

# Employment and Employment Services for Rural NEETs: Initiatives for tackling NEETs' and rural NEETs' employment issues

Report elaborated by Working Group 3 (WG3):

Employment & employment services in rural areas



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From 2012 and 2021, there has been a notably positive trend in school to work transitions across EU countries. For instance, rates of early school departure from education and training have declined by 2.9 percentage points between 2012 and 2021. In some countries, such as Portugal or France, the reduction of the numbers has even reached into double digits. Beyond this, tertiary education attainment of those aged 30–34 has increased by 7.1 percentage points. Likewise, youth unemployment has dropped 7.8 percentage points, whilst NEET rates have also decreased by 2.9 percentage points. This promising evolution of several indicators of the school to work transition was, however, interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. This was especially true between 2020 and 2021, with Southern, Eastern and Baltic countries displaying a slower recovery to pre-pandemic levels. The major justification for this development is the combination of a favorable economic environment, thereby leading to an increase of job offers with the implementation of the Youth Guarantee being adopted by the different EU member states in order to tackle NEET rates.

Sadly, this optimistic scenario does not operate evenly across the continent. Non-EU countries continue to struggle with very significant NEET rates. Moreover, Northern and Central European countries fared much better than Southern and Eastern countries in reducing NEETs numbers. Furthermore, sub-national NEET rates vis-à-vis national disparities continue to be very significant in Southern and Eastern countries. Overall, in these countries remote and predominantly rural areas tend to display a higher proportion of NEETs. This represents a remarkable challenge for the viability of already vulnerable territories which are struggling with shrinking demographics and declining economies.

Finding ways to promote NEETs' social inclusion is, therefore, a building block of restoring rural communities' sustainability in the long term. The COST Action Rural NEET Youth Network (RNYN) brings together multiple stakeholders, from researchers to policymakers and non-governmental organizations with the intention of informing research policies and programs that can ultimately promote rural NEETs' social inclusion. As part of that vision, RNYN is now delivering a series of four reports which collate promising practices, programs, and case studies. Our reports cover four topics traversing RNYN's thematic working groups: social inclusion; formal and non-formal education; employment and employment services; and, rural development. Altogether, we hope that these multiple angles of analysis will inspire further research or collaboration between institutions and people interested in moving forward rural NEETs, but also rural youth in general.

These reports were only made been possible with curiosity, research, and the commitment of dozens of RNYN members. However, we would not have fully fulfilled this challenging goal of our Action Plan without the outstanding co-ordination of the following persons: Maria Fernandes-Jesus; Tatiana Ferreira; Paul Flynn; Heidi Paabort; Claudia Petrescu; Òscar Prieto-Flores; Alen Mujčinović; Štefan Bojnec; and finally, our working groups leaders and vice-leaders. As the RNYN Chair, I cannot thank them enough for making this possible.

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## 1. CONTEXTUALISATION

This report is based upon findings from Working Group 3 Employment & Employment Services in Rural Areas of the COST Action CA18213 “Rural NEET Youth Network: Modeling the Risks Underlying Rural NEETs’ Social Exclusion”. Case studies covering a number of countries are considered: Montenegro; Poland; Romania; and, Lithuania as well as a critical comparison of three countries, i.e., Poland, Italy, and Romania. The cases presented in this report highlight a number of issues related to rural NEET youth employability in the aforementioned countries.

The Reinforced Youth Guarantee scheme, applied in EU Member States from 2021 onwards, provides an opportunity for all young people under 30 years of age to access employment, education, or an apprenticeship or traineeship within four months of either leaving education or becoming newly unemployed. The (Reinforced) Youth Guarantee Program was strengthened in order to effect a more comprehensive response and thereby mitigate the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee replaced the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee 2020/C 372/01, in that it included the demographic of those aged 25–29 who would now also be entitled to be supported in their transition from education to work. More specifically, they would be set to receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, or an apprenticeship or traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education.

All EU countries have committed themselves to the implementation of the Reinforced Youth Guarantee scheme, which steps up the comprehensive job support available to young people across the European Union, including the newly expanded demographic. Several EU countries have updated, or are developing, new youth strategies/policies in order to reflect the requirements of the Reinforced Youth Guarantee. The Youth Guarantee has created opportunities for young people and acted as a powerful driver for structural reforms and innovation. Consequently, the majority of public employment services (PES) have improved and expanded their services for young people.



Many European countries have large numbers of young people not in education, employment, or training (i.e., NEETs). Eurofound (2021) emphasised the following NEET risk factors: health restrictions; migration background; low level of education; young people living in low income households; adolescents whose parents were unemployed; adolescents whose parents have a low level of education; adolescents with divorced parents; and, living in rural areas. During periods of socio-economic crisis, NEET numbers tend to grow considerably; moreover, NEETs are less likely to return to the labour market after an economic recession has ceased.

Immediately prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019, there were approximately 1.7 million fewer young people neither in employment nor in education or training (NEETs) across the EU than seven years previously. According to the Eurostat, 17.2% of youths in EU 27 aged 25–29 were NEETs in 2019. The incidence of NEETs is much higher in rural areas than compared to urban areas. Several international studies indicate that place of origin is one of the key factors which differentiates the trajectories of NEETs and that negative outcomes in this regard are more likely vis-à-vis rural areas. Young people living in remote areas have a 1.5 times higher NEET risk than those living in medium-sized cities. According to the Eurostat (2019), in 17 EU Member states NEET rates were higher in rural (18.3%) than urban areas (15.1%). This difference was more pronounced in Eastern (e.g., Bulgaria, Romania, and Lithuania) and Southern European countries (e.g., Greece). NEET rates tend to remain low for the 15–19 age group, given that most of this population is still enrolled in education. However, NEET rates increase steadily for each age group, so that those aged 25–29 years are the most affected. In 2020, the proportion of NEET youth group to 18.6% for the age group 25–29 years. According to Eurostat, the proportion of 15–29-year-olds in the EU neither in employment nor in education and training in 2021 ranged from 5.5 % in the Netherlands to 23.1 % in Italy. For the age group of the EU-level target demographic, the share of NEETs was 13.1 % in 2021, for those aged 15–19 – 6.8 %, 14.8 % for those aged 20–24 and 17.3 % for those aged 25–29.

This report includes five case studies highlighting various interventions at the national level, aiming to stimulate NEET employment. The first concerns Montenegro and provides an overview of its NEET situation as well as an analysis of the policies aimed at increasing their employability. The second case study – from Poland – presents the labour market situation of unemployed youth with disabilities who participated in job activation programmes between 2020–2021. It examines working status, job stability



ty, and job satisfaction six months after participation in the programme. The authors compare young people with older age groups, as well as rural residents with their urban counterparts. The third case comparatively examines job search channels that young jobless people use in Italy, Poland, and Romania. Public employment services are more frequently used in Poland than in Romania and Italy, and more than half of young people in all countries search for a job directly through an employer.

The final two case studies discuss implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Romania and Lithuania. The Romanian case study presents the main evidence used in the development of the Reinforced Youth Guarantee and highlights the link between evidence related to NEETs and dysfunctions of the public employment system as well as policy measures proposed in the Reinforced Youth Guarantee vis-à-vis Romania. The case of Lithuania analyses the role of the Youth Guarantee Initiative for a successful rural NEET youth transition from school to work in Lithuania: it offers a brief analysis of Reinforced Youth Guarantee projects currently being implemented within Lithuania.

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## 2. METHODOLOGY

The case studies included in this report present various interventions utilised to support/stimulate or increase the employment of NEETs. The interventions presented include: public policies to stimulate the employment of NEETs – such as the Youth Guarantee Initiative (in Lithuania); the Reinforced Youth Guarantee (in Romania); other policies aimed to increase the employability of NEETs (in Montenegro); job search channels that young jobless people use (in Italy, Poland, and Romania); and, job activation programs for young people with disabilities (in Poland).

In mapping these interventions, Working Group 3 members began with some priority criteria, as outlined in the Manual for the Methodological Best-Practices in Research Dedicated to Rural NEETs (Petrescu et al., 2020). These were: 1) Interventions to address NEET or marginalised youth employment issues; 2) Diversity of types of interventions (i.e., policies, programs, projects); 3) Interdisciplinary orientation of the intervention; 4) Interventions which include rural NEETs; 5) and, focus on employment as one of the COST Action CA18213 project priorities. Each of these priority criteria were discussed with the Working Group 3 members during the WG meetings.

Considering the methodology for intervention mapping and assessment proposed in the Manual for the Methodological Best-Practices in Research Dedicated to Rural NEETs (Petrescu et al., 2020), the WG3 members analysed the policies, programs or tools for youth employment based on at least two of the following criteria: target population – NEETs, rural NEETs or marginalised youth; relevance of the policy/ program/measure for the NEETs or rural NEETs; replicability and scale-up capacity; and, the impact on the NEETs' or rural NEETs' employment.

The proposed research methodologies of the case studies includes a mixed method approach incorporating: 1) secondary data analysis on NEETs and NEET employment from EUROSTAT, European Labour Force Survey, surveys with persons with disabilities who entered the labour market after participating in a countrywide NGO's job activation programmes, and national institutes of statistics; 2) social document analysis – European Commission reports on Youth Guarantee, reports on the implementation of various policies/programs; 3) and, public policy document analysis – Youth Guarantee



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RURAL NEET YOUTH

Employment and Employment Services  
for Rural NEETs: Initiatives for tackling  
NEETs' and rural NEETs' employment  
issues

Initiative, Reinforced Youth Guarantee, National Strategies for Employment, European Commission recommendations, national policies for NEETs. Each case study details the relevant methodology used.

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### 3. CASE STUDIES

## Opportunities for NEET employment in Montenegro: policy analysis

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### Abstract

Youth unemployment is one of the most significant challenges facing the labour market in Montenegro. During previous years, their labour market demographic has significantly worsened. In 2021, the youth unemployment rate increased to 32.5% and the participation of NEETs was at 26.5% (15–29). The impact of the pandemic in relation to the significant decline in economic activity was reflected in the labour market in the form of reduced employment and loss of jobs, especially in sectors and for those jobs covered by young people. Various projects and research have been carried out in order to analyse the position of NEETs and provide a quality basis for defining policies and programs to improve both their position and inclusion in the labour market. Hence, policies have been formulated in order to increase the employability of young people. However, there are no programs designed specifically for the NEET population, yet this group of young people is included in programs that refer specifically to young people, or to the general population. Certainly, it is of great importance to evaluate the effects of these programs and policies, as well as consider redesigning existing ones or, indeed, creating new programs aimed at tackling the problem of youth unemployment. This report provides an overview of the NEET situation in Montenegro, as well as an analysis of policies aimed at increasing the employability of NEETs.

### Relevant Keywords:

Youth unemployment, NEET, Montenegro, policy analysis



## Introduction

The problem of unemployment in Montenegro is one of the significant challenges of the labour market. During the previous two years, the situation in the labour market has significantly worsened due to the deleterious impact of the pandemic on economic trends in general, as well as the reduction of real GDP growth. In turn, this was reflected in the reduction of the number of employees. Young people were the primary group exposed to the risk of unemployment. Firstly, the problem of the transition from the education system to the labour market is more pronounced; moreover, the types of jobs available, which consist largely of less secure, less well-paid, and often high-contact secondary jobs, which have been most affected by the crisis, exacerbates the situation of young people in the labour market (ILO, 2020). Although the economy has been recovering for both the current and previous year, and despite the labour market, showing more favourable trends, it seems that young people are experiencing this recovery in the slowest manner. A special category of young people, which is insufficiently recognised in policies, strategies, and employment programs, is the “NEET” category. Analysing the current state of the labour market and the position of young people therein, a special challenge exists in terms of employing the NEET population.

