](#), August 2019.

³³⁸ Citizens Information, [Youth employment support scheme \(YESS\)](#), n.d.

³³⁹ Citizens Information, [Work placement experience programme](#), n.d.

³⁴⁰ European Commission, 2020, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 - Country fiche: Ireland](#), November 2024.

³⁴¹ European Commission, 2020, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 - Country fiche: Poland](#), November 2024.

³⁴² European Commission, [One-Stop-Shop Guidance Centres for young people \(Ohjaamo\)](#), April 2018.

³⁴³ OECD, [Youth employment subsidies – Multiple countries](#), 2024.

³⁴⁴ European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFPOP), [Vocational education and training in Hungary](#), October 2024.

These examples illustrate some degree of alignment between CSRs and subsequent national measures, suggesting that Member States consider and respond to Commission recommendations received from the European Semester. However, establishing direct causality is difficult. Several Member States had already implemented similar measures before the 2013 Council Recommendation establishing the YG, indicating that national policy developments were largely domestically driven rather than explicitly CSR-induced.³⁴⁵ Therefore, while the CSRs may have reinforced the existing direction of national policy developments, the evidence suggests that they have had a more **limited direct influence on Member States' actions**.

CSR issuance versus conditions on the ground

Focusing on the relationship between CSR issuance and the prevailing conditions in Member States, the findings reveal the **mixed effectiveness of the Commission's engagement via the European Semester**.

At the macro level, CSRs have generally distinguished between high-performing Member States and those facing evident youth employment challenges. Between 2013 and 2024, no YG-related CSRs were issued to countries with low youth unemployment rates. The **Netherlands** and **Germany**, for example, **did not receive any YG-specific CSRs** during the observed period, even in 2013 and 2014 when such CSRs were issued to most Member States.^{346, 347} The positive situation in these countries is reflected in their consistently low and stable NEET rates: in Germany, the rate stood at 8.7% and 8.8% in 2023, while in the Netherlands, it fell from 7.6% to 4.7% over the same period.³⁴⁸ Sweden represents an exception to this pattern: despite its consistently low NEET rate (ranging from 7.8% to 5.7% over the examined period),³⁴⁹ the country nonetheless received a YG-related CSR in 2013.

Conversely, CSRs were issued to Member States facing high levels of youth unemployment alongside NEET rates ranging from around 10% to over 25% over the 2013-2014 period (see Figure 9). While a general downward trend in NEET rates has been observed since then, coinciding with the discontinuation of YG-relevant CSRs after the initial phase, closer examination reveals a notable gap. In specific cases, there appears to be a relative disconnect between the issuance of CSRs and prevailing labour market conditions.

For example, Lithuania received a YG-specific CSR in 2013, despite its NEET rate of 14.1%, as compared to the EU average of 16.1%.³⁵⁰ While the national NEET rate steadily improved and

³⁴⁵ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), [Local Implementation of Youth Guarantees: Emerging Lessons From European Experiences](#), October 2014.

³⁴⁶ European Commission, [Country-specific recommendations database](#), n.d.

³⁴⁷ European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 - Country fiche: Netherlands](#), November 2024.

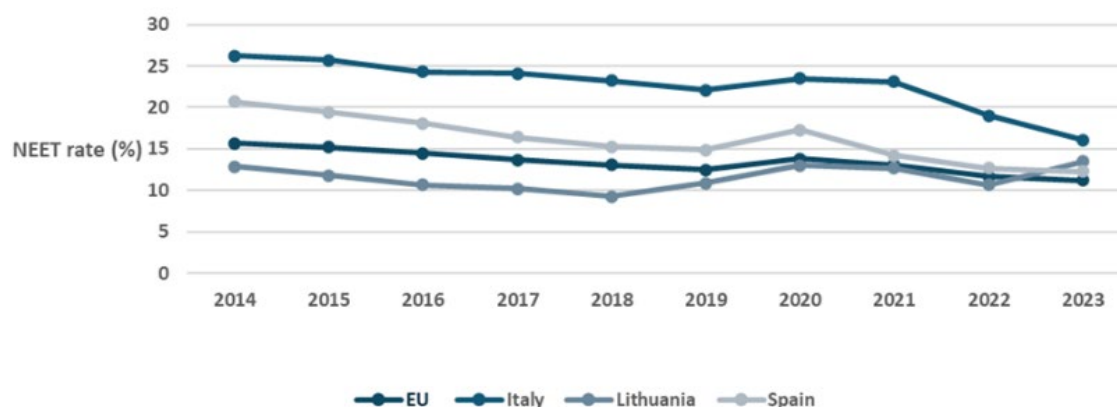
³⁴⁸ European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 - Country fiche: Germany](#), November 2024.

³⁴⁹ European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 - Country fiche: Sweden](#), November 2024.

