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# Access of young NEETs coming from vulnerable groups to the measures of the Youth Guarantee scheme in Romania.

State of play and moving forward.

Authors: Alexandra Toderiță, Alexandru Damian, Cătălina Meiroșu

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**In 2013 a comprehensive programme to improve school-to-work transition and to reduce youth unemployment was launched in the European Union entitled the Youth Guarantee (YG).** No less than 7.5 million young European were not in education, employment, nor training (NEETs) in 2013, i.e. 12.9% of young Europeans between the ages of 15 and 24 years.

What the Youth Guarantee intended to do was **to support these young people in accessing the labour market** through training programmes, assistance in finding jobs, internship programmes, financial support for employment (both for employees and for employers) and support for entrepreneurship programmes.

It was referred to as “the largest programme for combating youth unemployment in the last 25 years”. Romania has set up its own YG programme, based on the European model, split into two periods: 2014-2015 and 2017-2020. Under this scheme, Romania aims to fight unemployment among young NEETs aged 15-24. **Almost 1 in 5 young people in Romania was NEET in 2015.**

During the programme, they are registered with the Public Employment Services (AJOFM) and are providing profiling and counselling, and, within four months, they should receive a good offer for continued education, employment, apprenticeship or traineeship, as appropriate.

**In this study, we analysed how the YG programme is implemented in Romania, its main objectives, target groups, national projects and programmes for young NEETs, and, above all, we wanted to see the extent to which this programme managed to facilitate and to support the integration on the labour market of young people at risk of social marginalisation** - in particular young Roma people. The research methodology focused on the quantitative and, in particular, the qualitative dimension of the YG. We collected and analysed public information provided by the Ministry of Labour, the Public Employment Service - ANOFM, but also by its county offices - AJOFM.

Unfortunately, the data provided could only be used partially for the purpose of this report, due to the high degree of heterogeneity (e.g. regarding the specific measures included under the umbrella of the Youth Guarantee programme versus those carried out independently by ANOFM in order to combat unemployment among young people) and due to the lack of consistency of the reports at county, national and European level. However, as mentioned above, the main objective of the documentation was to understand the philosophy, mechanisms and practices of this programme and how its implementation is seen by young NEETs from vulnerable groups.

We conducted 90 in-depth interviews in 10 counties with 27 young Roma NEETs and 63 relevant actors in the field of youth, employment, Roma inclusion, etc. We also organised round tables, participatory workshops and a national consultative conference in the capital, in large Romanian cities, as well as in small urban and rural areas, with over 200 relevant stakeholders at national and local level: young Roma NEETs, authorities - members of the Parliament, former ministers of relevant line ministries,

representatives of institutions, NGOs, local action groups, training providers, community leaders.

**The overall situation of the first five years of implementation of the YG programme could be described as modest, at most.** In the country reports and in the European Semester reports of recent years, the European Commission repeatedly pointed out that the Youth Guarantee scheme is poorly implemented in Romania.

In the first period of implementation of the Youth Guarantee programme (2014-2015), Romania reported the creation of 27 youth centres (22 in the South and 5 in the North region) and a database with 67,702 young NEETs registered in ANOFM records. Romania also reported a set of early intervention and activation measures as an integral part of the European programme which were actually initially designed as individual measures, not included in the Youth Guarantee programme, such



as: A doua șansă (Second Chance), Bursa profesională (Professional Scholarship), Bani de liceu (High School Money), as well as measures to support for youth employment - mobility bonuses, installation bonuses, subsidies for employers.

**Even so, at the end of the implementation period, the results were far below expectations:** according to the European Commission's assessment, the programme reached less than 1 in 5 young NEETs during this period and, even if they underwent registration, 1 in 2 young people did not receive a job or a training offer in a timely manner. It is not clear what happened to those who did receive an offer, since, in the absence of any follow-up mechanism, the developments in 8 of 10 cases remain unknown.

**The youth centres also stopped working after these years.** Moreover, the responses received from 11 AJOFM agencies revealed that 9 of them were unaware of the existence of the centres set up as part of the "Youth Guarantee" programme. This makes us question the efficacy and efficiency of these centres – which are operational, according to official data.