Therefore, the aim of this report is to review and analyse the current state and position of the NEET population in Montenegro, and provide an analysis of policies and programs, which are directly or indirectly aimed at the employment of the NEET population. Namely, their more efficient and high-quality inclusion in the labour market. The implementation of strategies, programs, and policies at the national and local level, are key elements of this case and therefore the subject of this analysis.

In the first section, a quantitative analysis of data is given in order to assess the current state of the NEET population in Montenegro. The second part presents an analysis of employment policies and programs implemented in Montenegro, as well as the potential inclusion of NEETs in these programs.

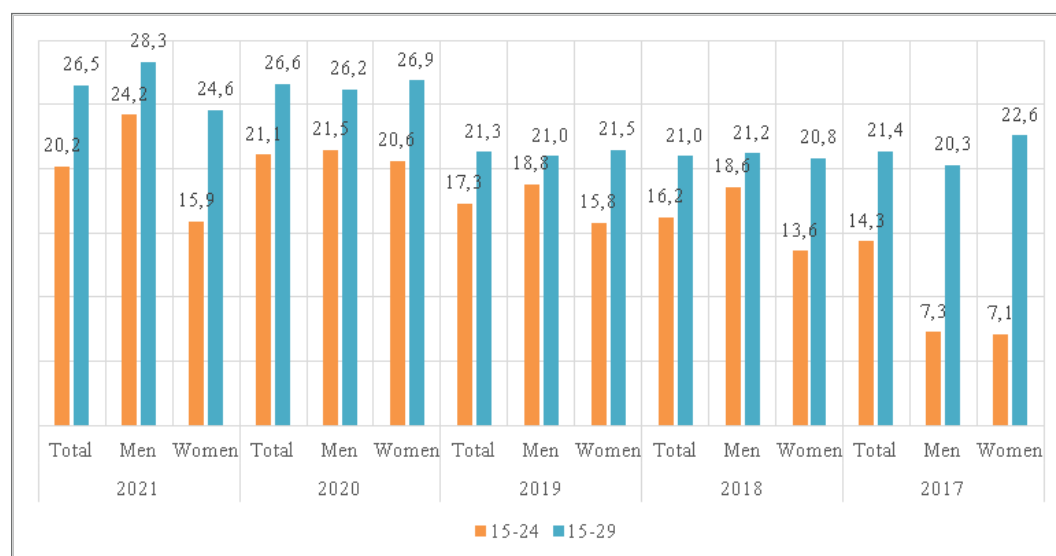
## Methodology

The preparation of this report was based on desk research of available data, research conducted during the previous period, laws, strategies, programmes related to the NEET population. Quantitative analysis of data is prepared based on the Labour Force Survey. Furthermore, legislative, strategic, and policy frameworks have been analysed.

## Overview of the state of NEET in Montenegro

The total percentage of the young people aged 15–24 years who are neither in employment nor in education or training in Montenegro in 2021, was 20.2%, whilst for the population aged 15–29 it was 25.5%. Compared to data from previous years, NEET rates are significantly higher in 2020 and 2021. Compared to 2019, the NEET rate for 15–29 has increased in 2020 by 5.3 percentage points, or 5.2 percentage points in 2021.

Figure 1. NEET rate in Montenegro (in %)



Source: Labour Force Survey, MONSTAT, 2017–2021

This level of the NEET rate was significantly influenced by the pandemic, which had a pronounced impact on economic growth as well as the general economic situation in Montenegro. In turn, this resulted in a reduction in the number of jobs, an increase in



unemployment, and difficulties in finding employment. Young people are particularly affected. The youth unemployment rate (15–29) increased from 22.3% in 2019, and to 32.5% in 2021. Although economic growth and more favourable trends on the labour market were recorded during 2021, youth unemployment still represents a significant challenge. These trends have also affected the NEET population, which further complicates their position from the point of view of finding employment.

Observed by gender, in 2021 a higher percentage of men aged 15–29 years who are neither in employment nor in education or training was recorded compared to women of the same age group (28.3% versus 24.6%). This difference is more pronounced in NEETs aged 15–24, where the participation of NEET men compared to women is higher by 8.3 percentage points.

Compared to the EU, the NEET rate (15–29) is much higher. In 2021, 13.1% of the 15–29-year-olds were neither in employment nor in education and training in the EU, which is 13.4 percentage points less than in Montenegro<sup>1</sup>.

## 1. Profile of the NEET

The definition of programs and policies intended for the education and training of this population group, with the express goal of efficient inclusion in the labour market, is of great importance for solving the problem of youth unemployment, especially in relation to the NEET population. However, on the other hand, in order to define adequate programs and policies, it is necessary to look at and analyse the position of the NEET population in Montenegro. The challenge in this case is the fact that NEETs are “unknown” and that their needs and requirements are difficult to ascertain. During the previous period, various research was carried out with the aim of analysing the state of the NEET population in Montenegro, and the results of which can be used to create programs for their inclusion in the labour market and/or the education system.

<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Statistics\\_on\\_young\\_people\\_neither\\_in\\_employment\\_nor\\_in\\_education\\_or\\_training#The\\_NEET\\_rate\\_within\\_the\\_EU\\_and\\_its\\_Member\\_States\\_2021](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Statistics_on_young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_or_training#The_NEET_rate_within_the_EU_and_its_Member_States_2021)



There are two groups of NEETs who should be targeted by the outreach strategy. Firstly, those who are not registered with the PES and who are long-term unemployed, without working experience and with at most upper secondary educational attainment. Secondly, are inactive young people with the exclusion of young re-entrants as their inactivity is transitory (ILO, 2018).

Research concerning the NEET population shows that 40% of NEETs cited the impossibility of finding a job as a reason for unemployment, 17% cited discrimination, and 13% that they were prevented from working because of care requirements for a family member. Out of the total number of respondents, slightly more than 5% do not want to work (Forum MNE, Defacto Consultancy, 2020). According to the same research, a third of the NEET respondents have been unemployed for more than a year, whilst a fifth of them have no work experience at all. This indicates a clear need to define policies towards this group of young people in order to assist them in joining the labour market. However, the fact that 15% of NEETs have never looked for a job also indicates the need to define policies for activating the NEET population. The possible lack of pro-activity in the job search of the NEET population can also be explained by the research finding that more than 70% of them prefer the public sector for employment (Forum MNE, Defacto consultancy, 2020). A similar result was obtained through research amongst young people, who stated that they most preferred employment in state administration roles (UNDP, 2022). Analysis of the type of employment can also indicate the preferences of NEETs. For instance, of the total number, 95% of them agreed to full-time employment, whilst 78% would agree to self-employment (Forum MNE & Defacto consultancy, 2020).

Observed by region, there are differences in the student NEET population between regions. This can be explained by different levels of regional development. Out of the total number of the NEET population, 40% are also from the Northern region. Therefore, in defining policies, young NEETs in the Northern region should be prioritised, as this region has the highest share of young unemployed people in Montenegro (including long-term unemployed), and also stands for the region with the lowest net income and the highest unemployment rate (ILO, 2018).



## 2. Employment policies and programs that target NEETs

The Youth Strategy is an umbrella document at the national level, which defines activities and goals for youth. Beyond this strategy, the strategic and legislative framework is defined by other sectoral strategies and laws related to employment, education, rights, and other issues of importance for young people. In addition to strategies and policies at the national level, local action plans for youth are defined and adopted by all municipalities in Montenegro. These action plans actually represent the main mechanisms of implementing youth policies and stem from the national strategy. These policies also cover the NEET population, but not as a special, specific group that needs to be addressed via purposively created programs, but rather as a part of the young population in general terms.

Various programs have been implemented in order to increase the inclusion of young people in the labour market. The programs are conducted through various employment policies, or other policies which focus on the employment of young people. Within the framework of active employment policies implemented by the Employment Agency, there are several programs that are specifically intended for employing young people, or improving their competences and knowledge, therefore rendering them more employable. Moreover, other employment policies that are oriented towards the entire population include young people also.

The goal of all programs is to train and acquire skills so that young people can join the labour market as efficiently as possible. Therefore, different programs include different profiles of young people depending on the level of education and type of education acquired. Obtaining work experience and practical knowledge is of great importance for the NEET population, although it is not specifically recognised in the programs, nor are there special programs to this end. Through programs that are directly or indirectly intended for young people, this population can also be included. However, although there is a relatively good legislative and strategic framework related to young people, in practice there are limitations, which differ to a greater or lesser extent between local communities. Often times, at the level of local self-governments, youth issues are not dealt with by special units in local self-government: however, due to administrative and financial limitations, the implementation of youth policies and youth issues are dealt with by administrative bodies which are also responsible for many other tasks. Furthermore, only in some municipalities are there youth offices which implement youth policies, including





measures from local action plans for youth. Moreover, youth clubs have not been formed in all municipalities (UNDP, 2022). There are also restrictions on the financing of youth policies. The findings of the Regional Program of Local Democracy in the Western Balkans 2 project indicate the absence of a holistic approach that would enable more efficient intersectoral cooperation and coordination (both at the national and local level) and which would enable synchronisation of the efforts of various actors in this area.

In order to improve the position of young people in the labour market, Montenegro adopted the Youth Employment Support Program. In the framework of this Program for 2022, support measures for youth employment related to the legislative framework are foreseen, as well as the implementation of concrete projects with the aim of including young people in the labour market. As part of the Youth Employment Support Program, programs in the field of agriculture and inspection supervision are implemented. The program "Youth as a support for the development of agriculture" provides training for the acquisition of entrepreneurial knowledge and specific skills in: creating project applications; managing and implementing projects; organising clusters; and, networking business entities in the field of agriculture. This agriculture program can be important when it comes to NEETs from rural areas. The second program refers to the engagement of university graduates who are unemployed in the tasks of inspection supervision with the aim of acquiring practical skills and training for the labour market through mentoring. Within the framework of the Youth Employment Support Program, the realisation of a measure related to the improvement of human resources for the digital economy is foreseen (Government of Montenegro, 2022).

Additionally, during the last ten years a Programme of Professional Training of Persons with Acquired High Education has been implemented. This enables the employment of young people with acquired higher education for a duration of nine months, which permits the acquisition of both work experience and practical knowledge. Through this program, almost all graduating students from a given year are employed every year.

Beyond the programs intended specifically for young people, there are also programs intended for the general population, but which also include young people. These programs are intended to create opportunities to acquire skills and work experience. The self-employment training program includes unemployed people with secondary edu-



cation who are without working experience, whilst the second program is intended for unemployed people whose lack of practical knowledge and skills has been identified as an obstacle to employment.

Each of these programmes include a significant number of young people. However, the implementation of programs and policies is often not followed by an evaluation, so the actual results and effects of the program remain unknown. Therefore, it is important to quantify and analyse the contribution of these programs vis-à-vis youth (un)employment. Special emphasis can be placed on the NEET population. There are certain analyses and evaluations of the effects of certain employment programs, but previously conducted evaluations are related to only specific measures, or ad hoc evaluations. However, there is a lack of systematic evaluation in order to modify and adapt the programs to the demands of the labour market and, specifically, young job seekers.

The creation of programs aimed at the NEET population could activate this group of young people, given that almost every second member of this population stated that they would be willing to participate in a training program, whilst three quarters believe that such courses are the best way to compensate for the lack of certain skills (Forum MNE & Defacto consultancy, 2020).

