

Consultation

Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee

The European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI) is a confederation of more than 40 national and European trade union organisations from 20 European countries, with a total of more than 5 million individual members. Founded in 1990, CESI advocates improved employment conditions for workers in Europe and a strong social dimension in the EU. CESI's particular strength lies in the public sector but CESI also represents private sector workers. Most of CESI's affiliates are employed in the fields of central, regional and local administration, education, training and research, security and justice, healthcare, postal services and telecommunications, defence and transport. The CESI Youth, founded in 2013, brings together the youth organisations of CESI's members and takes part actively in CESI's social dialogue and policy advocacy work.

As a preliminary remark, CESI deeply deplores not having been invited to participate in a dedicated consultation hearing on March 4 organised by the European Commission. Notwithstanding the central role of the horizontal European social partners, CESI believes that, not least if the European Commission wants to give flesh to its stated objective to strengthen social dialogue at the European level, it should be more sensitive and responsible, using its organisational power to make sure that members from all European trade union families and sectors are formally invited to send at least one delegate to hearings which address topics that are of significant concern to them.

1. Do you share the above analysis of the most significant challenges for young people in their first transitions to the labour market and of areas where the Youth Guarantee could be reinforced?

CESI, representing many young persons in search for promising employment and career prospects, generally agrees with the challenges outlined in the European Commission's background note for a dedicated hearing with the European horizontal social partners on February 20 2020 on reinforcing the youth guarantee and therefore agrees with the need to respond to the challenges with a reinforcement of the Youth Guarantee scheme.

The Juncker Commission's legacy to restore youth employment rates at least to the numbers before the financial crisis has not been fulfilled. Currently, more than one in five youngsters in the EU is struggling with the transition from education to work, without much security and predictability for their future work life.

For CESI, a reinforcement of the Youth Guarantee should in particular circle around a further promotion of social inclusion and assistance to the most disadvantaged among young people, above all the NEETs. This would help them further escape a vicious circle of precariousness and assist them in avoiding prospects of long-term unemployment and social exclusion. And if the Youth Guarantee is to be deployed as an effective and sustainable tool against social exclusion and youth unemployment, then public policies need to take a horizontal and cross-sector approach.

The Youth Guarantee should also be considered as one element only in the fight against youth unemployment – It is a reactive tool needed to try to repair damages which were caused by insufficient preventative public investments in social inclusion, quality early childhood education and care as well as primary and secondary education. For long, CESI has advocated higher levels of public spending in public care and education, which is a crucial economic investment for the future and represents lower costs than reactive ex-post remedies.¹ Indeed, youth unemployment is caused not only by economic challenges but also by a plethora of other factors including in the areas of skills mismatches between education systems and labour markets, a lacking appreciation of VET and the skilled non-academic professions as promising career paths, broader life risks related to increasing social disparities and, sometimes, a lack of access to/pick-up of public services such as healthcare. In this context, to accompany the Youth Guarantee, preventative in youth policies are needed to minimise, in the future, risks of social exclusion, lacking educational attainment and consequently youth unemployment in the first place. Young persons should be looked at in a preventative manner and through a life-cycle lens, starting with in early childhood education and care and ending with the integration into labour markets with access to quality jobs.

2. How could the Youth Guarantee better support employability of young people in rural / remote areas?

Young people between 15-29 years old represent between 15% and 20% of the population in the EU member states. They are not only a significant societal group, but also a very heterogeneous one. Hence, there is a strong need to develop diverse and targeted initiatives.

Generally, schools and educational institutions alone do not have the means to stay up-to-date with the state of evolution in the labour markets and the skills required therein. Industry and employer organisations do however have an overview. Plus, employee organisations such as trade unions have the expertise on how educational standards and quality assurance schemes could work and be ensured. This is why CESI generally advocates tri-partite approaches, bringing together employer organisations, trade unions and public authorities and educational institutions, not only for the implementation of the Youth Guarantee but also in the context of broader and further policies and measures to achieve better results in the transition of young people from education to work.

¹ <https://www.cesi.org/cesi-social-platform-eurodiaconia-continue-to-drive-the-agenda-for-more-public-social-investments-in-the-member-states/>

More career guidance in schools should also be promoted with the support of the public employment service where counsellors can give young persons competent advice about programmes funded under the Youth Guarantee.