³⁵⁰ European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 - Country fiche: Lithuania](#), November 2024.

remained significantly below the EU average, with nearly a 4-point difference in 2018, it increased sharply from its record low of 9.3% that year to 13% in 2020, and again to 13.5% in 2023, exceeding for the first time the EU average rate by over 2 points. Even so, this downward trend was not met with a new CSR in response.

Figure 8 – NEET rate evolution in discussed Member States relative to EU-27 NEET rate



Source: European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 – Country fiches: Lithuania, Italy and Spain](#), November 2024.

In the case of Italy, the NEET rate stood more than 10 percentage points above the EU average in 2014 (26.2% and 15.7% respectively), and persisted at high levels over the observed period.³⁵¹ Nevertheless, explicit guidance on the YG was absent from CSRs after 2014, with later CSRs in 2015 and 2019 referencing youth employment issues in more general terms.³⁵² Spain followed a similar trajectory, receiving YG-specific CSRs in 2013 and 2014, with some youth-related CSRs in later years as well.³⁵³ Although its NEET rate fell from 20.7% in 2014 to 12.3% in 2023, it remained consistently above the EU average.³⁵⁴ Furthermore, challenges in scheme implementation worsened, as the proportion of young people in the YG preparatory phase beyond the 4-month target in Spain increased by 20 points, from 40.2% in 2014 to 61.9% in 2023, remaining above the EU average (53.6% in 2023). Nonetheless, these challenging country-level conditions ultimately went unaddressed by the European Semester, with no YG-specific CSRs issued after the initial 2013–2014 period.

Overall, the European Semester's engagement on the YG as reflected in the **CSRs does not appear to be highly responsive to the conditions faced by Member States on the ground**. While the initial CSRs in 2013–14 distinguished between Member States facing significant youth employment-related issues versus those that were already faring well, subsequent engagement related to the YG has since waned considerably. As the above-described examples illustrate, the absence of further YG-specific CSRs despite limited or no improvement in outcomes reveals a lack of reactivity to the

³⁵¹ European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 – Country fiche: Italy](#), November 2024.

³⁵² European Commission, [Country-specific recommendations database](#), n.d.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ European Commission, [Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2023 – Country fiche: Spain](#), November 2024.

observed conditions in the Member States concerned. Beyond this finding, observations from the literature indicate that, even when issued, CSRs suffer from a lack of clarity, consistency, and sufficiently robust links between the recommendations and the economic analyses that underpin them.³⁵⁵

Taking into account the three elements examined in this section concerning the timing, responsiveness, and sensitivity of the CSRs issued reveals a clear **evolution in the Commission's engagement with Member States on the YG**. Engagement was most pronounced during the initial period, evidenced by the high concentration of YG-specific CSRs in 2013–2014 and subsequent national policy actions. This engagement then declined, with YG-specific CSRs discontinued after this implementation phase. According to the Commission, this shift is partly attributable to general improvements in NEET rates as well as the successful mainstreaming of the YG into national youth policy frameworks across the Member States following the 2013 Council Recommendation. Moreover, acknowledging that the European Semester considers the wider national context, the challenges facing NEETs have increasingly been addressed through CSRs targeting broader structural economic conditions.³⁵⁶

Even so, while recognising the inherent challenge in drawing causality between the responsiveness of national reforms to the CSRs issued, the observed discrepancies between CSRs issued and actual conditions in the Member States points to a certain **level of disconnect**. These findings suggest that CSR issuance is closely aligned with broader policy orientations at a given time rather than exclusively driven by country-specific conditions. The strong emphasis on social policy around 2014,³⁵⁷ followed by a focus on digital skills in 2020 and green skills in 2023,³⁵⁸ may therefore explain the concentration of YG-related CSRs at the start of the examined period.

5.4. Synergies with other national and EU level instruments

The RYG operates within the broader EU policy framework of instruments aimed at supporting young people and vulnerable groups. As a result, many of these related policies share both overlapping objectives and target segments of the population with the RYG. Roma youth aged 16–24 are one such example, who face a NEET rate of 63% compared to the EU average of just 12%, making them a key target group for both the **EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation** as well as the RYG.³⁵⁹ The same principle applies to other related policy instruments such as the **ALMA** (Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve) initiative³⁶⁰ and the **European Child**

³⁵⁵ Efstathiou, K. & Wolff, G., [Is the European Semester effective and useful?](#), June 2018.

³⁵⁶ Interview with DG EMPL, conducted on 26.06.2025.

³⁵⁷ Clauwaert, S., [The country-specific recommendations \(CSRs\) in the social field: An overview and comparison](#), October 2013.

³⁵⁸ Boeren, E., [Post-COVID-19 European Country-Specific Recommendations on adult education, training, and skills: Content, focus, shifts, and patterns](#), August 2024.