Regarding youth employment, an important element is the implementation of the Youth Guarantee project. Such an implementation of the Youth Guarantee project is currently in the preparatory phase in Montenegro. Thus far, in order to realise this project, steps have been taken at the institutional level by forming a working group that will be responsible for the implementation of the Youth Guarantee. In this regard, the Employment Agency of Montenegro plays a significant role, which consists in the registration of NEET persons, the provision of preparatory services to these persons related to profiling, counselling, career guidance, connecting job seekers with vacancies, providing training services and education etc., as well as monitoring the status of NEET persons. On the other hand, there are numerous challenges facing the institutions and the entire system in the coming period, namely: the adoption of policies that would accompany the implementation of the Youth Guarantee Scheme; the challenges on the resource side needed to implement this project; monitoring and evaluation of programs; pro-active action strategies; and, difficulties in involving inactive youth, etc.



(Employment Agency of Montenegro, 2021). In any case, significant financial resources are needed for the functioning and implementation of the Youth Guarantee scheme. Therefore, the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans launched by the European Commission is of great importance, given that the plan enables the potential financing of this scheme.

## Conclusion

Youth unemployment is one of the most significant problems of the Montenegrin labour market. The problem has been particularly pronounced during the previous years. Numerous programs and policies are being implemented with the aim of improving the position of young people in the labour market. Latterly, these are primarily aimed at improving knowledge, competences, skills, as well as developing and improving practical knowledge and skills which the labour market requires. Therefore, the evaluation of all programs and policies, or their effects, is of great importance. In fact, it is necessary to analyse how much programs and policies contribute to the employability of young people and whether financial resources and human capacities can be used in a different way in order to improve the results of the program. Given that the youth unemployment problem and the growth of the percentage of the NEET population are significant, it is necessary to consider the creation of new programs that would include these categories of residents, or to redesign existing programs in order to activate the NEET population and include them in training and employment programs. The problem also exists on the side of the inactivity of the NEET population. Furthermore, in solving the issue of youth unemployment, it is necessary to have a holistic approach where all relevant institutions would be connected and included in order to achieve a synergistic effect.

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RURAL NEET YOUTH

Employment and Employment Services  
for Rural NEETs: Initiatives for tackling  
NEETs' and rural NEETs' employment  
issues

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## The quality of employment and working conditions of young people with disabilities in Poland

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### Abstract:

We investigate the labour market situation of unemployed people with disabilities who participated in job activation programmes between 2020–2021. We analyse their working status, job stability, and job satisfaction six months after the programme. We compare young people with older age groups and rural residents with their urban counterparts. We find that most programme beneficiaries remained employed six months after the programme, often at the same employer and with a permanent contract. Most reported good working conditions and general satisfaction with their job. Less than half reported satisfaction with a salary, which may be due to the low earnings (around the minimum wage level). We find that young people and urban residents were more often employed at unsheltered workplaces. It may suggest that rural residents with disabilities have worse access to good jobs and public services, so they must rely on sheltered workplaces. Unsheltered workplaces may attract young people as they provide more modern positions, and may be more suitable for older people as they provide more complex health and rehabilitation-related services. Additionally, young people more often reported training opportunities at the workplace, and less often stayed at the same employer.

Keywords: quality of employment, working conditions, young people with disabilities.

### Introduction

In recent years, many EU countries have increased efforts to improve the labour market situation of people with disabilities. Nevertheless, labour force participation amongst

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people with disabilities is still lower than amongst those without (Eurofund 2021). People with disabilities face many problems and barriers which lower their employment opportunities. Barriers to access in relation to the physical environment, transportation, information, and communications often mean that workplaces are not adapted to their needs. Negative stereotypes amongst employers often result in discriminatory practices in the workplace, and barriers to education make it more challenging to gain the qualifications required in the labour market (Eurofund 2021). Therefore, policies aiming to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities should take all these dimensions into consideration.

This paper investigates the labour market situation of unemployed people with disabilities who participated in job activation programmes between 2020 and 2021 in Poland. A countrywide NGO ran the programmes. We focus on the programme beneficiaries' employment level, work stability, working conditions, and satisfaction with their job six months after the end of the programme. We compare young people with older age groups and residents of rural areas with their urban counterparts. There are two reasons for focusing on these issues. Firstly, the labour market situation of youth is generally worse than older people. Young people often lack qualifications and experience, they work based on temporary agreements, and in precarious jobs. Therefore, they are hit by economic downturns particularly hard since it is easier to terminate contracts with them (OECD 2016). Secondly, research shows that people living in rural areas have worse access to job market services and health services. They often face transportation exclusion, which hinders their capabilities to use public employment services support or commute to an employer (Włodarczyk 2013; OECD 2010).

The next section provides information regarding our dataset, sampling, and methodology. Results are presented, and conclusions drawn.

## Data, sampling, and methodology

Our dataset contains information regarding 1,047 persons with disabilities who entered the labour market after participating in a countrywide NGO's job activation programmes. Jobless people aged 18 or above, and with various disabilities, could participate in these programmes. The programmes offered such measures as classroom training, on-the-



job training, job crafting, job counselling, psychological counselling, and legal support. Six months after the end of the programme, a telephone survey (computer-assisted telephone interview, CATI) was carried out in order to gather information about the employment status, work conditions, and job satisfaction of the clients with disabilities.

Our sample is gender balanced (51% of women and 49% of men) (see Table in Appendix). Around 64% of the study participants have secondary education (general or vocational), about 30% have a university degree, and about 6% have primary education. Most participants live in urban areas (87.2%). They lived in all geographical regions in Poland. Most of them have a moderate level of disability (69.1%), and they represent various types of disability.

In the first step, we present descriptive statistics concerning the labour market situation of the programme participants with regards to their working status, wages, job satisfaction, and job conditions. Following this, we compare the situations of (i) young people aged 18–29 with older age groups; and, (2) people from rural areas with people from urban areas with regards to eight outcomes. They are:

1. A share of programme participants who work six months after the programme;
2. A share of programme participants who work based on some six months after the programme;
3. A share of programme participants who work with the same employer six months after the programme;
4. A share of programme participants who work in unsheltered workplaces six months after the programme;
5. The level of satisfaction amongst programme participants (the average rate from three questions);
6. A share of programme participants who report that the employer gives them training opportunities;
7. A share of programme participants who report that the employer cares about their health needs;
8. A share of programme participants who report that they are satisfied with the salary.



To assess whether the differences are statistically significant, we run several t-tests.

## Results

Yo Table 1 shows that most programme beneficiaries retained employment six months after the programme (81.5%). Almost all participants worked based on a permanent contract (98.4%), and the vast majority (89.4%) worked with the same employer. Most participants worked in unsheltered workplaces (81.1%). Almost 2/3 of the participants were satisfied with their job. Over 80% reported that the employer cares for their health needs. Less than half were satisfied with their salary. It may stem from the fact that the earnings of the vast majority of the programme participants were at the minimum wage level or lower.

Regarding the age groups comparison, young people worked more often at unsheltered workplaces (88.9% vs 79.3%), worked less often at the same employer (84.6% vs 90.6%), and more often reported that their workplace offered them training opportunities (40.7% vs 27.2%) (Table 1). These differences were statistically significant.

The differences regarding other labour market outcomes were small and not significant. However, Table 1 shows that the employment level was slightly higher amongst young people (83.5% vs 81.0%), they were slightly more satisfied with a job (61.1% vs 59.6%) and the salary (50.0% vs 46.3%), and more often reported that the employer cares for their health needs (85.8% vs 80.2%). In both groups, almost all programme beneficiaries worked based on a permanent contract.



Table 1. Labour market outcomes of the participants six months after participation in the programme by age

	Total	Age		
		15-29 y.o.	30-64 y.o.	Difference (signi- ficance)
Working	81.5%	83.5%	81.0%	2.5 (no)
Working in an unsheltered workplace	81.1%	88.9%	79.3%	9.6 (yes)
Permanent contract	98.4%	98.8%	98.3%	0.5 (no)
Work at the same employer	89.4%	84.6%	90.6%	-6.0 (yes)
Satisfied with a job	59.9%	61.1%	59.6%	1.5 (no)
Training opportunities	29.8%	40.7%	27.2%	13.6 (yes)
Employer cares for health needs	81.2%	85.8%	80.2%	5.7 (no)
Satisfied with salary	47.0%	50.0%	46.3%	3.7 (no)

Note: the table shows results from the t-tests. Significance level 95%. The table with full results is available in the Appendix.

Source: author's calculation based on the CATI survey

Urban residents more often worked at unsheltered workplaces (82.9% vs 70.7%), and the difference was statistically significant (Table 2).

Other labour market outcomes were similar for both groups, and the differences were small and insignificant. The employment rate amongst people from rural areas was slightly higher (85.4%) than those from urban areas (80.8%). They also more often worked at the same employer (92.7% in rural areas vs 88.9% in urban areas). In both groups, almost all people worked based on a permanent contract. Rural residents were generally more often satisfied with a job (64.3% vs 59.2%), but less often satisfied with the monthly wage (43.1% vs 47.7%). In both groups, over 80% of people reported that the employer cares for their health needs, and around 30% reported training opportunities at their workplace.



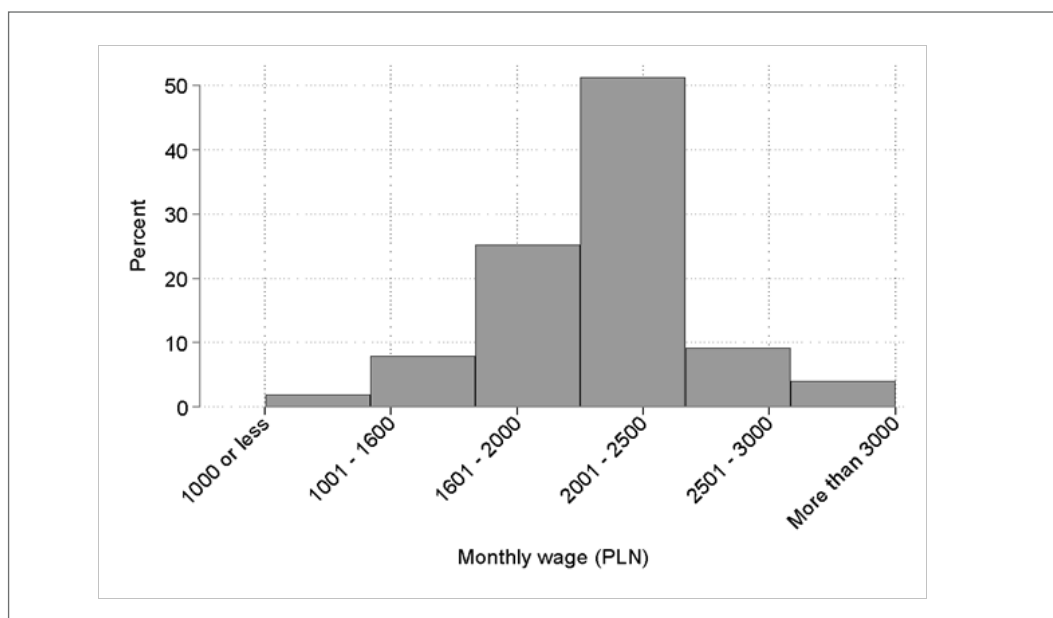
Table 2. Labour market outcomes of the participants six months after participation in the programme, by place of residence

	Total	Place of residence		
		Urban areas	Rural areas	Difference (significance)
Working	81.5%	80.8%	85.4%	-4.6 (no)
Working in an unsheltered workplace	81.1%	82.9%	70.7%	12.1 (yes)
Permanent contract	98.4%	98.4%	98.4%	0.0 (no)
Work at the same employer	89.4%	88.9%	92.7%	-3.8 (no)
Job satisfaction	59.9%	59.2%	64.2%	-5.1 (no)
Training opportunities	29.8%	29.3%	32.5%	-3.2 (no)
Employer cares for health needs	81.2%	81.0%	82.9%	-1.9 (no)
Satisfied with salary	47.0%	47.7%	43.1%	4.6 (no)

Note: the table shows results from the t-tests. Significance level 95%. The table with full results is available in the Appendix.