In order to guarantee the proper roll-out of the Youth Guarantee specifically in rural and remote areas, CESI advocates an enhanced consideration of and role for the Committee of the Regions and interactions with sectoral social partners and trade unions locally present in regions and at company/employer level. CESI also stresses the particular role of public local administrations, which need to be engaged and, for this, be financially sufficiently equipped and dispose of the necessary number of staff, well-trained in the procedure and governance of the Youth Guarantee. To this end, specific training should also be provided to public sector workers in local and regional administration.

CESI also stresses the role that further communication and awareness-raising campaigns about the Youth Guarantee can play in efforts to reach out to young people especially in rural and remote regions. This is particularly true for online tools and the social media.

Beyond the rural/urban cleavage, for the Youth Guarantee to be an effective instrument to help young people with education-to-job transitions, CESI supports the idea to extend the maximum age of a person eligible to benefit from a Youth Guarantee placement to 29 years. The current maximum age of 25 years means that the large group of young people that has not yet completed its professional degree in its mid-20s is outside the scope of the Youth Guarantee.

3. How could the Youth Guarantee best respond to the challenges of the labour market, in particular the need to provide young people with the skills in demand (e.g. digital, green skills, cognitive skills, STEM skills)?

Since the Youth Guarantee is about short-term employment and, ideally, a subsequent transition to more permanent employment, the Youth Guarantee is in fact in a very useful instrument for employers to be flexible and offer new work opportunities in areas that are likely to be of high demand, and to form and hire young persons in this regard.

CESI notes that there is a need for more innovation and creativity in the current educational systems. Training and life-long learning should be provided to educators, too. CESI also advocates further investment in non-formal ways of learning for young persons, such as vocational and educational training as well as apprenticeships.

CESI also emphasises that skills in demand do not only relate to the green or ICT/STEM areas. Also human-centred jobs, such as in the care and education sectors, are in severe labour shortages in many member states. Moreover, regardless of efforts by the education systems to teach skills that are currently in high demand in the business world, school education should not only be utilitarian but continue to focus on forming responsible citizens for the next generations, thereby cementing tolerant, inclusive and democratically-minded societies.

4. How could the quality of Youth Guarantee interventions, in particular employment offers, be improved further – both directly and indirectly?

Directly, the Youth Guarantee should consider the possibility of more projects being run by youth organisations or young people themselves, with close involvement of trade unions – not only to reach out to other young people but to support a creative young start-up mentality.

The improvement of the Youth Guarantee scheme could also be reflected in a reduction of bureaucracy, since implementing organisations often only have limited staffing resources for this task.

Also directly, CESI strongly advocates the need for decent remuneration of all types of internships, traineeships or apprenticeships. A decent and fair remuneration is not only important to fight social exclusion and in-work poverty at an early stage, but equally important to keep young people engaged in transitioning to the labour market and further develop their skills. Their taking-up of a Youth Guarantee should not depend on the ability of the parents to fund their lives. In this regard, a reinforced Youth Guarantee could include a wage top-up to incentivise the employers to hire young workers through this programme. The Youth Guarantee could also include a financial bonus for a company to offer a (permanent) work contract upon the completion of a Youth Guarantee placement of a young person.

The Youth Guarantee could also further help tackle long-term youth unemployment through career re-orientation and innovative educational initiatives, in order to help young persons orienting themselves on the labour markets.

Indirectly, the Youth Guarantee can have an important role in fostering a culture of social responsibility within businesses and among employers. Furthermore, by introducing financial compensations, the Youth Guarantee promotes a culture of independent, responsible and engaged young citizens, ready to take ownership of their lives – which is rather difficult to happen if they remain financially dependent on their families.

5. In which ways will social partners contribute to and support effective implementation of the reinforced Youth Guarantee?

Social partners are in a privileged position to ensure the success of the Youth Guarantee, given their direct access to and contact with young workers, their know-how and their network of youth and labour market stakeholders and institutions.

CESI advocates a more inclusive and systematic involvement of all stakeholders to optimise the implementation of the Youth Guarantee at all levels. In this sense, especially trade union and their youth organisations are fundamental to the communication of the Youth Guarantee opportunities to the young people. On the other hand, these organisations also collect feedback and identify obstacles and challenges that young people face in connection to the Youth Guarantee. In this context, they can help policy makers make the Youth Guarantee more effective. They are therefore an important asset to help make it a success.