³⁵⁹ European Commission, [EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation for 2020–2030](#), October 2020.

³⁶⁰ European Commission, [ALMA](#), n.d.

Guarantee,³⁶¹ both of which aim to support populations that may also be the intended beneficiaries of the RYG. In view of these potential overlaps, the ability of the European Commission to ensure **effective coordination and synergy** between these complementary instruments is key to maximising their impact while minimising duplication of effort. Informed by consultations with EU level stakeholders and complemented by national research, this section examines the extent to which such synergies have been developed and leveraged at EU level, with Member State level examples serving to illustrate patterns in implementation.

Synergistic EU-level policy instruments

Considering its intended scope, the RYG has considerable **potential for interoperability with other EU instruments**. At EU level, several instruments have been identified as having strong synergy with the RYG. These include:

- **European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan.** Launched in 2021, the Action Plan establishes 20 key guiding principles and rights for a fair and well-functioning labour market in the EU,³⁶² many of which are relevant for the RYG.³⁶³ Specifically, the Plan recognises the role of the RYG in fostering labour market integration and quality employment. A 2020 ETUC report, published several months before the 2020 Council Recommendation, argued that an RYG *could* meaningfully contribute to the realisation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, ensuring that young people have adequate access to social protection, as the report noted this age group is often denied access to key social protection programmes.³⁶⁴
- **ALMA.** Adopted in 2022, ALMA supports disadvantaged NEETs aged 18–30 to access work or training. ALMA provides training, a supervised work-related learning experience abroad with mentoring services, and continued support upon return. The initiative covers various costs such as travel, insurance, social security, food and accommodation, as well coaching before, during and after the stay. ALMA provides additional support to a particularly vulnerable subgroup that is often targeted by the RYG.³⁶⁵
- **European Child Guarantee.** Adopted in 2021, the European Child Guarantee seeks to prevent and tackle social exclusion by ensuring effective access for children in need to key services: free early childhood education and care, free education, free healthcare, nutrition, and adequate housing.³⁶⁶
- **EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation.** This framework aims at tackling the discrimination and socio-economic exclusion faced by Roma people across the EU and enlargement countries by promoting equal access to education,

³⁶¹ European Commission, [European Child Guarantee](#), n.d.

³⁶² European Commission, [The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan](#), 2021.

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), [Resolution on Reinforced Youth Guarantee Revisited fight against youth unemployment](#), July 2020.

³⁶⁵ European Commission, [ALMA](#), n.d.

³⁶⁶ European Commission, [European Child Guarantee](#), n.d.

employment health and housing³⁶⁷. Given that Roma youth experience rates of early school leaving and NEET status well above the EU average, the RYG's effective implementation for this group requires strong links with the objectives and measures outlined in the Roma Strategic Framework.

In view of these complementary EU initiatives, **DG EMPL** notes that the Commission works to ensure the RYG operates in synergy with such instruments, which are designed to be mutually reinforcing with distinct targets and scope to prevent overlaps in implementation.³⁶⁸ Specifically, the Commission aims to **foster this coordination internally**, in part by inviting colleagues from other Directorates-General to recurring meetings that are held between DG EMPL and Member States' **national YG coordinators** to ensure they are informed as to relevant developments in the areas of skills and education. Beyond this meeting platform, representatives from DG EMPL also note that the Commission has made broad efforts to reach young people through its own communication channels, such as youth policy dialogues and campaigns via social media platforms, among others.³⁶⁹

Stakeholder perspectives on synergies between EU level instruments

Conversely, feedback from the EU-level stakeholders consulted for this study provided **considerably different assessments** of how well these EU policy synergies work in practice. While the 2020 ETUC resolution emphasised how a future RYG could potentially function in concert with, for example, the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Skills Agenda,³⁷⁰ the evidence gathered since the 2020 Council Recommendation reveals substantial variation in how such coordination is carried out in practice.

To start, BusinessEurope reports receiving **relatively positive feedback** from its members concerning the coordination of complementary initiatives at national level. Yet, it was also noted that from the perspective of EU-level forums such as the ESF+ Committee, it is not always clear as to whether discussions on coordination result in material action on the ground. Moreover, the organisation noted that **coordination with newer initiatives such as ALMA appears to be less developed** than the more well-established instruments.

The assessment provided by ETUC was notably more critical, however, expressing a view based on their members that the **coordination meetings cited by DG EMPL tend to function more as information sharing exercises** rather than platforms for meaningful, substantive coordination.³⁷¹ Despite these challenges, ETUC shared some positive developments in certain Member States, particularly Belgium and Sweden, noting that their implementing authorities are moving towards

³⁶⁷ European Commission, [EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation for 2020-2030](#), October 2020.