Source: author's calculation based on the CATI survey

Graph 1. The monthly wage (gross) of programme participants six months after participation in the programme



Note: 100 EUR  $\approx$  450 PLN. The minimum wage was 2600 and PLN gross ( $\approx$  500 EUR) in 2020 and 2800 PLN gross ( $\approx$  580 EUR) in 2021.

Source: author's calculation based on the CATI survey

## Conclusion and discussion

We phoned that over 80% of persons with disabilities who took part in employment programmes carried out by a countrywide NGO in Poland between 2020 and 2021, and entered the labour market afterwards, retained employment six months after the end of the programme. Their jobs were stable. Given that most participants worked based on a permanent contract and maintained employment with the same employer. Most of them reported good working conditions and general satisfaction with their job. However, they were much less satisfied with their earnings which were usually at the minimum wage level. This paper shows that labour market measures designed and implemented in line with the needs of people with disabilities, and cooperation with employers, may bring positive results. The employment level of the programme participants is high compared to the general population of persons with disabilities in Poland of whom less than 30% were employed in 2019 and 2020, according to the Labour Force Survey for Poland.



We find no difference in employment levels between young and older age groups. However, six months after the programme, older people were more often employed by the same employer. We do not know, however, whether this stems from more frequent layoffs amongst young workers, or their higher job mobility. Furthermore, older people were less likely to be employed in unsheltered workplaces. Firstly, unsheltered workplaces may offer more modern job positions and services that attract young people. Secondly, sheltered workplaces may provide better health and rehabilitation-related services, which may be more important for older people. People from rural areas differ from their urban counterparts only in one regard – they are less likely to be employed in unsheltered workplaces. This may indicate that the access to various public services in rural areas in Poland is worse than in urban areas. Sheltered workplaces are obliged by law to provide their workers with various medical and rehabilitation services as well as adapted offices. Due to the limited access of those services in rural areas, sheltered workplaces may be more attractive for rural residents.

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## Appendix

Table 3. Sample structure

		Sample
Gender	Female	50.9%
	Male	49.1%
Education	Primary	5.8%
	Secondary	45.0%
	Vocational	19.3%
	Tertiary	29.9%
Age	15–29	18.7%
	30–39	28.9%
	40–49	25.4%
	50 and more	27.0%
Region (NUTS-1)	East	21.7%
	Central	20.5%
	North–West	17.5%
	North	15.4%
	South	10.1%
	South–West	8.8%
	Mazovia	6.0%
Place of living	Urban area	87.2%
	Rural area	12.8%
Disability level	Slight	22.0%
	Moderate	69.1%
	Severe	8.9%
Disability type	Mental health conditions	25.7%
	Other	20.9%
	Physical disability	20.5%
	Multiple disabilities	17.5%
	Vision impairment	6.2%
	Deaf or hard of hearing	5.7%
	General health condition	2.3%
	Intellectual disability	0.8%
	Autism spectrum disorder	0.5%

Source: author's calculation based on the CATI survey.



Table 4. The difference in labour market outcomes between 15 – 29 y.o. and 30 – 64 y.o. six months after participation in the programme (T-test results).

	15 – 29 y.o.	30 – 64 y.o.	Dif.	St Err.	T value	P value
Working	.835	.81	.025	.031	.8	.419
Working in an unsheltered workplace	.889	.793	.096	.034	2.8	.005
Permanent contract	.988	.983	.005	.011	.45	.651
Work at the same employer	.846	.906	-.06	.027	-2.25	.025
Job satisfaction	.611	.596	.015	.043	.35	.729
Training opportunities	.408	.272	.136	.04	3.4	.001
Employer cares for health needs	.858	.801	.057	.034	1.65	.099
Satisfied with salary	.5	.463	.037	.044	.85	.398

Source: author's calculation based on the CATI survey.



Table 5. The difference in labour market outcomes between rural and urban residents six months after participation in the programme (T-test results).

	Urban	Rural	Dif.	St Err.	T value	P value
Working	.808	.854	-.046	.035	-1.3	.19
Working in an unsheltered workplace	.829	.708	.121	.038	3.2	.002
Permanent contract	.984	.984	0	.013	0	.989
Work at the same employer	.889	.927	-.038	.03	-1.25	.208
Job satisfaction	.592	.642	-.051	.048	-1.05	.291
Training opportunities	.293	.325	-.032	.044	-.7	.473
Employer cares for health needs	.809	.83	-.019	.038	-.5	.606
Satisfied with salary	.477	.431	.046	.049	.95	.347

Source: author's calculation based on the CATI survey.



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Rural NEET Youth Network:  
Modeling the risks underlying rural  
NEETs social exclusion



WORKING GROUP 3  
**Employment services &  
Employment in rural areas**  
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RURAL NEET YOUTH

Employment and Employment Services  
for Rural NEETs: Initiatives for tackling  
NEETs' and rural NEETs' employment  
issues





## Youth Participation in The Labour Market and Job Channels Used: A comparative study between Italy, Poland and Romania

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### Abstract:

Technological progress, industrialisation, and globalisation mean that many aspects of young people's lives have changed. Despite this progress, their participation in the labour market still presents several challenges. This phenomenon represents a significant economic and social problem in many countries, youth unemployment is a topic intensely discussed by all governments. There is an increasing need for policy instruments aimed at solving the problem and improving the lives of young people. The European Union (EU) has created several strategies for this purpose. Thanks to the European Labour Force Survey (LFS), it is possible to keep track of all information and data regarding young people and their participation in the labour market. In this study, the goal was to compare the choice of channels made by Italian, Romanian, and Polish youth and calculate the likelihood that these channels influence finding a job. Particular focus is paid to public employment services (PES).

Keywords: youth unemployment, youth employment, youth participation, public employment services (PES).

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## Introduction

Employment plays a vitally important part in people's lives, especially for the young. Through work, people feel fulfilled and useful to both their families and society. Youth unemployment represents an important and serious problem in many countries worldwide.

The European Union makes many efforts to address the phenomenon by providing specific programs targeted at young people with the goal of helping them enter the labour market and increase their employment rate. However, they present significant structural differences in terms of the percentage of youth participation in the labour market. Those differences have been widely studied in the literature, finding that they arise due to a combination of cultural aspects, labour market conditions, and the education system. Considering these characteristics, European Union (EU) countries have implemented policies geared to promoting youth employment, improving their quality of life, and avoiding social exclusion.

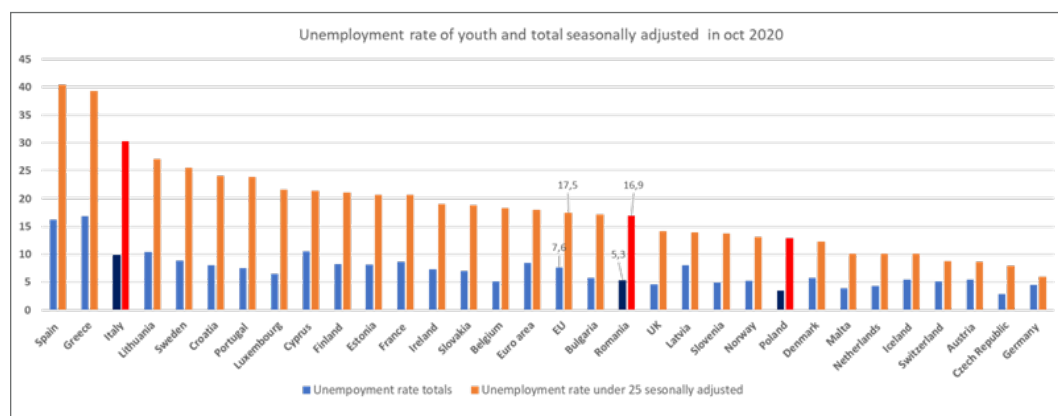
In April 2013, the European Commission launched the Young Guarantee program. This generated some positive effects on the youth unemployment trend. Owing to YG implementation, the number of jobless youths aged 15–29 decreased in 2019 (12.6%). However, Eurofound's (2016) research still estimates that youth unemployment constitutes a significant negative impact on the economic and social development of the EU. Indeed, at the end of 2019, the youth unemployment rate in the EU varied from 4.7% in the Czech Republic to 32.4% in Greece (Lambovska et al. 2021). An entrance point to the EU Youth Guarantee (YG) program is represented by the Public Employment Services (PES). They have the primary role in facilitating the labour market integration of young jobseekers.

Broschinski and Assmann (2020) present the percentage of PES support received and the percentage of PES registration rate based on the Labour Force Survey 2016. They find that there is a gap between people who are registered, and those who receive support. For example, although the PES registration rate is the highest in Croatia, the support of PES is the highest in Finland, which may lead to an incapacity of the PES to deliver results. Italy has less than a 40% registration rate, but more than 10% of unemployed people receive support. Poland has a more than 40% registration rate

with PES, but about 10% of the unemployed receive actual support, whilst Romania has the lowest registration rate with the PES and the lowest share of people who receive support. This figure brings to mind structural problems in the organisation of PES, both in terms of attracting young people to register and supporting them to integrate in education or the labour market.

Italy, Poland and Romania are amongst the countries with a high youth unemployment rate (See Figure 1). Moreover, they are also the countries with the lowest youth registration in 2021.

Figure 1. Unemployment rate of youth compared to total unemployment rate



Source: author's calculation based on the CATI survey.

Over the years, technological advancement and access to the internet has changed the way people, especially young people, inquire about job opportunities. Search engine behaviours of young people are constantly evolving as they have begun to adopt new technologies and use new ways to communicate with each other. In the most advanced countries, online channels are also becoming critical in the delivery of public services, indeed becoming almost preferred (DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Pierson, 2018).

Although PES is trying to adapt to this technological evolution, there are so many differences in the quality of services offered between nations and regions it is difficult to create a uniform set of outcomes in terms of success. The objective of this paper



is, therefore, to compare the channels used in job searches amongst young people in Italy, Poland, and Romania and to investigate whether using PES as a job search channel affects the probability of finding a job. To that end, the remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the data examined and the methodology used; Section 3 shows the empirical results and discusses their interpretation; and, Section 4 summarises the findings and draws conclusions therefrom.

## Data and method

The European Labour Force Survey (LFS) is one of the most important sources of information regarding the labour market situation of the working-age population in EU countries. To carry out the analysis, LFS microdata for Italy, Poland, and Romania for 2015 – 2020 has been used. The sample included individuals between 15 and 29 years old. Regarding the ways of looking for work, five job search channels used by young jobless people are considered: PES; private agencies; employers; friends and relatives; and, others.

After an overview of the main channels used to find a job, the study focuses upon PES, and a set of bivariate Probit (BiProbit) models have been implemented. The special feature of this model is that, unlike the classic probit model, it has two dependent variables and thus calculates the effect, positive or negative, of the explanatory ones. In each of our probit models, the two dependent variables were: (1) whether a person who was not employed one year before the survey found a job; and, (2) the job search channel. In each model, we control for socio-demographic characteristics, work experience, household composition, and the year of the survey.

This work presents basic statistics on the job search channels young jobless people use in these countries. Following this, it analyses whether searching for a job through PES affected the ability to actually find a job. The sample has been limited to those individuals who were not employed one year before the survey.

