

2016



Youth Guarantee – opportunities for young Roma Findings of a small scale field research in six EU countries

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February 2016

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This publication has been produced with financial support from the European Union's Programme for Employment and Social Innovation "EaSI" (2014-2020). The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission.



Youth unemployment is one of Europe's big challenges. For young Roma, it is often a persistent struggle: for many, the impact of the economic slowdown is compounded by common aspects of Roma social exclusion, including substandard education and direct or indirect discrimination on the labour market.

Many young Roma will formally fall under the umbrella of the Youth Guarantee: according to the FRA, fifty-eight percent of Roma aged 16 to 24 in the eleven countries they surveyed are not in employment, education or training (NEETs)¹. The Youth Guarantee may help them find a job or obtain the skills needed on the labour market. It is unfortunately likely, however, that young Roma will face (indirect) discrimination in employment initiatives such as these. From a study of Roma employment patterns in Europe² we know, for instance, that employment offices often lack the capacity to reach Roma.

ERGO Network, in cooperation with member and partner organizations, executed a small scale research into the Youth Guarantee in six EU countries: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Spain. The aim was to investigate whether the Youth Guarantee is successful in reaching out to and creating meaningful opportunities for young Roma.

Main findings

The following main findings emerged from the research across (a majority of) the countries covered:

1. Insufficient capacity of Public Employment Services (PESs) to help candidates properly. The information for and communication to potential beneficiaries is often scarce or unclear. Whereas the PESs are the main access points to YG measures, there may be strong social barriers for Roma youth to enter the PESs.
2. Complicated and cumbersome registration procedures pose a real obstacle for potential beneficiaries. This affects in particular those who lack basic understanding of administrative language or IT skills, which are often taken for granted in registration procedures.
3. Lack of sustained efforts to encourage participation of those farthest from the labour market, the discouraged and hard to reach. They are most unlikely to register on their own initiative and have a strong need for individual support, which is usually absent. As a result, opportunities are currently not directed to those that need them most.
4. Little or no individual attention or support for beneficiaries. None of the test persons were given a 'personalised approach'; only few of the opportunities that were being offered to test persons could qualify as a "good quality offer"³.
5. Lack of quality or relevance of the trainings offered: the trainings provided sometimes prepare for jobs that are not available in the beneficiaries' regions or teach skills that are not being demanded in the labour market. In some countries covered (Spain, Hungary) there are big differences in the training offers depending on the region.

¹ Fundamental Rights Agency, 2014, Roma survey – Data in focus. Poverty and employment: the situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States.

² Vera Messing, 2014, Patterns of Roma employment in Europe. NEUJOBS Policy Brief D.19.4

³ As described in 'Frequently Asked Questions on the Youth Guarantee', European Commission April 2015.

6. There were no strong indications from the field research that Roma were being treated unfairly. Nonetheless, some of the findings mentioned may give rise to indirect discrimination, as they may disproportionately affect the socially excluded.

Although the evidence of the research is necessarily anecdotal, given its limited scope, the findings clearly show that the implementation of the Youth Guarantee is patchy and is yet to make a systematic difference for Roma youth.

Country specific findings

In addition to the main findings, which apply to all or most of the countries covered by this study, the following country-specific findings are of importance:

In Bulgaria, there are strong indications that incentive schemes for employers are not effective in creating sustainable employment opportunities for NEETs; they are rather treated by businesses as opportunities to cheaply add labor on a purely temporary basis. Implementation of an early warning system for school drop-outs that is envisaged as part of the YG implementation plan is delayed.

In Czech Republic, the most relevant measures for hard to reach groups will only be implemented from early 2016, so few conclusions can be drawn on their effect at this point. The lack of involvement of NGOs with experience in the field of youth work, however, may affect the participation rate of the hard to reach. The field study further indicates that few meaningful opportunities are on offer for those with only basic education.