³⁶⁸ Interview with DG EMPL, conducted on 26.06.2025.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), [Resolution on Reinforced Youth Guarantee Revisited fight against youth unemployment](#), July 2020.

³⁷¹ Interview with ETUC, conducted on 22.07.2025.

integrated 'one-stop-shop' models that present the RYG as one option within a broader range of support.

The EYF highlighted a more fundamental concern related to the **lack of integration between the RYG and complementary policies**, namely in terms of implementation at the Member State level.³⁷² Elaborating further, the organisation emphasised that young people face multi-dimensional challenges that cannot be addressed through a single employment measure alone. These pressures can be observed in Romania and Czechia, for example, where young mothers represent a significant share of the NEET population, yet coordination between the YG and related care strategies remains limited. Even **beyond employment and social policies**, the case of Bulgaria and Romania was raised concerning the absence of adequate transport infrastructure and how it prevents young people in remote areas from accessing jobs or training opportunities, regardless of how well their employment services may function.

Taken together, these examples illustrate a **key gap**: while the policy framework may assume effective coordination across employment, social, care, and even transport policies, stakeholders report that such integration has yet to be consistently achieved at the Member State level in practice.

National-level implementation of synergies

As EU-level stakeholders have already pointed out, **there are mixed views as to the extent of effective coordination and synergising between the RYG and related instruments at EU level**. Such inconsistencies are also evident in terms of implementation at the Member State level, between national YG schemes and their complementary policy measures and frameworks. Concretely, the national research shows that the effectiveness of such synergies often depends on factors such as institutional capacity and coordination mechanisms across multiple levels of governance.

Cases from the national research find that **multi-level coordination structures** are key enablers of synergising measures in certain Member States. In **Spain**, beyond the coordination between national and regional governments, third-sector organisations, such as Cruz Roja and ONCE facilitate outreach, guidance, and registration of the YG scheme, with further evidence suggesting that improved data sharing between different entities has led to **better monitoring and decision-making**.³⁷³ Similarly, **Germany's** approach to coordination between its national YG scheme and other relevant instruments involves several different institutions and is supported by **multi-level data sharing between various levels of governance and implementation structures**.³⁷⁴ For example, most schools are allowed to transfer students' data to the entities involved in the provision of counselling services, which enhances early intervention. The recently established Service Centre for Youth Employment Agencies at the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training serves as a central coordination centre for 365 youth employment agencies across the country, thus

³⁷² Interview with European Youth Forum, conducted on 03.07.2025.

³⁷³ Interview with Spain's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted 04.08.2025.

³⁷⁴ Written input from Germany's Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, received on 29.08.2025.

supporting information and best practices exchange. Moreover, given Germany's decentralised institutional structure, the school-to-work transition involves both federal and Länder competencies, necessitating strong coordination through mechanisms such as the Education Chains Initiative, which brings together the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the Länder and the Federal Employment Agency.

However, as demonstrated by other national examples, the effectiveness of coordination between the YG scheme and complementary instruments largely depends on the underlying institutional structure of the relevant Member State concerned. While there are synergies between the national YG scheme and other programmes for vulnerable populations in **Hungary**, their effective coordination depends on local implementation.³⁷⁵ For instance, the NGO-run 'Catching-up settlements' (FETE) programme, which focuses on the 240 most disadvantaged municipalities with large shares of Roma settlements, provides integrated social services.³⁷⁶ However, their employment offers are limited and not standardised, while their connections to Hungarian PES are not explicitly regulated. Even in **Germany**, the quality of coordination varies across the Länder, with highly connected areas characterised as having integrated support, tailored engagement channels with vulnerable populations and clear administrative processes, while other regions lag behind.³⁷⁷ Yet no explicit policies for outreach or support for vulnerable groups linked to synergies with other instruments can be observed in **the Netherlands**, as YG-related implementation is left to the discretion of municipalities, resulting in a lack of national coordination entirely.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁵ Interview with Hungary's national Youth Guarantee coordinator, conducted on 30.07.2025.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Written input from Germany's Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, received on 29.08.2025.

³⁷⁸ Interview with the Netherlands' national Youth Guarantee Coordinator, conducted on 28.07.2025.