## Results

Jobless young people in Italy, Poland, and Romania differ slightly regarding the job search channels they use to find a job. Table 1 shows the percentage of young people

who use identified job search channels. Whilst seeking employment through public employment services is quite popular in Poland (59%), less than one in three youths use this channel in Romania and Italy. In these two countries, youth prefer to search for employment via family, friends, and relatives (over 80% in Italy and Romania, and 65% of youths in Poland). In Italy, many young people look for a job directly at an employer (75%). On the other hand, job searching through private agencies seems to be the least preferred channel in all three countries considered.

Table 1. Job search channels amongst young (15 – 29 y.o.) unemployed people in Italy, Poland, and Romania

	Italy	Poland	Romania
Public employment services (PES)	25%	59%	30%
Private agency	15%	9%	10%
Directly at employer	75%	51%	51%
Family, friends and relatives	81%	65%	86%
Other channels	83%	79%	98%

Source: author's calculation based on the Labour Force Survey data for 2015 – 2020

Table 2 shows the results of applying the biProbit model, which calculates the probability of young people finding a job if they choose PES as their search channel.

In Italy, rural area residents are more likely to find a job, whilst women, young people, and those with lower education are less likely to find a job. Regarding the channels used, those with secondary education and job experience are more likely to search for a job through PES.

In Poland, women, younger, and lower-educated people are less likely to find a job, whilst people from rural areas and those living with a partner are more likely to find employment. Regarding the job channel, females, younger, and lower educated persons

are less likely to search for employment through PES, whilst people from rural areas and with work experience are more likely to use PES as a job search channel.

In Romania, the situation looks similar – women, younger, and lower-educated people are less likely to find a job, whilst people from rural areas and those living with a partner are more likely to find employment. Regarding the job search channels, females, younger, and less educated people are less likely to search for employment through PES, whilst those with work experience are more likely to use PES.

As can be seen from the results in Table 2, the likelihood of finding a job by choosing to turn to PES is very different both across countries, and also across young people with differing characteristics.

Table 2: Focus on Public employment services as job search channels amongst young jobless people in Italy, Poland, and Romania

VARIABLES	Italy		Poland		Romania	
	Found_job	PES	Found_job	PES	Found_job	PES
Female	-0.207*** (0.0191)	-0.114*** (0.0265)	-0.208*** (0.0263)	-0.230*** (0.0365)	-0.298*** (0.0442)	-0.212*** (0.0514)
Age: 15 – 19 y.o	-1.373*** (0.0283)	-0.672*** (0.0414)	-1.649*** (0.0414)	-1.154*** (0.0594)	-0.709*** (0.0641)	-0.666*** (0.0748)
Age: 20 – 24 y.o	-0.409*** (0.0220)	-0.0807*** (0.0302)	-0.615*** (0.0361)	-0.257*** (0.0438)	-0.307*** (0.0583)	-0.272*** (0.0675)
Education: lower secondary	-0.307*** (0.0702)	0.155 (0.114)	-0.803*** (0.111)	-0.147 (0.189)	-0.889*** (0.187)	-0.408* (0.246)
Education: upper secondary	-0.0315 (0.0611)	0.199* (0.105)	-0.351*** (0.0962)	0.129 (0.146)	-0.658*** (0.177)	-0.150 (0.227)
Rural	0.0630*** (0.0231)	0.0422 (0.0317)	0.0762*** (0.0257)	0.301*** (0.0348)	0.373*** (0.0425)	0.0709 (0.0498)
National_own_country	-0.0992*** (0.0333)	-0.185*** (0.0427)	-0.0858 (0.181)	0.853* (0.483)	0.241 (0.606)	0.00347 (0.592)
Work experience	-5.819 (258.9)	0.522*** (0.0301)	-6.495 (346.0)	0.799*** (0.0427)	-5.288 (703.5)	0.407*** (0.0938)
Child in the household	-0.0769*** (0.0257)	0.0383 (0.0346)	-0.142*** (0.0295)	0.00162 (0.0404)	0.0441 (0.0466)	-0.0685 (0.0571)



	Italy		Poland		Romania	
VARIABLES	Found_job	PES	Found_job	PES	Found_job	PES
Partner in the household	0.00885 (0.0434)	-0.263*** (0.0577)	0.422*** (0.0439)	-0.624*** (0.0600)	0.159** (0.0675)	-0.256*** (0.0862)
Year: 2016	0.0514 (0.0322)	-0.0956** (0.0403)	0.0812** (0.0410)	-0.124** (0.0494)	-0.0912 (0.0696)	-0.0659 (0.0760)
Year: 2017	0.0698** (0.0320)	-0.130*** (0.0412)	0.0976** (0.0417)	-0.299*** (0.0538)	-0.0157 (0.0692)	-0.115 (0.0793)
Year: 2018	0.0671** (0.0320)	-0.205*** (0.0427)	0.123*** (0.0423)	-0.373*** (0.0570)	-0.0417 (0.0707)	-0.230*** (0.0848)
Year: 2019	0.195*** (0.0575)	-0.396*** (0.0989)	0.556*** (0.0902)	-0.530*** (0.136)	0.705*** (0.170)	0.0860 (0.219)
Year: 2020	-0.0107 (0.0329)	-0.409*** (0.0477)	0.00293 (0.0446)	-0.504*** (0.0627)	-0.00864 (0.0707)	-0.189** (0.0847)
Constant	-0.406*** (0.0429)	-1.371*** (0.0553)	-0.000756 (0.185)	-1.961*** (0.485)	-1.514** (0.609)	-1.313** (0.595)
Observations	347,709	347,709	152,074	152,074	134,244	134,244
Standard errors in parentheses						
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1						

Source: author's calculation based on the Labour Force Survey data for 2015 – 2020

## Conclusions

This work investigates job search channels used by young jobless people in Italy, Poland, and Romania. The choices available amongst the channels used to look for work varies across countries. In fact, several preferences were identified, but it is interesting to see how one channel is preferred over the others in each case. Indeed, in all countries most young people search for employment through friends and relatives, leading us to the concept of social capital as a key factor for escaping poverty through work. Public employment services are more often used in Poland than in Romania and Italy. More than half of young people in all countries search for a job directly through an employer. Private employment agencies are not popular in any country. If we take a closer look at PES, it is possible to see that in all countries, females, younger people and lower-educated individuals are less likely to search for employment through PES, whilst those from rural



areas and with job experience are more likely to use PES. The outcomes from this preliminary study are very interesting, showing that something has changed over the years, that young people have different preferences, and that public employment offices operate differently across different countries. In future research, we will focus upon understanding the discriminating factors of this choice, and what strategies PESs could adopt to be more attractive and useful to young job seekers.

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## Reinforced Youth Guarantee Program in Romania: How evidence shapes the proposed measures for NEETs

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### Abstract:

The Youth Guarantee is the flagship initiative of the European Commission designed to solve the youth unemployment problem. The first program was launched in 2013, and in 2020 the European Commission, based on the monitoring and evaluation reports, decided to continue the program with some improvements. The updated version was called the Reinforced Youth Guarantee. This paper aims to present the main evidence used in the development of the Reinforced Youth Guarantee plan in reference to Romania. Considering that the evidence used for a public policy determines the proposed measures, the paper highlights the link between evidence related to NEETs and dysfunctions of the public employment system and policy measures proposed in the Romanian Reinforced Youth Guarantee. Although the evidence shows a large number of NEETs in rural areas, there are very few public policy measures proposed in the Reinforced Guarantee Program in Romania to address their problems currently experience there.

Keywords: Youth Guarantee, NEETs, evidence, rural, public policy

### Introduction

The Youth Guarantee, the flagship initiative of the European Commission launched in 2013, has been an important driver of structural reform at the national level, both for employment services – which expanded and diversified their services for young people – and for educational services, which paid more attention to the school to work transition process.



These structural reforms and innovations included in the Youth Guarantee Program, and translated into the national Youth Guarantee implementation plans, have generated opportunities for young people. In brief, the number of NEETs aged 15–29 at the EU-27 level has decreased from 16.1% in 2013, to 12.6% in 2019 (EUROSTAT, edat\_lfse\_20).

The Youth Guarantee Program had a significant impact upon public employment services insofar as they developed their range of youth employment services, have innovated in order to identify the best solutions for youth employment, have understood the need for integrated service provision, but also that these need to be tailored to the type of NEETs targeted, and moreover have developed partnerships to deliver these services to NEETs. Even if these structural changes have not been achieved at the same level in all EU Member States' public employment services, as evidenced by the number of young NEETs benefiting from interventions in relation to their number, these reforms have started to be implemented. To that end, the Youth Guarantee has had a transformative effect upon public employment services and youth employment policies in general.

Based on these results, and the fact that action is still needed to tackle the problem of NEETs in EU countries (particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic), the European Commission launched the Reinforced Youth Guarantee in 2020. The Reinforced Youth Guarantee addresses the issues of NEETs between 15–29 years old and 'ensures 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' (Council of the European Union, 2020, point 21).

The Reinforced Youth Guarantee aims to create employment opportunities for young people, or to increase the space for employment opportunities by improving skills and competencies, including through upskilling and reskilling. This is undertaken within the context of twin transitions (i.e., digital and green), the European Pillar of Social Rights, the New Industrial Strategy, and the European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness, and resilience. The digital and green transition influences the general policy framework at the EU level, including the youth employment policies, and promotes measures to learn or improve digital and green competencies and skills in order to take advantage of emerging opportunities.



Simultaneously, the Reinforced Youth Guarantee makes an important contribution to the implementation of the European Commission's recovery strategy following the COVID-19 pandemic. It does so by supporting youth employment, which was negatively affected during the pandemic: in 2020 alone, the percentage of young NEETs increased by more than 1% (EUROSTAT data, 2022). Given the previous results achieved through the implementation of apprenticeships (European Alliance for Apprenticeships, 2019; Broeck et al., 2017; Cedefop, 2019), it is considered an important tool both for facilitating the transition of young people to the labour market, and for involving the business sector in this process of increasing youth employment by addressing their skills needs.

In order to improve the program's results regarding youth employment, the European Commission proposes a path toward a stable and sustainable labour market integration. This includes four stages: mapping, outreach, preparation, and offer. Furthermore, the individualised approach is highlighted due to the diversity of national, regional, or local socio-economic contexts and NEETs' categories and characteristics. The Reinforced Youth Guarantee stresses the need for integrated service provision (such as a one-stop-shop model) as a condition for overcoming vulnerability; preparatory training (with digital, green, language, entrepreneurial, and career management skills) before taking up an offer and for better coordination; and, partnership between policy areas (employment, education, youth, social and gender equality).

## Reinforced Youth Guarantee in Romania

The evidence used in the development of a public policy determines the measures adopted and the allocation of resources (Rickinson et al., 2019). This paper aims to present the main evidence used in the development of the Reinforced Youth Guarantee plan in Romania. Even though many public policy measures which have been implemented for years without valuable results have been taken into account for its continuing development, the Youth Guarantee has become one of the main public policy schemes for tackling youth employment issues within Romania (Petrescu et al, 2021).

The Reinforced Youth Guarantee plan was included in the National Strategy for Employment for 2021–2027, which also considered the measures for green employment developed in the National Strategy for Green Employment for 2018–2025. The second objective of the



National Strategy for Employment is dedicated to young people and aims to increase their economic potential (including NEETs). The measures/actions included in the National Strategy for Employment for 2021–2027 for young people are as follows (p. 57).