In Hungary, the Youth Guarantee's implementation is being phased in, with a first phase ongoing at the time of the field study. In this phase, the YG targets primarily long term unemployed who are already registered at the PES. There are few measures foreseen to reach out to new entrants. The opportunities offered to the test persons were relevant and meaningful, though there are indications that such relatively positive experiences may not reflect the situation in other regions in Hungary.

In Romania, there is a lack of coordination between the main actors involved in the Youth Guarantee implementation plan. The PESs are supposed to play an important role as access point to the YG measures, but lag behind in creating necessary capacity. There are consequently big regional differences in the opportunities being offered: in one of the two regions covered in the field study, implementation of the main initiatives had not started altogether, save for a few small scale pilots. In the other region, there is a specific project reaching out to Roma beneficiaries, but the field research revealed clear indications of irregularities in the trainings being offered, including the selection procedure of beneficiaries. This points to a lack of government oversight of the selection and implementation of partnerships.

In Slovakia, test persons were redirected to a national web portal by the PES but were not given any additional support or information. PES staff have insufficient information about the YG. Specific measures to reach out to Roma through existing community centers are envisaged in the national YG plan, but implementation is lagging behind.

In Spain, the Youth Guarantee has not been widely implemented. On top of that, young Roma find difficulties and limitations accessing YG due to lack of information and dissemination of the opportunities offered, complexity of the registration process given

the requirement of IT skills to access the web platform of PES and lack of quality job offers adapted to their profile.

Recommendations

Based on our findings, we recommend the European Commission to include the following elements in its mid-term review of the YG:

1. Close existing capacity gaps of the PESs so they can effectively take up their role as central access point to the YG. Encourage involvement of experienced civil society organisations partners to identify, motivate and support hard to reach individuals: school drop-outs, long term unemployed, and youth from isolated and socially excluded localities.
2. Increase and reorient the information and awareness raising of the YG among all relevant actors, including the youngsters themselves, civil society organizations, private sector, public bodies involved, etc. Clear coordination between all these actors is necessary to achieve a multiplier effects concerning the dissemination and outreach to the target groups.
3. Remove (indirect) barriers in the registration process; make it more flexible and easier, taking into account the reality of the situation of its target group in terms of skills and competences. Ensure individual support for those who might have more difficulties or encounter barriers.
4. Reorient training approaches to special efforts to provide those youngsters farthest from the labour market with training opportunities, in order to compensate the disadvantages with the rest of the population.
5. Fullfill the promise of a personalized approach for all registered candidates..

Methodology

The research was coordinated by ERGO Network. The research questions were:

1. To what extent does the YG programme create the conditions to reach young Roma?
2. In practice, do the outreach efforts and YG instruments create meaningful opportunities for young Roma?
3. In practice, are young Roma treated differently than non-Roma with a similar background?

In each of the countries, national Youth Guarantee implementation plans were explored in a desk study phase, during in which particular attention was paid to outreach efforts towards marginalized groups, and, where applicable, actions particularly targeted at Roma; as recommended by the European Commission.

In the field study phase, a small number of youngsters (ranging from 2 to 7 per country, both Roma and non-Roma) who fulfilled the eligibility criteria for the Youth Guarantee in their countries were recruited as test persons. Test persons (in each country Roma and non-Roma with similar backgrounds (age, educational status, employment status) received a brief training about the youth guarantee and consequently registered at Public Employment Services (PES)

with a view to benefiting from measures that may be offered to them in the frame of the Youth Guarantee.

Their experiences (going through the registration process, in some cases taking part in a training) were recorded in a field diary and reported to ERGO Network's research partners. Findings from the test persons were in some countries supplemented by interviews with PES officials. Together with some of the findings from the desk study, they are basis of the main findings in this synthesis note.

The field research was carried out in September – November 2015.

Country research data is not published, but can be made available on request. For all enquiries please contact info@ergonetwork.org

Partners



Bulgaria: Integro Association

Czech Republic: Slovo 21

Hungary: Butterfly Development

Romania: Nevo Parudimos & Asociatia CRIS

Slovakia: RAVS

Spain: Fundación Secretariado Gitano