6. Conclusions and policy recommendations

Key findings

- Member State trends in implementation of the RYG show considerable diversity, with a notable imbalance in favour of employment-first approaches (i.e., the Netherlands, Bulgaria) over training-focused systems (i.e., Germany, Italy), and their governance structures varying from decentralised municipal delivery to more centralised national coordination.
- The 2020 reinforcement addressed several structural weaknesses through the ESF+ thematic concentration, aligning quality standards with EU frameworks, and an updated monitoring system. However, a persistent gap remains between the RYG's policy ambitions and implementation, notably in terms of offer quality, outreach, and monitoring.
- Funding levels appear to be adequate and accessible, though challenges relate primarily to administrative capacity and interinstitutional coordination. The YG Indicator Monitoring Framework still faces data quality issues, while the European Semester's engagement with Member States on the YG has declined considerably since 2014, despite persisting challenges in implementation.
- Four policy recommendations are proposed: 1) strengthening the administrative capacity of authorities responsible for YG implementation to improve service delivery; 2) developing more localised or community-driven outreach infrastructure to reach inactive NEETs and vulnerable groups; 3) shifting the emphasis towards skills development by reducing dependence on direct employment and wage subsidies in favour of continued education, traineeships and apprenticeships ; and 4) improving monitoring and addressing data quality issues by sharing best practices.

This final chapter summarises the study's key findings and presents evidence-based policy recommendations to improve the implementation of the RYG. The analysis underlying these recommendations is based on extensive research conducted across ten Member States, consultations with EU-level stakeholders, surveys of Managing Authorities, and a thorough review of policy documents and evaluative reports covering over a decade of YG implementation. The chapter is structured into two parts. **Section 6.1** starts by presenting the **main conclusions**, organised across the three main analytical chapters of the study: (1) Member State implementation trends, (2) the impact of the 2020 reinforcement, and (3) EU funding and governance mechanisms. Next, **Section 6.2** then translates these findings into **policy recommendations** for consideration of the European Parliament.

6.1. Main conclusions

6.1.1. On Member State implementation trends

Examining the institutional arrangements and implementation models adopted by Member States since the 2020 Council Recommendation reveals that **no single uniform approach has been taken**. Instead, approaches to implementation range widely even among the selected 10 Member States, from full policy mainstreaming within existing systems (as in Italy, the Netherlands and Finland) to the creation of distinct, branded national models (as in Ireland). Furthermore, national

YG scheme delivery models cluster around two main poles, with a notable imbalance in favour of employment-first approaches (i.e., the Netherlands, Bulgaria) over training-focused systems (i.e., Germany, Italy), with the governance structures of such schemes varying from decentralised municipal delivery to more centralised national coordination.

The **structured, four-phase implementation approach (Mapping, Outreach, Preparation and Offer) was central to the 2020 reinforcement**. However, its **adoption has been uneven** among the examined Member States, which are ultimately heavily shaped by the national and institutional contexts in which they operate. Some of the approaches to mapping identified include school-based early warning systems and more robust data-sharing platforms. However, the comprehensive mapping of key support services as per the 2020 Council Recommendation appears to be limited across the Member States examined. The next phase, outreach, particularly to inactive and vulnerable NEETs, continues to face challenges. There is a systemic 'creaming effect', whereby national YG schemes primarily benefit young people who are already closer to the labour market. This is partly due to structural factors, such as PES registration systems, and insufficient capacity for national YG implementers to engage in proactive, community-based outreach.

Assessing the **effectiveness of the RYG using the Indicator Monitoring Framework** highlights **key gaps between the improving macroeconomic context and the direct performance of the national schemes themselves**. While NEET rates reached their lowest recorded level of 11.1% in 2024, over half of participants waited beyond the four-month target and coverage remained below 50% of the NEET population in many Member States. Equity concerns persist, both in terms of the ability of RYG schemes to reach vulnerable subgroups and to serve rural and remote areas, with structural barriers often limiting engagement.

Despite the **RYG's intended focus on delivering timely offers**, analysis of the offer phase reveals that, **in 2023, 53.6% of young people registered in a YG scheme in the EU had not yet taken up an offer after exceeding the four-month target**, with particularly weak performance in Italy (86.1%), Ireland (78.8%), and the Netherlands (73.2%). The quality of offers has also been identified as a persistent challenge, even after the 2020 reinforcement, and was a widespread criticism of the original YG. The provision of post-placement support also appears to be underdeveloped among the selected Member States, and follow-up data is often lacking to assess whether the scheme is achieving long-term, sustainable labour market outcomes.

6.1.2. On the impact of the RYG

Although the 2020 Council Recommendation addressed structural weaknesses documented by previous evaluative reports, **the study reveals a persistent gap between the RYG's policy ambitions and its practical realisation**. The reinforcement formally addressed ECA critiques through the ESF+ thematic concentration, quality standards aligned with EU frameworks and updated monitoring via the YG Indicator Monitoring Framework, yet stakeholder feedback suggests that these improvements have not resolved the underlying challenges facing implementation.