1. Development of prevention systems by strengthening partnerships between institutions with competencies in the fields of employment, education, and social protection as well as other entities in order to identify young people at risk of becoming NEET.
2. Establishment/development of youth centres/clubs at the community level, involving local authorities and public or private entities offering specific activities tailored to young people, and supporting actions to promote these activities.
3. The development by public or private youth centres/clubs or other interested entities of networks of youth workers, identified, selected, and activated amongst young people (especially NEETs).
4. Mapping, informing, preparing, and providing the offer itself (integrated packages of activation measures for young people, including NEETs);
5. Improving the tracking system of the situation of NEETs after integration into the labour market or into the education or training system.
6. Developing volunteering amongst young people, including NEETs, in order to familiarise them with job requirements, to facilitate the acquisition of new skills, and identify potential career paths, including entrepreneurship.
7. Ensuring that young people, including NEETs, acquire transversal skills, with a focus on basic digital skills, career management, communication, and teamwork skills, as well as social and green entrepreneurship skills.

The integrated packages of activation measures for young people are developed on the basis of the identified needs of young people, and are tailored accordingly. They may include: counselling; mediation; subsidies; vocational training/internships/internships; skills assessment; enrolment and support for participation in flexible second-chance programs, including vocational training modules; provision of personalised support



services (training allowances to cover training-related expenses – transport, meals, etc.); subsidising the costs of obtaining a driver's licence; internships; apprenticeships; mobility allowances; and, employment allowances.

## Methodology

Our paper presents the Reinforced Youth Guarantee, one of the most important public policy interventions, which aims to increase the employability of young people aged 15–29, especially NEETs. As was mentioned previously, this EU policy is transposed at the national level, according to various plans vis-à-vis the context in question. Based on the impact on the youth population, especially NEETs, and the relevance of the proposed measures for the youth employment sector, our paper aims to present the Reinforced Youth Guarantee in Romania and how the proposed measures are linked with the evidence on NEETs and the youth population.

Based on the methodology developed in the Manual for the Methodological Best-Practices in Research Dedicated to Rural NEETs (Petrescu et al., 2020), the priority criteria for selecting the Reinforced Youth Guarantee as an intervention were: addressing NEETs' issues; interdisciplinary orientation of the intervention; and, focus on COST project priorities, namely employment.

The methodology draws upon an extensive policy analysis and secondary data analysis. The policy analysis includes: the European Commission's Communication on Reinforced Youth Guarantee (Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Youth Employment Support: a Bridge to Jobs for the Next Generation – COM/2020/276 final); the European 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 2020/C 372/01; the Romanian National Strategy for Employment 2021 – 2027 (including the Action Plan for Implementing the Strategy); and, the Romanian National Strategy for Green Employment for 2018– 2025.



The secondary data analysis focuses upon the data regarding NEETs at both the national and EU-27 levels. Additionally, it integrates other data available on NEETs, or on the implementation of various measures included in the Youth Guarantee 2017 – 2020 from other reports (CEDEFOP reports. Latterly, these reports are sourced at the country level (i.e., Youth Guarantee implementation reports from 2020, and Romanian PES reports).

## Findings

For the elaboration of the section dedicated to young people, with a focus on the issue of NEETs, the following data was used to justify the proposed measures: the employment rate by age group; gender and development region; the unemployment rate; the share of 15–29-year-olds in total; being long-term unemployed; and, the NEETs rate by age group, gender, region, and degree of urbanisation.

EUROSTAT data indicated a decrease in the NEETs rate between 15 and 29 years old in Romania between 2012 and 2019, dropping from 19.3% to 16.8%. Nevertheless, it remains one of the highest in Europe, being 4.2% higher than the European average. The highest NEETs rate is found in rural areas (20.3%), followed by towns and suburbs (19.6%) (Table 1). The share of young people aged 15–29 in the total long-term unemployed category was 43.2% in 2019, which shows once again the vulnerability of this demographic segment (National Strategy for Employment 2021 – 2027, p. 33).



	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>EU – 27 countries (from 2020)</b>	16.0	16.1	15.7	15.2	14.5	13.7	13.1	12.6
<b>Romania</b>	19.3	19.6	19.9	20.9	20.2	17.8	17.0	16.8
<b>Cities</b>								
<b>EU – 27 countries (from 2020)</b>	14.8	14.5	14.2	13.8	13.1	12.5	12.0	11.7
<b>Romania</b>	13.3	13.8	14.4	14.1	12.1	9.9	9.4	9.5
<b>Towns and suburbs</b>								
<b>EU – 27 countries (from 2020)</b>	16.0	16.5	16.1	15.8	15.1	14.4	13.5	13.1
<b>Romania</b>	21.2	21.8	20.7	23.6	22.5	21.1	19.6	19.6
<b>Rural areas</b>								
<b>EU – 27 countries (from 2020)</b>	17.6	17.8	17.3	16.6	16.0	14.9	14.3	13.6
<b>Romania</b>	23.7	23.4	24.1	24.6	24.6	21.6	21.0	20.3

Source: EUROSTAT, Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex, age, and degree of urbanisation (NEET rates) [edat\_lfse\_29]

Data from the Public Employment Service (National Agency for Employment) was also used in relation to: the subsidies granted for the employment of graduates; young people at risk of marginalisation and becoming NEETs; the number of subsidies granted to stimulate the employment of pupils and students during the holidays; and, the graduate placement bonuses granted (Table 2).



Table2. Evolution of the number of young people employed through active measures between 2014 and 2019

Type of active measure	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Subsidising graduates' employment*</b>	6.893	5.923	4.898	4.780	4.346	4.625
<b>Subsidising the employment of young people at risk of social marginalisation</b>	420	372	297	143	116	71
<b>Employment allowances for graduate*</b>	4.249	3.627	2.544	2.571	1.280**	1.365
<b>Stimulating the employment of pupils and students during holidays</b>	1.291	2.070	2.527	2.358	1.995	814
<b>Subsidising the employment of young NEETs*</b>				1.318	2.165	7.557

Source: Agenția Națională pentru Ocuparea Forței de Muncă – Realizările Programului de Ocupare 2014 – 2019, date cuprinse în Strategia Națională pentru Ocuparea Forței de Muncă 2021 – 2027, p. 42

\* Employment measures introduced or modified between 2016 and 2017.

\*\* Work integration bonus.

The justification of the proposed measures also takes into account a number of shortcomings pointed out by other previous studies (European Commission, 2020; Toderita et al., 2019; MFE, 2019; Meirosu et al., 2020; Petrescu et al., 2021, Petrescu et al., 2022). These include: insufficient cooperation between national decision-makers involved in the implementation of measures to increase the employment of NEETs; lack of partnerships with local actors (local authorities, educational institutions, employers); other actors involved in working with young people (youth workers, NGOs, youth centres); insufficient identification of NEETs youth and their needs for the implementation of integrated packages of services; and, skills training without an analysis of labour market needs.

The proposed measures respond primarily to the main problems identified by the evidence used, especially that mentioned by the other European Commission studies in relation to the implementation of the Youth Guarantee during the period 2014–2020. However, the seven proposed measures are quite general and try to respond to the requi-





rements at a European level; insufficient detail is given on how they will be implemented in reality. Although the European discourse focuses quite heavily upon the twin transition and need for skills training in the digital and green fields, there is very little discussion of these issues at national level. Even so, one of the measures foresees the organisation of courses in this field. Furthermore, there is a clear gap between the European discourse on new trends in youth training and the national provisions in this regard.

Although the evidence points to the need to strengthen the partnership with the business sector, it is not clear how this will be achieved, beyond providing subsidies to employers and including apprenticeships and internships in the package of activation measures.

## Conclusions

The introduction of the Reinforced Youth Guarantee in the National Employment Strategy 2021 – 2027 may indicate an internalisation of the European programme into the national public policy framework. However, it is difficult to say that the current measures proposed for the implementation of the Reinforced Youth Guarantee in Romania are fully part of the current practice of the institutions with responsibilities in the youth field. Nevertheless, the proposal of funding the proposed measures from European non-reimbursable funds indicates a reduced ownership of these measures by the relevant national public institutions. However, in the previous national implementation plan

of Youth Guarantee, the proposed measures were more detailed and shared between the responsible ministries, the results achieved are far from those expected according to the latest reports of the European Commission (European Commission, 2020).

The evidence used in the National Employment Strategy 2021–2027 justifies the proposed measures to a large extent; however, there remains no specific measures for young NEETs in rural areas even though they are the most numerous, nor for specific categories of NEETs. Latterly, these include those who have been in this situation for a long period of time, or those who have family problems which prevent them from taking up employment. In the Plan of Measures, indicators are foreseen related to the number of young people with disabilities who are included in the programme and who manage to become employed. This is a novelty compared to the previous Youth Guarantee



programme. It should be mentioned that most of the proposed measures are related to the services and programs offered by the Public Employment Service (ANOFM) and less by the other national actors who should be involved (i.e., Ministry of Education, Ministry of Family, Youth and Equal Opportunities, and Ministry of Economy).

The measures outlined are aimed more at developing tools with which to reach young NEETs more quickly, who will then be taken over by the Public Employment Service to do their needs analysis and offer them integrated packages of services and benefits. It is not clear how the most vulnerable NEETs will be reached, especially those in rural areas.

The implementation plan of the Strategy does not detail the measures, which will be financed from European funds to a large extent. The detailing of the measures and programmes, and the projects through which they will be implemented will remain at the discretion of the Public Employment Services (ANOFM). They will be better defined in the operational programmes which will include axes dedicated to the employment of young NEETs.

## Implications and recommendations

Although the most numerous, young NEETs in rural areas remain the least reached by the proposed measures. Part of the activation measures for youth centres/youth clubs and youth workers network, as well as partnerships with local authorities, aim at reaching as many NEETs as young people as possible and informing them of their options so they can benefit from the activation package.

However, these centres/clubs are not active in rural or disadvantaged areas where the number of young NEETs is highest. There is a need for greater flexibility in employment services when it comes to forming mobile teams to identify and inform these young people. Concurrently, activation measures need to be more diversified and tailor-made in order to help bring young people out of vulnerability and into the labour market or education system.



It is necessary that the proposed measures be accompanied by a clear definition and establishment of responsibilities between institutions in order to ensure their implementation. Furthermore, better collaboration with rural development institutions can help to provide dedicated funding programmes for rural youth.

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## Rural NEET Youth Transition from School to Work: The Role of the Youth Guarantee Initiative in Lithuania

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### Abstract:

The aim of this report is to analyse the role of the Youth Guarantee Initiative in effecting a successful rural NEET youth transition from school to work in Lithuania. According to suggested recommendations given by the European Commission, since 2014 in Lithuania a youth employment support program connected to the Youth Guarantee initiative has been implemented. This programme has involved NEET youth and has utilised primary and secondary interventions. The new action plan for the implementation of the Youth Guarantee initiative was approved in 2021. Currently, three Youth Guarantee Initiative projects are being implemented across Lithuania with the aim of increasing the competencies of young people and helping them return to school or enter the labour market.

Keywords: NEETs, rural youth, school to work transitions, Youth Guarantee.

### Introduction

The aim of this report is to analyse the role of the Youth Guarantee initiative for a rural NEETs' transition from school to work in Lithuania. According to suggested recommendations given by the European Commission, since 2014 in Lithuania, a youth employment support program Youth Guarantee initiative has been implemented. This programme involved NEET youth using primary and secondary interventions. The new action plan for the implementation of the Youth Guarantee initiative was approved in

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2021. Currently, three Youth Guarantee Initiative projects are being implemented in Lithuania. They aim to increase the competencies of young people and help them return to school, or enter the labour market. The primary objectives of the plan are: identification of inactive young people; prevention of inactivity; implementation of initial intervention through early intervention and activation measures; and, increased integration of young people into the labour market.