**The implementation plan of the YG for the period 2017-2020 has a more complex structure, compared to the previous version:** 8 line-ministries, CNDIPT (National Centre for the Development of Vocational and Technical Education) and 3 NGOs are indicated as key stakeholders, supporting and participating in the implementation of Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan, while ANOFM plays the role of "catalyst", in terms of the direct services provided and responsibilities undertaken.

The INTESPO project (implemented in partnership with the National Agency for Payments and Social Inspection, the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Justice), and funded through the European Social Fund, aims to identify 200,000 young people NEETs aged 16-24 by 2021, to register in the ANOFM database at least 160,000 of them and, subsequently, to provide specialised support measures. These would be implemented through the establishment and financing of support and intervention networks at local level, made up of institutions with relevant responsibilities in the field, as well as civil society actors.

**The novelty of this period is the fact that the whole process of identifying, registering, profiling and supporting young NEETs is based on a customized intervention,** from the perspective of “case management”, calibrated according to employability (from easily employable to very difficult to employ).

For the first time, it is stated that “special attention must continue to be paid to the most vulnerable categories of young people (those belonging to the Roma minority, young people with disabilities, formerly institutionalised young people) in order to reduce the risk of social exclusion.”



**Unfortunately, even the latest country report of the European Commission, published in February 2019, indicated an inefficient implementation of the YG programme and, regrettably,** “ineffective coordination between the education sector, the employment sector and the social sector”. The programme managed to reach only 14% of the young NEETs, although there were some positive signs: there was a significant increase in the share of young NEETs who got a job offer within 4 months - from 25.9% in 2016 to 40.2% in 2017.

**In 2015, Romania also received additional funding to combat unemployment among young NEETs through the Youth Employment Initiative, which targets young people in regions with unemployment rates above 25%.** The additional financing through the YEI - of almost EUR 330 million - was included by Romania in the Human Capital Operational Programme, which approach differs from that of many other Member States which have separate programmes, sometimes even at regional level. **Unfortunately, Romania has so far absorbed less than 3% of the total amount allocated, although it has been more than 3 years since the launch of the Initiative.**

**To conclude, based on the analysis of the figures, more than 4 years after the launch of this programme in Romania, the money is still on the table, but it is yet to be accessed for projects.** Although the official rate of NEETs has decreased by 3 percentage points in recent years (from 18.1% in 2015 to 14.5% in 2018), Romania remains one of the European countries with the largest number of young NEETs, far from the EU average. (10.5% in Romania, surpassed only by Bulgaria, with 15%, and Italy, with 19.2%)

But leaving aside the macro data, this study is mainly aimed at understanding the mechanisms and their implementation at local level, vis-à-vis the disadvantaged and discriminated groups, in particular young Roma NEETs.

**On average, in Romania, 64% of the young Roma are in the NEET category - not in education, nor in training (4 times higher than the statistics in the majority population).** The Roma are one of the most disadvantaged groups on the labour market. Only one in three Roma citizens between the ages of 20 and 64 stated that they carried out paid work.

Even though the implementation plan for the YG for the period 2017-2020 explicitly mentions for the first time that the programme should target “the most vulnerable categories of youth (the Roma minority, young people with disabilities, formerly institutionalised young people) in order to reduce the risk of social exclusion”, the field research carried out within this project shows that, for now, “not much has been achieved”.

**So far, in Romania, as part of the YG, only steps have been taken for registration of young NEETs with the Public Employment Services.** Romania started with very low numbers - in 2013, it had the lowest percentage of NEETs registered in the EU28 <sup>1</sup>: 8.1%, with modest overall implementation of the YG. From the understanding provided by the field interactions, the young NEETs from the marginalised communities, those from the rural areas, the vulnerable groups - all of whom are difficult to reach even through inter-institutional efforts - are just beginning to enter the procedure: becoming registered and benefitting from the YG measures, as a result of the architecture of the INTESPO project, first of all, and of the “case management” approach.