EU-level stakeholders have **mixed views on the current state of RYG funding**. For example, the EYF claims that the total amount of funding is still insufficient, whereas BusinessEurope notes that the challenge has shifted towards effective absorption and implementation. Despite clearer

definitions, stakeholders report little material improvement in offer quality. Although the monitoring framework has improved, significant data gaps in national reporting remain. The 2023 EMCO review findings remain largely valid in 2025. Persistent difficulties in outreach and a shift towards generalised services in some Member States, despite formal commitments to individualisation in others, suggest inconsistent implementation across the EU-27. Scheme coverage rates remain low in several Member States, with Bulgaria recording the lowest figure at 14.3%, while follow-up data quality also suffers due to high proportions of unknown outcomes.

Analysis of the specific reinforced elements reveals an uneven impact on implementation. Expanding the age range to 15–29 produced different outcomes among the observed Member States, with participation in Ireland nearly doubling, while the Netherlands has not implemented it at all. There is limited documented implementation of the mapping requirement as well. Furthermore, while the RYG places emphasis on individualised approaches, evidence from the Member States highlights a significant gap between the intention of the policy and its outcomes in practice. Although the RYG's emphasis on improving skills has stimulated national investment in certain cases, the overall impact remains limited. For example, Ireland's continued education offerings accounted for just 0.4% of exits in 2023 despite significant investment. Finally, the inclusion components of the RYG have prompted targeted measures in some of the observed Member States, yet fundamental structural barriers to implementation persist.

6.1.3. On EU funding and governance

The use of **EU funding instruments has evolved** over the last two programming periods, shifting from a combination of the YEI and ESF as key funds over the 2014–2020 period to reliance on the ESF+ for 2021–2027. According to the Managing Authorities (MA) of RYG-relevant operational programmes (OPs), **funding appears to be relatively adequate and accessible**. Relevant challenges identified relate to weak administrative capacity, uneven coordination and unclear guidance.

National co-financing has increased in both absolute and relative terms, though with some variations across Member States. National approaches vary significantly, with some embedding RYG-linked interventions into domestic systems or funds, while others have developed comprehensive plans following the launch of the NextGenerationEU. Consequently, the uptake of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) to support the RYG is mixed. While some Member States link RRF funds to targeted interventions, others utilise them to finance broader plans or interventions.

The impact of merging the YEI into the ESF+ has yielded mixed but largely positive feedback. A key improvement is the greater flexibility in implementation. Additionally, the concomitant extension of the age range of the target population thanks to the RYG is identified as another improvement. However, several challenges are identified as well, such as the complexity of national administrative rules, frequent reporting, and the limited visibility of YG-specific expenditure.

Finally, **the monitoring framework suffers from data quality and completeness issues**, with high rates of 'unknown' outcomes and inconsistent data collection rendering the analysis of trends and cross-country comparisons difficult. Furthermore, **governance** via the **European Semester** heavily

utilises social monitoring tools, such as the Social Scoreboard and Joint Employment Report, to track RYG objectives, while the Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure has recalibrated its focus by downgrading youth unemployment to an auxiliary indicator. At the same time, direct political engagement through **the Semester shows declining responsiveness**: Despite some CSRs following the adoption of the RYG in 2020, YG-specific CSRs were largely confined to the 2013–2014 period, with limited correlation between CSR issuance and prevailing conditions in the Member States concerned suggesting limited sensitivity to actual outcomes, supporting the interpretation that the European Semester functions primarily as a politically driven instrument.

6.2. Policy recommendations

Informed by the analyses presented throughout this report, **four key policy recommendations are proposed** with the aim of strengthening implementation of the RYG and addressing the persistent gaps between its policy ambitions and the operational realities on the ground.

6.2.1. Recommendation 1) Strengthen administrative capacity for effective service delivery

The study finds that while funding is largely adequate and available, the **capacity and skills of the authorities responsible for implementing** national YG schemes are a key constraint on effective service delivery. This aligns with the key conclusions reached in chapter 5 that funding adequacy overall is no longer a primary concern, yet significant operational challenges persist. Results from the MA survey highlight burdensome reporting and application procedures, as well as limited beneficiary capacity as key barriers. At the same time, weak interinstitutional coordination between ministries, MAs, and PES results in inconsistent guidance and fragmented implementation. Furthermore, the PES often lack sufficient human resources and pedagogical capacity to deliver the individualised support that is intended by the 2020 reinforcement but remains lacking. In response, this challenge calls for a two-pronged approach:

At **EU level**, the Commission should **emphasise implementation capacity** as a priority through the European Semester, using the CSRs to issue high-level messaging that urges national governments to strengthen YG delivery capacity. In parallel, the Commission should support the dissemination of good practice by developing guidance drawing on successful models, such as Germany's coordinated youth employment agencies and Ireland's statistical profiling tools, among others. This guidance could be delivered via Commission-provided technical assistance and in DG EMPL-national YG coordinator meetings.