According to the European Commission, the Youth Guarantee Initiative in Lithuania has been evaluated positively: 'it has made progress since the last review two years ago, since the percentage of NEET's who took up an offer within 4 months of registration has considerably increased. Improvements are expected by the adoption of new tools, including a social assistance mapping tool, and the new forms of youth work....'

Active inclusion of different population groups into the labour market is a priority set in many other strategic policy documents. The 18th Government Programme (2020), is aimed at decreasing unemployment and active inclusion of different population groups into the labour market. These include: youth; women; older persons; and, the long term unemployed. It is foreseen that through higher education institutions and the private sector 'social innovations will be expanded and ensure that older people have the opportunity to work and earn as long as they want and can, and that working conditions are more flexible and responsive to individual needs.' The 2014–2020 Programme for Employment Increase sets a strategic objective to increase employment levels as much as possible. This is to ensure that every person will be able to find a job that meets his or her qualifications and to secure an adequate standard of living. This objective is based on three strategic goals: (1) to promote creation of jobs and labour demand; (2) to improve the match between labour skills and market needs; and, (3) to integrate and retain free labour resources in the labour market.

Amendments to the Law on Employment (2020) foresee an increased funding (indeed, doubled) for VET to acquire high value-added qualifications and competencies, more possibilities for employed persons to participate in VET (i.e., works as a preventative measure), and increased support for employers who employ those who are supported, unemployed, and under apprenticeship contract (from 40 to 70%) in order to make apprenticeship a more attractive measure. There are also amendments to the Law on



Employment (2020–2021) which introduce measures to mitigate the consequences of extreme situations and quarantines owing to the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., wage subsidies, support for the self-employed, job search benefit etc.) It is important to also mention the amendments to the Law on Youth Policy Framework (2019). They foresee provisions regarding street, and mobile youth work embedded in law. There is also an obligation for the municipalities to have an Open Youth Centres and (or) Open Youth Spaces policy.

## Methodology

This report draws upon comprehensive research of the Youth Guarantee Programme implementation process in Lithuania, using a mix method approach including secondary data analysis, and social and public policy document analysis. The analysis of the YGP's implementation in Lithuania involves a secondary data analysis of the Eurostat data on NEETs, of administrative data regarding the number of NEETs that benefit from various measures (from PES, Ministry of Social Security and Labour, Youth Affairs Agency, etc.), and data regarding programmes for NEETs financed by the ESF. This research also utilises an assessment of the YG project "Let's Move" evaluation report carried out by the Youth Affairs Agency in 2021. This evaluation was based on the following data: interviews with the Let's Move project coordinators (N=6), and interviews with the Let's Move project participants (N=30), and some 584 project participants data files. The data file consists of: a participant's questionnaire; a consent to participate in the project form; and, an individual activity plan in the project. Furthermore, there are 29 variables covering socio-demographics (gender, age, education) and various other characteristics. For example: the duration of participation in the project; family's situation; living area (urban vs. rural area); specific challenges being faced; what kind of professional's support was being provided; and, the purpose of taking part in the project alongside associated expectations, etc.

## NEETs profile in Lithuania

The transitions and situation of young people in the labour market are particularly affected by crises: socio-economic crises such as the 2008 financial crisis, crises caused by the Covid-19 pandemic (ILO, 2021; Eurofound, 2021; OECD, 2021) etc. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a negative impact not only on youth employment levels, but also on working conditions more generally. It also negatively affects young people's





search for a job and employability, thereby making them an even more vulnerable group on the labour market (ILO, 2021; Eurofound, 2021; OECD, 2021). Youth employment declined in Lithuania more significantly than the EU27 average. The lockdown in Lithuania, which began in March 2020, was followed by an increase in unemployment of workers of all age groups. However, we observed in particular an increase in unemployment amongst young people in rural areas (i.e., 18 to 35 years old). For example, according to Lithuanian statistics, youth unemployment increased from 6.3% in December 2019 to 18.3% in January 2021. Specifically, the Covid-19 crisis has negatively impacted upon socially vulnerable groups of young people (i.e., unemployed young people, NEET youth, young people in non- standard employment, temporary workers, workers in atypical employment, etc.)

The total employment rate (% population aged 20–24) was 49.5%, with 52.0%, for men and 46.7 for women; for the age group 25–29, the total employment rate was 80.0%, with 80.9%, for men and 78.8%, for women respectively, in 2020 (Eurostat LFS 2022). The unemployment rate of youth aged 15–29 was 11.5% in 2019.

During the first period of lockdown in March–May 2020, 22,5 thousand young unemployed persons registered with the public employment service (PES). In comparison to the same period of 2019, this represented an increase of 33,9%. According to the (PES) administrative data, in June 2020 there were 39,3 thousand of unemployed 16–29 persons registered with the (PES). In 2021, 17.6% of all registered unemployed persons were from the 16–29 age group.

It is evident from the Eurostat statistical data that the level of NEETs in Lithuania has been slightly decreasing over the past 10 years, from 15.3% in 2012 to 12.8% in 2021 (see Table 1). The level of youth neither in employment nor in education or training (i.e., NEETs) in Lithuania is slightly lower than the EU28 average (until 2020, i.e., pre-Brexit).



Table 1. Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex, age and labour status (NEET rates) [EDAT\_LFSE\_20\_\_custom\_3605224], %

Age category 15-34	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>EU-28</b>	17.1	17.2	16.6	16.1	15.6	14.7	14.1	13.6	n/a	n/a
<b>Lithuania</b>	15.3	14.1	13.5	12.6	12.0	11.5	10.6	11.6	13.3	12.8

Source: data extracted on 16.10.2022

The figures for youth (aged 15-19) neither in employment nor in education or training are increasing, from 3.6% in 2011 to 5.7% in 2021. The highest share of the NEETs is in the age group of 25-29 (see Table 2).

Table 2. Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by age (NEET rates) [edat\_lfse\_29], %

Age groups	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>15-19</b>	3.6	3.4	3.1	2.9	2.9	2.3	2.4	2.3	3.2	2.8	5.7
<b>15-29</b>	14.7	13.9	13.7	12.9	11.8	10.7	10.2	9.3	10.9	13.0	12.7
<b>20-24</b>	19.8	18.3	18.0	15.7	14.4	15.3	14.9	13.0	13.4	17.5	16.1
<b>25-29</b>	21.7	20.3	19.4	19.1	17.2	13.4	12.3	11.6	15.1	17.1	15.2
<b>30-34</b>	20.4	19.6	15.3	15.5	14.7	15.3	14.7	13.4	12.9	13.8	12.9

Source: Eurostat – data extracted on 09.05.2022

Some gender differences can be observed. The share of females is higher amongst the NEET youth, and has been on an increasing trend since 2016 (see Table 3).

Table 3. Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex (NEET rates) (edat\_lfse\_29), %

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>Males</b>	22.9	19.4	16.5	15.6	13.9	12.3	11.0	9.3	12.9	15.8	12.2
<b>Females</b>	20.6	21.1	22.4	22.8	20.6	14.7	13.9	14.2	17.5	18.7	18.5

Source: Eurostat – data extracted on 09.05.2022

The share of NEETs is higher in rural areas, than in cities (see Table 4). The share of NEETs in rural areas has increased more than in urban areas due to the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 4. Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by place of residence (edat\_lfse\_29), %

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>Cities</b>	13.4	11.8	11.9	16.2	13.5	9.0	8.2	8.0	11.1	12.2	10.1
<b>Towns</b>	n/a	n/a	19.0	9.2	17.4	17.1	16.4	14.9	20.3	20.4	24.3
<b>Rural</b>	30.7	31.0	28.6	25.3	21.4	17.9	16.4	15.6	18.4	22.7	18.3

Source: Eurostat – data extracted on 09.05.2022

## Implementation of Youth Guarantee Initiative in Lithuania

The Lithuania presented a Youth Guarantee implementation plan on 18 December 2013, which was subsequently updated in May 2014. Lithuania elected to extend coverage of the YG beyond that specified in the Council Recommendation: presently, the scheme is available to all young people aged 15–29 not engaged in employment, education or training. The first aim of the YG Plan is early intervention and activation, motivation of youth; the second aim is enhancing youth integration in the labour market. The system, made up of primary and secondary intervention projects, provides comprehensive, consistent support to young people in a more complex situation, and this includes not



only basic social and job skills and vocational training, but also integration and retention in the labour market.

The new action plan for the implementation of the Youth Guarantee initiative was approved in 2021. The aim of the new plan is 'to ensure that all persons aged 15–29 who are not in employment, education or training receive an offer to work, continue learning (including professional training in the form of an apprenticeship), practice or an internship'. During the implementation of the plan, services are provided to inactive young persons and unemployed persons aged 16–29. Career counselling services can be provided to persons aged 14–29.

By implementing the new IG action plan, the aim is for most attention to be paid to persons with medium and limited employment opportunities, low motivation, those who are already long-term unemployed, or are at risk of becoming unemployed without additional help. Since the long-term unemployed are one of the most socially vulnerable groups in society, and given that they are particularly at risk of becoming socially excluded, the first priority should be to prevent individuals from becoming long-term unemployed.

The responsible authority for the Youth Guarantee implementation in Lithuania is the Ministry of Social Security and Labour. Other actors involved include: the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports; the Ministry of Economy and Innovations, "Enterprise Lithuania" (a non-profit agency under the Ministry of Economy); Municipalities; NGOs; and, the Centre of Information Technologies in Education. Young people could initially register for the YG only through the PES (online or in person); however, since February 2016 inactive NEETs can also register via 51 organisations (i.e., NGOs and various budgetary institutions). In August 2016, a YG dedicated website was launched where young people can complete an online form and are then contacted by the PES coordinators.

#### *Implementation of the projects under the Youth Guarantee Initiative*

Since 2019, a number of different projects have been implemented in Lithuania. The assistance was ensured by providing the necessary services in two closely connected projects: the primary intervention project Discover Yourself, and the secondary intervention project The New Start. Only those young people, who have previously par-



ticipated in the project Discover Yourself were able to participate in the project The New Start. This was done in order to ensure that each NEET youth has access to very diverse services ranging from the development of social skills to participating in one, or even several, active labour market policy measures, such as vocational training and subsidised employment.

The project Discover Yourself was implemented by the Employment Service under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, and the Department of Youth Affairs under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour. The New Start project was implemented by the PES. The implementation of the project Discover Yourself ended in September 2018, and the implementation of the project The New Start ended in November 2019. To ensure sustainability of the YG, new projects for NEETs were implemented as of 2019, namely the primary intervention project Enhancing Youth Social Competencies, and secondary intervention project Promotion of Youth Employment which continue the activities of former YG projects Discover Yourself and The New Start. These projects are implemented by the public employment service, funded by ESF and co-funded by state budgets. The projects will be implemented without partners, but the primary intervention project will employ career counsellors and narrow field specialists (e.g., psychologists, legal consultants etc.) who will work directly with NEETs in municipalities. The Enhancing Youth Social Competencies project ended in April, 2022 and the Promotion of Youth Employment project will be implemented until December 2022. The aim of the project is to reduce the number of NEET youth aged 16–29. The main project activities include: the participants of the project's target group participation in vocational training; apprenticeships; internships; informal recognition of competences; support for the acquisition of work skills; and, subsidised employment. These are carried out according to standards determined by Articles 37, 38, 39, 39(1), 42 and 43 of the Law on Employment of the Republic of Lithuania.