Regarding the Roma youth, the data obtained from AJOFM regarding their inclusion as beneficiaries in the YG is inconclusive, since stating one’s ethnicity is optional upon registration with the Public Employment Services. **What can be said with certainty and was validated through this study is the fact that public policies in the field of youth employment in recent years in Romania, including the YG, have not taken into account the particularities of this minority group,** which, indeed, is facing some problems commonly faced by the majority population as well (limited access to information, poverty, low level of education due largely to school dropout, vocational and

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<sup>1</sup>Exploring the diversity of NEETs: Country profiles, Eurofound 2016, <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef1602en2.pdf>, p 64

technical education not adapted to the needs of the market, low mobility especially in the rural area, migration abroad, etc.). Added to these, there are specific problems - discrimination by employers, prejudices of the society that influence the self-image of the youth, certain cultural customs etc.

**Thus, the main conclusions and recommendations resulting from the field research concerning the effects of the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Romania on the young NEETs from disadvantaged groups, especially Roma ethnics, are as follows:**

- **Continuing the Youth Guarantee programme in Romania after 2020 in an improved format.** An impact assessment is required with regard to the Youth Guarantee programme, so that lessons learned during the first two implementation periods are taken into consideration, and a revision of the Implementation Plan;

- **Public-private partnerships at local level can greatly improve the implementation of the Youth Guarantee at local level.**

The main recommendation for Romania is coordination and/or integration between the Public Employment Service and the social and educational support services, as well as with the local authorities and the private sector (SMEs, trade unions, employers, NGOs, etc.) - recurrent in the reports of the European institutions, and revealed as a fundamental necessity in the direct interaction with the



communities. In this respect, the example of the inter-institutional collaboration in Campulung Muscel for the organising of the disabled communities caravans, documented in the report, is eloquent;

- **There is a need to strengthen the capacity of the Public Employment Service to reach the youth at risk of marginalisation,** first and foremost physically and then through information, and to implement the complex and non-standardised measures of accompanying them on the labour market, through a deep understanding of the individual and local context;

- **It is necessary for the Public Employment Service to take over good practice examples and resources at European level and to adapt them to the national specificities** - relying on the significant progress made in this area by many Member States since the launch of the programme - regarding the implementation of the YG, depending on the typology of vulnerability of NEETs. Such an example could be the establishment of a national network of youth mediators - with a focus on employment - similar to the Bulgarian model;

- **Youth organizations, local social NGOs, organizations active in underprivileged communities, Roma NGOs – left out so far - should play a more important role in the architecture of public policies, and especially in implementing the YG scheme in Romania post-2020.** They have profound knowledge of the communities, which is essential with respect to the socio-cultural specificities of the Roma, for example;
- **Representative organizations of economic agents - employer unions, Chambers of Commerce, business associations, should take part in this dialogue.** Both categories should be involved in the drafting of the Implementation Plan, the “popularisation” of the scheme among young people, but also in the process of monitoring and analysing the implementation of the YG programme beyond 2020;
- **Moreover, it is necessary to multiply the anti-discrimination campaigns among employers, as well as to promote the financial benefits related to the status of insertion employer, given the labour shortage that Romania is facing at the moment;**
- **Public policies in the field of education, Roma inclusion, youth employment in Romania in the last years, including YG, are deficient, at best, in their design, indicators, monitoring mechanisms regarding their support for maintaining young Roma people in school and for transitioning to employment, which, obviously, has an impact on their effective implementation.** There is need for better correlation of the measures dedicated to young people from vulnerable groups in the various governmental strategies targeting them - for example the National Strategy for the Improvement of the Situation of the Roma, achieving synergy with the YG, defining coherent monitoring indicators, as well as allocating/ attracting budgetary resources to achieve them;
- **The “Second Chance” and the after-school programmes have had a significant impact on keeping people from disadvantaged backgrounds in school or bringing them back to school- especially in rural areas - and they must be multiplied and intensified in as many communities as possible.** Also, it is necessary to implement a broad skills equivalent programme for individuals who failed to graduate from lower secondary education, so that they can access a wider range of vocational training courses;
- **The legislation on apprenticeship should be improved and this type of vocational training should be promoted at local level** (since in smaller towns or in the rural areas it remains almost unknown) - both among the youth and employers, since facilitation is required at both ends in order to conclude such an agreement. Moreover, it is necessary to correlate and integrate the public policies in the field with the current policies supporting vocational, technical and dual education, under the umbrella of the Youth Guarantee.

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