At **Member State level**, national governments should **strengthen interinstitutional coordination** between ministries and PES. In parallel, Member States should aim to invest in specialised staff recruitment and training for individualised case management, including profiling tools, tailored action planning, and counselling for complex cases. Adequate staffing levels should enable meaningful one-on-one engagement rather than the generalised services identified as a persistent concern.

6.2.2. Recommendation 2) Establish decentralised outreach infrastructure to reach inactive NEETs and vulnerable groups

In line with the challenges identified in past evaluative (ECA and EMCO) reports, this study finds that **many YG schemes still struggle in accessing hard-to-reach NEETs**, particularly vulnerable subgroups (e.g., Roma communities, migrants). Perpetuated in part by the finding that schemes predominantly benefit those already closer to the labour market, this exclusion is structural, rooted in dependency on traditional PES registration systems. This is characterised by the EYF as 'one of the biggest issues' facing the RYG, while BusinessEurope acknowledged that engaging the most vulnerable remains a significant challenge due to **varying PES capacity for proactive, community-based outreach**.

It is therefore **recommended that Member States shift from exclusive reliance on registration-based systems** toward proactive, more decentralised outreach infrastructure positioning services where young people are. Successful models include Finland's 80+ OSGCs offering low-threshold, multi-agency services, Germany's 365 youth employment agencies coordinating local services with data-sharing between relevant supportive entities, the Netherlands' municipally-led approach to better tailor local responses, and Sweden's school-based, also municipal, approach.

Informed by these best practices, Member States should **invest in establishing or expanding similar decentralised infrastructure** appropriate to their own institutional contexts, with explicit attention to barriers facing vulnerable NEET subgroups. This will require **formal partnerships or agreements** between complementary services: PES, social services, educational institutions, and local organisations, in addition to the establishment of coordination frameworks to define clear roles and information-sharing rules. To better engage vulnerable NEET subgroups, resources for dedicated community outreach to such groups (i.e., Roma, migrants) are key.

6.2.3. Recommendation 3) Rebalance Youth Guarantee pathways toward quality skills development

The study finds that **national YG schemes often over-emphasise direct employment placements and wage subsidies** at the expense of the remaining core objective of the RYG: education, apprenticeship, and training pathways. In Ireland, despite significant policy commitments to upskilling and considerable investment, direct employment accounted for 88.6% of exits and 11.0% of apprenticeships, while continued education represented only 0.4% of timely and positive exits in 2023. This raises fundamental questions about long term sustainability, as stakeholders consistently question whether wage subsidies create genuine employment or temporary, subsidy-dependent positions, while ETUC noted traineeships often have poorly designed learning objectives.

In response, Member States **should restructure their national YG schemes to reduce their dependence on direct employment placements and wage subsidies** as the primary funding model and default pathway. Instead, these should be positioned as one component within a more diversified portfolio balanced against the acquisition of relevant traineeships, apprenticeships and continued educational offerings. When wage subsidies are used, they should be redesigned to lead to more sustainable employment. This could be achieved by, for example, making funds conditional

on longer contracts or requirements for on-the-job training. Furthermore, to address persistent concerns regarding the quality of offers generated by YG schemes, Member States should rigorously apply quality frameworks for traineeships and apprenticeships, ensuring they contain defined learning objectives. Complementing these national efforts, the **Commission should enforce funding conditionality**, making the use of EU funds that are allocated to youth employment related measures (specifically under IF 136 of the ESF+) contingent upon Member States demonstrating alignment with the Quality Framework for Traineeships and the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships.

6.2.4. Recommendation 4) Strengthen monitoring systems and address critical data quality gaps

In line with previous critiques, this study finds that a number of **key gaps in monitoring and data quality undermine the ability to assess the effectiveness of the RYG**, and more specifically, whether it achieves sustainable labour market integration over the long term. This assessment is hindered by several Member States reporting high shares of 'unknown' programme outcomes, which makes it impossible to determine whether the RYG's intended long-term aim was achieved. Inconsistencies in national data reporting are another key challenge, as Germany, Finland and the Netherlands do not consistently provide follow-up data, which means that substantial YG activity cannot be systematically evaluated for long-term effectiveness.

To better address these longstanding issues, the **Commission should provide targeted technical assistance to Member States with data quality challenges**, focusing on support for linking administrative datasets across systems (PES, social security, education authorities). Enabling this interoperability is key to reducing the rate of 'unknown' outcomes, as it allows public authorities to track better track beneficiaries who have exited the PES register but may have entered education or employment recorded in other state databases, particularly for more localised, community-driven approaches (i.e., the Netherlands, Germany).

In parallel, **best practices on monitoring beyond scheme exits could be shared** to reduce the proportion of unknown outcomes. Accordingly, DG EMPL-national YG coordinator meetings could serve as the primary forum for such knowledge exchange on monitoring and data quality. More specifically, national YG coordinators from Member States with high-quality data should present detailed explanations of how their systems work, while those experiencing difficulties should openly discuss obstacles to enable peer support and identify where technical assistance from the Commission would be valuable.

