



Youth unemployment: can lessons be learnt from the Youth Guarantee in Europe?

*by Allan Päll**

Youth unemployment has blighted young people's lives in Europe for several years now. Despite the fact that many European economies have started to recover, young people are still, in too many cases, not able to find good, sustainable long-term work. If they are able to find a job, it is too often "precarious" – meaning that they are on a short-term contract, or maybe they have no contract at all and have very little in the way of protection, wages or rights.

But what has been done to tackle this? There has been progress and positive steps made towards tackling youth unemployment, but these are too often piecemeal and progress varies hugely between different countries. One of these positive steps has been the development and implementation of the Youth Guarantee. This is the policy of offering any young person up to the age of 25 a good quality job, training, or re-training within four months of being made unemployed or leaving formal education.

The Youth Guarantee scheme paves the way for re-thinking the school-to-work transition with the involvement of many different actors. This means offering a tailored and individualised service to young people looking for a job. There is also a consequent need to invest in Public Employment Services, creating strong partnerships between young people, social partners, employers, educational authorities and governments.

Since the adoption of the EU Council recommendation on the Youth Guarantee in April 2013, European Union Member States have been working on the design and implementation of such schemes as well as on the way they plan to use European funding for them.

Some Member States are particularly advanced in this respect and others can learn a great deal from them. Some, for example, have developed a cross-sectorial approach and have established Public-Private-People Partnerships. As part of the Youth Guarantee programme, some cities in Finland have, for instance, successfully developed "one-stop-shops" (called 'Ohjaamo') to provide counselling and guidance services for young people under the age of 30. The key to their success seems to be not only the proximity to young people but also the cross-sectorial approach, allowing more accurate solutions and opportunities better tailored to young people's needs.

Other countries in Europe and indeed in Latin America can learn from such good practice. One Finnish example stands out: The Petra project in the Finnish city of



Vantaa¹ aims to create a link between employers and job applicants by giving personal guidance but also information about apprenticeships, education and job offers as well as health counselling and financial guidelines, which necessarily implies the involvement of public authorities, education providers and 200 companies.

The European Youth Forum believes that these kinds of Public-Private-People Partnerships can bring about real change for young people in Europe and that the role of national, regional and local authorities is crucial to encourage this cooperative working. These are the kind of lessons that other areas of the world can also draw from to help tackle youth unemployment, something which affects young people globally.

Another important lesson is that, when designing ways to get young people back into work, it makes sense to involve young people in this process. One general problem regarding the design and implementation of the Youth Guarantee is that there has been little consultation with youth organisations. Everyone agrees that there is a real difficulty to reach out to young people – according to Eurobarometer² (Flash Eurobarometer of the European Parliament – 2014), only two out of ten young people have heard of the scheme! We believe that youth organisations and young representatives have a role to play to design, monitor and communicate this measure which will have to fit specific needs of young people.

Last, but certainly not least, targeted schemes, such as the Youth Guarantee, will not tackle the youth unemployment crisis alone. They have to be part of a coherent set of policies and a broader investment programme in Public Employment Services, education and training system, social protection schemes, social innovation and entrepreneurship.... The key here lies in macro-economic policies encouraging sustainable growth leading to durable solutions for the younger generation. We would urge governments in all parts of the world to prioritise young people's rights and to help them to lead the autonomous lives that they deserve and a key step to this is to ensure that they have access to good quality jobs. Perhaps the Youth Guarantee, and the EU's experience so far of its design and implementation can be "food for thought" for the Latin American and Caribbean region in tackling the common challenge of youth unemployment.

¹http://www.vantaa.fi/work_and_business_services/_en/_en_petra_employment_and_education_for_the_young

²http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/eurobarometre/2014/youth/eb_395_synthesis_youth_en.pdf



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This paper is a contribution to March 2015 edition of the EU- LAC Foundation on Youth Employment. This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the EU- LAC Foundation.