#### *Evaluation of the YG Let's Move project*

The aim of the Let's Move project (2019–2023) (implemented by the Agency of Youth Affairs together with partner organisations) is to reduce the number of unemployed, uneducated, unrepresented, and non-registered PES youth by implementing measures of activation and motivation. Particular attention will be paid to the young people with fewer or limited opportunities: young people from families with difficulties; young people



that have problems with law enforcement or detainees; youth growing up in foster homes and/or those who have left a care institution; those who suffer from low income and other deprivation; and, youth with addictions. Based on the specificity of the target group, the minimum working time with youth will be 4 months and may last up to 24 months. In each instance, this will depend on the needs of the young person in question.

By implementing the Let's Move project, each YG coordinator actively cooperates with various parties: local youth coordinators; child rights protection services; social workers; case managers; inter-departmental coordinators; educational institutions; health institutions; territorial police commissions; PES; care institutions; open youth centres; open youth spaces; representatives from youth organisations; and, communities, home associations, probation services etc. Particular attention is paid to the search and identification of young NEET and it is planned that searches for NEETs and their identification will occupy roughly 30% of YG coordinator's working time. In terms of an active search for youth in need of support and activation, elements of street work and mobile work with young people are used, e.g., outreach in residential areas, especially those that do not have youth work infrastructure in place in order to identify the NEETs and meet their needs; direct work with young people in informal youth gathering places (i.e., public spaces, streets, parks, cafes, sports grounds, clubs, etc.); and, work with youth groups through a variety of activities that help to identify the NEET target group.

The main activities of the Let's Move project include: identification of NEETs; motivational assessments; development of the social and working capacity of young people; development of personal, intermediate, and professional competences; development of competitive competences required for reintegration into educational and labour market systems (via consultations with professionals i.e., legal, financial consultants, career specialists, psychologists, social workers etc.); and, youth voluntary service.

The evaluation of the project Let's Move was carried out In July–November, 2021. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of the Let's Move project and its impact upon the project target group. The goals of this assessment are: to monitor the positive changes in the situations of young people; to determine which measures (activities) applied in the project contributed the most to the positive change of the target group; and, to identify the expectations of young people for measures aimed at NEET



young people. Based on the evaluation results, these are then used to prepare recommendations for the implementation of national youth policy measures for NEET youth.

The evaluation study<sup>13</sup> used a mixed research strategy, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. Data was collected using structured interviews and document analysis methods. The following data was collected: interviews with the Let's Move project coordinators (N=6); interviews with the participants (N=30) of the Let's Move project, namely young people who have received services; and, 584 project participants data files. The data file consists of a participant's questionnaire, consent to participate in the project form, and an individual activity plan in the project. Furthermore, there are 29 variables including socio-demographic (gender, age, education) and other characteristics which are taken into consideration. These include: the duration of participation in the project; family situation; living area (urban vs. rural area); what challenges were being faced; what kind of professional support was being provided; and, the purpose of taking part in the project and associated expectations etc.

Analysis of participants' data files revealed that 41% of the participants are female, and 59% are male. The majority of the participants had secondary education 43%, and at least basic education 39%. Only 5% had tertiary education and 13% were with primary education only. The average age of the Let's Move project participants was 22 years. Duration of participation in the project was, on average, 5 months. The majority of the participants are from a socially vulnerable environment, i.e., at risk of poverty 60.6%; long term unemployed 24.4%; early leavers from education 14.9%; having a criminal record 9.5%; and, different addictions 7.2%.

The participants of the project indicated that they most frequently lack social skills and motivation, however, the majority improved these gaps by participating in the project. The social background of participants is primarily families at the risk of poverty and families with difficulties. Prior experience in the labour market applied to only one third of the participants. Amongst the most important project results were that the participants had indicated improved social skills, motivation, integration into the labour market, and educational acquisition (81.9%), and an improvement in interpersonal competencies (14.5%). The results of the analysis revealed that the level of education

13 Project Let's move evaluation report (2021). Youth Affairs Agency.



attained had the most significant impact on the successful completion of the Youth Guarantee Initiative project. The higher the level of education, the more likely it is that the participants achieve the results of the project, namely return to school or successfully enter the labour market. Socio-demographic characteristics like gender and age were observed as statistically insignificant outcomes in the project. Deviant behaviour and different kinds of additions were noticed as particularly important risk factors: these interfere with successful finalisation of Youth Guarantee Initiative projects. The presence of social risks is a major factor undermining achievement of the project goals. Finally, the general effectiveness of the project was not affected by the duration of participation in the project, but rather more by services received (or provided) during the project i.e., the more hours devoted to developing young people's social skills and competencies, the more often they achieved the results of the project.

The analysis has also disclosed not only individual obstacles for participation in the labour market, but also considerable rural urban differences, e.g., structural problems. Young people in rural areas are in a less privileged situation than young people living in more urbanised environments. They face many disadvantages in terms of: employment; access to basic services; transportation; lack of decent employment opportunities/decent workplaces for youth in rural areas; huge regional disparities (the smaller the region, the higher demand for low-skilled labour, as well as lower employer professional requirements for future employees); illegal work being widespread in rural areas; the infrastructure of youth services being unevenly developed; and, a lack of transportation as well as other necessary facilities.

## Conclusions

Employment of young women and men is a major issue in both rural areas and small towns across Lithuania. Almost two third of the NEET youth aged 16–29 who participated in the Youth Guarantee Initiative had indicated that they do not have any previous work experience. Young women constitute a larger portion amongst NEET youth. The continuation of the implementation of Youth Guarantee Initiative projects is very important because the system, made up of primary and secondary intervention projects, also provides comprehensive, consistent support to young people in more complex situations. This includes not only basic social and job skills and vocational training, but also integration and retention in the labour market. Measures of early intervention and



secondary intervention ensure effective implementation of the YG. The sustainability of YG measures is achieved by preparing new projects on the basis of recommendations which are presented by internal and external evaluators and serve to ensure that there is no significant gap between the old projects and the new ones.

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## 4. Disparities/communalities

This report considers five case studies regarding youth unemployment in different countries. Latterly, these mainly focus upon the problems that young people presently face in accessing the labour market and how Active Labour Market policies operate in Poland, Italy, Romania, Lithuania, and Montenegro. Whilst some papers present a case study in one country and explore the need for a deep analysis on the employment of (for instance) people with disabilities, other studies aim to provide a comparative view on the youth unemployment situation in different countries, or an analysis of how the Reinforced Youth Guarantee is being implemented.

The case study of Montenegro offers an interesting perspective concerning the fact that existing policies are generally aimed at unemployed youth yet do not explicitly target NEETs and their needs. Even though there are many programs and policies aimed at improving the situation of young people in the labour market by increasing their knowledge and skills, the youth unemployment rate increased up to 32.5% in some instances, and the participation of NEETs was 26.5% (15–29) in 2021. The Covid-19 crisis impacted heavily upon the economic activity, and especially on those jobs occupied by young people. Considering that the percentage of the NEET population is growing in Montenegro, thinking about how reactivation measures are effectively working, as well as developing new programs targeting the NEET youth populations by fostering training programs, is necessary.

Considering Poland, we find a recent analysis of the participation of people with disabilities in employment activation programs. Authors analyse working status, job stability, and job satisfaction of people with disabilities six months after participation in the programme. To that end, they found significant differences between various categories. For example, 80% of people with disabilities who took part in employment programmes conducted by a national NGO in Poland between 2020 and 2021, and who entered the labour market afterwards, retained employment with the same employer under the same contract. Most participants reported good working conditions and general satisfaction with their job, however, they were less satisfied from the point of view of payment which only reached the minimum. Comparing urban and rural young people with disabilities they found that those living in rural areas have worse access to good jobs and public services. However, the case proposed by Poland demonstrates



how focusing on a specific category, in this case people with disabilities, can lead to positive results when combating unemployment. Their comparative study of the participant's employment situation 6 months after the project demonstrated reassuring results from an employment perspective, although much work still needs to be done to match wages with those of the general working population.

In April 2013, the European Commission launched the Youth Guarantee program, which saw some positive effects on the youth unemployment trend. With the YG implementation, the number of jobless youths aged 15–29 decreased in 2019 (12.6%). A key role in expanding the EU Youth Guarantee (YG) program was played by the Public Employment Services (PES). These play the primary role in helping with labour market integration of young jobseekers.

More specifically, with regards to the different approach or access to services that young people today may encounter, is the third case study which aimed to analyse the likelihood of finding jobs based on the search channel used. Latterly, the focus was upon the likelihood of finding a job through Public Employment Services for young people in Italy, Poland, and Romania. In the three different countries considered, young people prefer to use different channels to find a job. Despite the importance of PES, many young people prefer to search for employment through friends and relatives in each of the countries. Public employment services are more preferred in Poland. However, more than half of young people in all countries look for a job directly through an employer. Moreover, private employment agencies are not prevalent in any nation, and young people who choose PES as a channel to find a job experience a different probability of success, according to gender, age, education level, and the country where they live. A common result in all three countries considered is that females, younger people, and lower-educated individuals are less likely to search for employment through PES, whilst those from rural areas and with job experience are more likely to use PES. The results suggest that there has been a shift in perspective over the years regarding how young people perceive public employment offices in different countries.

The fourth and fifth case studies focus respectively on the implementation of the Youth Guarantee program in two specific countries: Lithuania and Romania. In both cases, the share of NEET youths is higher in rural areas than in cities, and a large part of this contingent is represented by young women. Both contributions place emphasis upon the



relevance of programs, such as the Youth Guarantee. Whilst in the Romanian case the implementation of the Youth Guarantee lacks infrastructure in rural areas (e.g., youth centres) and a more personalised approach towards youth, in Lithuania the authors emphasise the role of the Youth Guarantee Initiative for a successful rural NEET youth transition from school to the labour market in Lithuania.

## 5. Implications and recommendations

When implementing the Reinforced Youth Guarantee, it is necessary to clearly define goals, actions, and results of the interventions. It is necessary to assure not only a holistic approach, but also the coherence of interventions by ensuring the continuity and sustainability of implemented projects etc. Regular assessment and monitoring of interventions should be provided.

By planning and implementing different Reinforced Youth Guarantee interventions and activation projects for better support of rural NEET youth in their transition from education to work, it is very important to take into account challenges related to young people (e.g., disabilities, migrant background, family situation, competences, lack of motivation and trust, etc.)

A more effective implementation of the measures of the Youth Guarantee scheme at the national level relies upon the quality of cooperation between different actors involved from national, regional and local levels, namely educational institutions, PES, NGOs etc. Through the implementation of the Youth Guarantee scheme at the national level, access to public employment services and various other public services in rural areas should be improved in most EU and non-EU countries given that there is a major gap between urban and rural areas and that the number of young NEETs in rural areas is significantly higher. Without access to employment services and integrated packages of employment activation services in rural areas, it remains difficult for young NEETs in rural areas to successfully enter and/or be included in the labour market. To that end, there is a need to apply an effective communication strategy to identify those young people in need in rural areas and to adapt the services to their specific needs. In this sense, it is important to have evidence regarding rural NEETs, which includes their needs, capacities, and challenges in attempting to reach out to employment services. Without this evidence, it is difficult not only to develop the existing services, but also innovate in this area and thereby elaborate and adopt the best public policy measures.



COST Action CA18213  
Rural NEET Youth Network:  
Modeling the risks underlying rural  
NEETs social exclusion



WORKING GROUP 3  
**Employment services &  
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COST Action CA18213:  
RURAL NEET YOUTH

Employment and Employment Services  
for Rural NEETs: Initiatives for tackling  
NEETs' and rural NEETs' employment  
issues