7. Annex: Supplementary information

Table 14 – Proposed EU Member State selection criteria and justification

Member State	Selection criteria met	Justification
ES	YU 1 (highest rate); YU 3 (substantial improvement); and GDP B (moderate growth).	Exhibits the second-highest YU rate (26.2%, January 2025) despite a significant reduction (-29.4 pp since April 2013), alongside moderate GDP growth (+19.3%). Allows analysis of persistent structural challenges limiting RYG impact despite progress from a high baseline.
SE	YU 1 (highest rate); YU 4 (worsening trend); and GDP B (moderate growth).	Recorded the highest YU rate (26.6%, January 2025) and a worsening trend (+3.2 pp since April 2013), despite moderate GDP growth (+10.1%). Key for understanding factors counteracting economic trends or hindering RYG effectiveness.
DE	YU 2 (lowest rate); and GDP C (low growth).	Consistently lowest YU rate (6.8%, January 2025), slightly improved (-1.4 pp) alongside low GDP growth (+7.5%). Provides a benchmark for successful youth employment systems effective even without strong macroeconomic tailwinds.
NL	YU 2 (lowest rate); and GDP B (moderate growth).	Second-lowest YU rate (8.9%, January 2025) with moderate reduction (-4.9 pp since 2013) and moderate GDP growth (+15.0%). Offers another best-performing context for comparison, exploring different successful pathways balancing policy and economic factors.
BG	YU 3 (substantial improvement); and GDP A (high growth).	Substantial YU reduction (-22.6 pp) from a high baseline (32.3% in 2013) to 9.7% (January 2025), coupled with high GDP growth (+49.1%). Key Eastern European case for analysing the interplay of economic convergence and RYG in driving down high YU rates.
IT	YU 3 (substantial improvement); and GDP B (moderate growth).	Significant YU reduction (-18.8 pp) from 39.5% (April 2013) to 20.7% (January 2025) within a moderate GDP growth context (+13.7%). Valuable for examining RYG effectiveness during economic recovery, particularly given its large baseline of unemployed young people.
PL	YU 3 (substantial improvement); and GDP A (high growth).	Significant YU reduction (-15.8 pp since 2013) resulting in a rate below EU average (11.8%, January 2025), coinciding with very high GDP growth (+50.7%). Key for understanding how rapid economic convergence interacts with targeted youth policies like the RYG.
FI	YU 4 (minimal improvement); and GDP C (low growth).	Minimal YU improvement (-1.2 pp) between April 2013 (20.8%) and January 2025 (19.6%), alongside low/stagnant GDP growth (+5.5%). Allows study of persistent challenges in a context of limited economic dynamism, highlighting potential RYG framework weaknesses or specific barriers.

Member State	Selection criteria met	Justification
HU	YU 3 (substantial improvement); and GDP A (high growth).	Substantial YU reduction (-11.9 pp since April 2013) to 13.7% (January 2025), accompanied by high GDP growth (+40.9%). Provides another key Eastern European perspective for comparison in terms of macroeconomic growth and youth employment outcomes.
IE	YU 3 (substantial improvement); and GDP A (high growth).	Significant YU decrease (-16.5 pp since April 2013) to 11.4% (January 2025), alongside exceptionally high GDP growth (+97.4%). Offers a unique case to explore the impact of extremely strong economic performance and the relative role of policies like the RYG.

Note: YU = Youth Unemployment Rate (15-24); GDP = Real GDP per capita growth (2013-2024); YU data references 2013 and 2025 unless stated otherwise.

Sources: Eurostat, [Unemployment by sex and age – monthly data \[une_rt_m\]](#), November 2025; Eurostat, [Real GDP per capita \[sdg_08_10\]](#), October 2025.

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This European implementation assessment of the 2020 Council Recommendation on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee (the 'reinforced Youth Guarantee' or 'RYG') aims to inform the ongoing work of the European Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) on an own-initiative implementation report on the RYG (2025/2184(INI)).

The assessment is composed of two parts. The first part is an introduction by the European Parliamentary Research Service that provides the essential historical background, including an overview of selected evaluations, Parliament's position and a complementary analysis on young people not in education, employment or training. The second part is an evaluation study undertaken by a team of external experts that aims to provide an updated assessment of the RYG's implementation. It is guided by three core objectives: (i) to assess current trends in implementation at Member State level; (ii) to analyse the impact of the 2020 reinforcement in addressing previously identified challenges; and (iii) to examine the role of EU funding and governance mechanisms. Based on interviews, a survey, desk research, and extended national research in 10 selected Member States, the study provides key findings and policy recommendations to tackle the implementation gaps identified.

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