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Guarantee: Key Messages
- *Endorsement*

With a view to their endorsement at the Council (EPSCO) meeting on 9 March 2026, delegations will find below the Key Messages of the Employment Committee review of the implementation of the Youth Guarantee, as transmitted by this Committee (EMCO).

The country-specific conclusions of the Employment Committee review of the implementation of the Youth Guarantee can be found in document 6184/26 ADD 1.

**EMCO review of the implementation of the
2020 Council Recommendation on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee**

Key Messages for the Council

1. Introduction

The **Employment Committee (EMCO)** is tasked with monitoring the progress made in the implementation of the **Council Recommendation on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee**.¹ In 2021, the Committee focused on the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 crisis on young people, reflecting on the steps made in all Member States towards a more systematic and coherent approach in tackling youth unemployment and inactivity, in spite of the pandemic. In 2023, the Committee noted an increase in the efficiency of activation programmes, with the share of timely and positive exits from Youth Guarantee schemes improving compared to previous years.

In 2025, the multilateral review focused on the identification of structural and institutional challenges that prevent the sustainable integration of young people not in employment, education, or training (NEETs) into the labour market. The review showed that, when it comes to addressing the challenges of both unemployed and inactive NEETs, several Member States are still primarily focusing on traditional activation and labour market support provided mainly by the Public Employment Services (PES). While acknowledged as valid and important explanations for the inactivity of NEETs, fewer measures are being taken to address obstacles such as care responsibilities, housing affordability, lack of access to affordable transport, illness, and disabilities.

¹ In 2016, 2018 and 2019, the Council (EPSCO) endorsed a set of Key Messages prepared by EMCO on the basis of its monitoring of the 2013 *Council Recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee*. These underlined the importance of prevention, early intervention, strong partnerships within Member States, as well as the crucial role of Public Employment Services. Since 2021, monitoring in EMCO has continued on the implementation of the 2020 *Council Recommendation on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee*.

2. Progress achieved

All Member States have made progress in implementing the reinforced Youth Guarantee, in particular those where large gaps remain, although progress is at different stages across countries and regions and is also influenced by broader macroeconomic developments. The impact of demographic trends is visible: as younger cohorts decline, the number of NEETs is also decreasing. At the same time, the increasing proportion of inactive NEETs (compared to unemployed NEETs) among potential beneficiaries and the still low coverage of Youth Guarantee schemes in some cases indicate a significant untapped activation potential. Indeed, while the best-performing NEETs achieve positive exits from national schemes, many inactive young people are not yet entering these programmes, suggesting a potential need for reshaping these schemes.

To respond to these trends, Member States reported on numerous reforms during the review, reflecting ongoing efforts and continuous commitment to fully implement the Youth Guarantee. Most notably, these included actions to strengthen PES, vocational education and training (VET), and skills matching, as well as to dismantle remaining barriers to employment. Despite widespread commitment, the review pointed to gaps in strategic planning, particularly the limited use of clearly defined objectives, targets, and systematic impact assessments at both project and programme levels. Addressing the lack of comprehensive strategic design and impact evaluations at the national level is therefore key to effectively support all NEET target groups.

Significant differences in coverage rates remain between Member States, with all working to improve outreach and awareness. Engaging inactive NEETs - particularly those not registered in any system - remains a persistent challenge. The ongoing shift from unemployment to inactivity among this target group has made these young people increasingly hard to reach, especially in remote or rural areas. Notable gender differences persist in some Member States, and specific attention continues to be required for groups such as young Roma, migrants, young women, youth in rural areas, persons with disabilities, and young people with health problems, especially related to mental health. Overall, the reviews highlight the challenge of combining outreach with integrated service delivery: while locally integrated approaches can provide tailored services and foster cooperation among institutions, stakeholders, and service providers, centralised coordination is needed to ensure that all regions are covered and that services are delivered consistently.

Mapping of NEETs and available services has improved in most Member States, with many reporting good sources and instruments. However, the challenge is to address data protection rules in order to efficiently cooperate and exchange personal data between institutions or services, highlighting a complex trade-off between outreach and privacy. Delegates emphasized the importance of cross-sectoral approaches and locally integrated service delivery, balancing tailored, high-quality local services with central coordination to ensure equitable access across regions. Local partnerships can foster innovative solutions involving multiple societal actors, though they also present coordination challenges.

3. Remaining challenges

Institutional challenges hindering the effective delivery of Youth Guarantee schemes are shared across most Member States. These include skills mismatches, including insufficient alignment of education and training with labour market demands; health issues, particularly mental health, acting as significant barriers for many NEETs; limited infrastructure support, such as the availability of childcare services and public transportation; as well as persistent socio-economic challenges, including housing affordability.

In addition to these institutional obstacles, young people continue to face structural and personal barriers that affect their access to the Youth Guarantee schemes. These include low qualification levels, requiring reskilling or upskilling; labour markets still unable to meet the expectations of better-qualified youth; negative attitudes of most employers towards young people; as well as disadvantaged socio-economic background, such as young mothers, Roma, migrants, or youth with disabilities.

To address these barriers, Member States have implemented many prevention measures, including increased cooperation with schools, better information provision, and targeted outreach. In this context, the Youth Guarantee remains a crucial policy tool for equipping young people with essential skills, including both basic and social skills. Some Member States rely heavily on EU funding, including the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), making the integration of effective services into national budgets essential to ensure long-term sustainability.

4. Conclusions

Overall, the review highlighted that - despite widespread commitment - further efforts are needed to strengthen coordination among actors within the Youth Guarantee ecosystem. This includes improving data exchange, integrating services across sectors, addressing persisting structural and personal barriers, and ensuring long-term financial sustainability. Promising practices identified during the review that could be scaled up across Member States include innovative local partnerships, the use of digital tools such as artificial intelligence, mobility allowances to support training, and targeted support for vulnerable groups. Delegates emphasized the importance of providing even more targeted and personalised support to young people, alongside more systematic strategic planning and impact evaluations to measure the effectiveness of Youth Guarantee schemes.
