



A large, light brown silhouette of a person sitting on a bench is positioned in the background. The person is facing right, with their legs crossed. The silhouette has a textured, hand-drawn appearance.

**Does the EU Youth Guarantee address young
homeless people's needs?**



Youth unemployment and inactivity in the EU

Eurostat estimates that almost 25 million people in the EU-28 were unemployed in July 2014. Compared with June 2014, the number of persons unemployed decreased by 1,634,000 in the EU-28. However, despite this recent slight improvement, the EU unemployment rate is still more than 3% higher¹ than pre-crisis levels and there is a huge difference between Member States, with the lowest unemployment rates recorded in Germany and Austria (both 4.9 %), and the highest in Greece (27.2 % in May 2014) and Spain (24.5 %).

With regard to youth unemployment, 5 million young persons (under 25) – representing 21.7 % - are unemployed in the EU and, although this is the lowest rate for the EU-28 since September 2011, it remains a huge problem, particularly in countries such as Spain (53.8 %), Greece (53.1 %), Italy (42.9 %), Croatia (41.5 %), Portugal (35.5%) and Cyprus (35.1%). Indeed, the economic crisis has hit the young hard and youth unemployment rates are generally much higher than unemployment rates for all ages combined. Overall, in the last four years, the employment rates for young people fell three times as much as they did for adults and, something which is particularly worrying, 7.5 million young Europeans between 15 and 24 are not only not employed but also not in education and not in training (NEETs).² Furthermore, 30% of unemployed people under the age of 25 have been unemployed for more than 12 months.

With limited access to jobs, the transition to adulthood and independence becomes increasingly difficult. Young people are vulnerable because of the transitional life periods they are going through, their possible lack of professional experience, their inadequate levels of education or training, their often limited social protection coverage, their restricted access to financial resources, and their precarious work conditions. Moreover, access to housing benefits is increasingly being further restricted for young people, making some of them more vulnerable to homelessness. Unemployment is indeed a major underlying cause of youth homelessness.

The EU Youth Guarantee

In December 2012, the European Commission put forward a Youth Employment Package to assist and guide Member States in combating youth unemployment. Based on the Commission's proposal, the Council adopted a Recommendation on the Youth Guarantee in April 2013. Member States thereby committed to ensuring that "all young people under the age of 25 years receive a good-

¹ Unemployment rate from 2000 to 2014

http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/images/2/2b/Unemployment_rates_EU-28%2C_EA-17%2C_US_and_Japan%2C_seasonally_adjusted%2C_January_2000_-_July_2014_.png

² European Commission, Memo "The EU Youth Guarantee", http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-14-530_en.htm 16/09/2014



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quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education".³

The Youth Guarantee aims at considering both immediate and long-term perspectives. Immediate action to relieve the high levels of youth unemployment and inactivity - through financial incentives to support work placements, apprenticeships and training -, which should be accompanied by long-term reforms to address the structural barriers faced by young people during their transition to working life. Moreover, the Youth Guarantee should be geared to national, regional and local circumstances and thus Member States should base their actions on a analysis of youth unemployment and inactivity (NEETs) in their country/regions, carry out a mapping of existing policies on youth employment and link these measures to a comprehensive youth guarantee scheme as well as filling policy gaps by means of targeted reforms or new initiatives to ensure that the approach is comprehensive and does not leave anyone behind.

Although Member States can structure the Youth Guarantee as they see fit, some key elements were provided in the Council recommendations: 1) early intervention and activation in order to prevent accumulation of problems and detachment from the labour market; 2) partnerships that should connect all key stakeholders supporting young people in different stages and aspects of their transition to employment; 3) supportive measures for labour market integration that would address skills mismatches and improve young people's employability; 4) national budgets should prioritise youth to avoid higher costs in the future; 5) ongoing monitoring and evaluation of youth guarantee activities that ensures efficient use of resources and positive returns on investment.

Will the national youth guarantee implementation plans address youth homelessness?

The European Youth Guarantee aims at providing opportunities of employment, continued education or traineeship to all young people under the age of 25. However, as already stressed by Eurofound in the analysis of the Finnish and Swedish experiences, youth guarantees seem to be more effective for young people who are work-ready and therefore tend to focus more on new labour market entrants than on long-term unemployed young people.⁴ Still according to the study, the youth guarantees have not proven to be as successful with deeply entrenched and 'hard-to-help' unemployed groups. Indeed, young homeless people often have a complex variety of problems which may not allow them to take full advantage of public employment and training schemes developed through the youth guarantees. The route towards mainstream employment or even supported employment in social economy enterprises will often be longer and might not be possible at all for some homeless young people. Intensive support might be required and stable housing is often a precondition for successful take up of employment opportunities.

³ Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee, paragraph 1.

⁴ M. Mascherini, "Youth Guarantee: Experiences from Finland and Sweden", Eurofound, 2012
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef1242.htm>



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The building blocks of the EU youth guarantee show little attention to those young people who are most socially excluded and have specific problems and therefore needs. Both the preventive approach and most of the labour market integration measures envisaged do not address young people who are already destitute and would first need to find housing. The Council invitation to develop outreach strategies does not strongly highlight the importance of reaching out to those young homeless people who have been experiencing extremely disadvantaged situations and problems for which they need adapted employment and training schemes.

All Member States have submitted their national implementation plan for the youth guarantee. The weaknesses reported above are clearly visible in these plans. Most of the measures proposed by Member States focus on prompting immediate action to address youth unemployment, before disengagement 'sets in'. Among the national implementation plans, only a few outreach strategies could possibly address the problems faced by young homeless. As highlighted in the Croatian youth guarantee implementation plan, vulnerable groups such as young homeless people are often in the hands of civil society organisations that have to deal with lack of capacity and stable financing.⁵

What needs to be done?

What is lacking is a structured strategy addressing hard-to-reach young people who have specific needs and require support in order to be ready to benefit from the measures set down in the national youth guarantees. The EU should therefore guarantee that all young people under the age of 25, including homeless young people, receive a good-quality offer of employment, continuing education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship. This could be assured by encouraging Member States to develop strategies to address the challenges faced by young homeless people or, if needed, by proposing an additional policy framework that would effectively include the hard-to-reach young people.

We should avoid pushing young people into homelessness and creating a new cohort of chronic homeless people as a result of the crisis. Therefore FEANTSA calls upon the EU and member states to take the following measures:

Develop support networks for young people who are disengaged from the system

Young homeless people without any kind of support and are disengaged from the system. Without family or social support, they often do not know what their rights are. Therefore, it is very challenging for them to get access to the Youth Guarantee measures. Indeed, all these schemes require commitment and although many of these measures are extremely helpful, there is a need for a support network that would include young homeless people who are disengaged from education

⁵ Ministry of Labour and Pension System, Republic of Croatia, *Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan*, <http://www.mrms.hr/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/implementation-plan-yg.pdf>



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and employment systems or who have failed to comply with the conditions required to access Youth Guarantee schemes provided by Member States.

More housing options for young homeless people. Several factors contribute to the increasing vulnerability of young people on the housing market, namely low income, unemployment, limited access to benefits, inaccessible mortgage finance and unaffordable rental markets. Investment in social housing is urgently required. Even where affordability problems exist in social housing (about 12% of the tenants experience housing cost overburden),³ it is often the best, or indeed, the only sustainable option for young homeless people. Housing allowance systems often restrict access for young people under a certain age. Allowances might not be available at all, or only available for shared accommodation. Several governments have taken further measures to reduce access for young people to housing benefits as a means of saving public money. This is based on the assumption that young people can simply stay longer with their parents. But for vulnerable young people, a difficult family situation can be part of the trigger that pushes them into homelessness.

Proper supported housing solutions need to be available before young people are released from youth care. Too often a history of institutionalisation in youth care is a direct route into homelessness – especially in Eastern Europe. Better cooperation between the youth care, homelessness and social housing sectors could prevent most cases of homelessness after release from youth care. The European Union should promote best practice on how to ensure successful transition for vulnerable young people leaving youth care to independent living and how to prevent homelessness.

Access to employment is paramount but for young homeless people this may mean adapted employment schemes. Young homeless people often have a complex variety of problems which may not allow them to take full advantage of existing public employment and training schemes developed for unemployed youth. The route towards mainstream employment or even supported employment in social economy enterprises will often be longer and might not be possible at all for some homeless young people. Intensive support might be required and stable housing is often a precondition for successful take up of employment opportunities.

EU Member States should ensure that reforms in welfare systems do not adversely affect young vulnerable people. The European Union should make sure that in its macro-economic surveillance and financial assistance programmes (especially for programme countries), it is not promoting changes to the social security and social assistance model that drive some young people into destitution and homelessness. Moreover, public funding cuts are also felt by the homelessness service sector in many countries. Cuts are imposed by national and local governments on a variety of homeless and support services. Those services specialised in housing solutions and prevention of homelessness particularly hit by the cuts.



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For more details, contact [Mauro Striano](#)



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