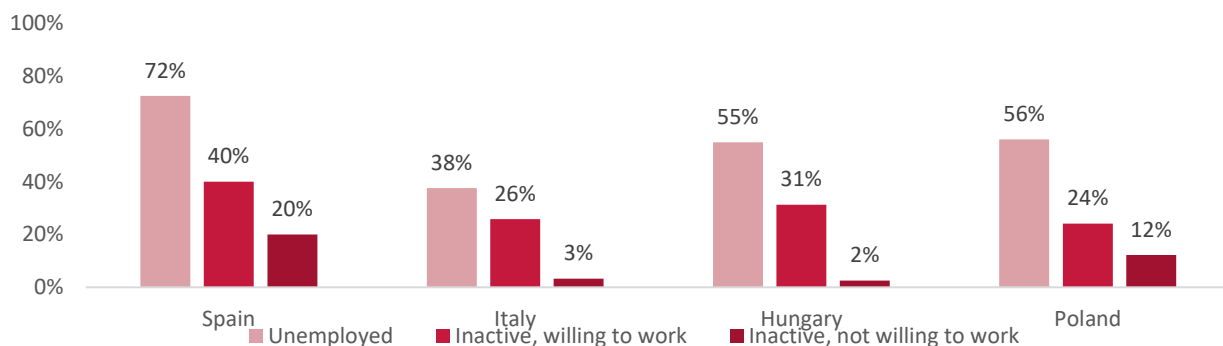


How PES strategies for reaching young NEETs can be improved in Spain, Hungary, Italy and Poland

The Youth Guarantee (YG) reached and helped over 30 million young people across the EU between 2015 and 2021. However, it has become evident that large groups of non-employed youth have not been able to benefit from the YG. Indeed, early evaluations of the YG's implementation have reported that the public employment services (PES) were struggling to reach young people with vulnerable backgrounds.

The proportion of NEETs who reported being registered as unemployed in 2019 was relatively high (slightly above 50%) in Spain¹. However, in Hungary, Italy, and Poland, only one in four (or fewer) NEETs indicated they were in contact with the PES in 2019. This gap can be explained in part by the relatively high proportion of young NEETs in Spain who were actively looking for a job, as such individuals were more likely to seek the help of the PES. However, we can also see that even within this group of young NEETs who were closest to the labour market, sizeable shares were not in contact with the PES. Providing support to these groups could prevent them from further disengaging from the labour market, and improve the effectiveness of the YG.

The PES registration rate among NEETs in Spain, Italy, Hungary, Poland



Source: own elaboration based on the EU Labour Force Survey 2019

The upgraded YG, called the 'Bridge to Jobs', calls for raising awareness about the YG, and for stepping up outreach to vulnerable groups. These efforts can be considered essential to the effectiveness of the YG, as previous studies have shown these groups of young people are among those who stand to benefit the most from the services and measures that the PES can offer.

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The general recommendations presented in this policy brief can help to improve the development of policies aimed at youth and other target groups, and can assist the Member States in implementing the agenda put forward in the ‘Bridge to Jobs’ Recommendation of the EU Commission

Find out why young people do not register with the PES. Among the reasons why young people do not register with the PES are barriers related to their attitudes and motivations, such as low trust in public institutions, fear of the stigma of being officially registered as unemployed, the perception that the programmes the PES offer are of poor quality, or simply limited knowledge about the PES. However, there are also barriers to registration related to the inadequacy of the PES’ efforts. Employment offices face difficulties in identifying and approaching unregistered NEETs, and in mapping local stakeholders and establishing cooperation with them. When the services offered are not tailored to the needs of various NEET subgroups, the young people in these groups who register as unemployed often do so mainly for administrative reasons, and to gain access to passive entitlements. A lack of incentives and the insufficient capacity of PES staff to develop outreach strategies can also lead to low rates of registration.

Activate NEETs who are outside the labour force. There is one group in particular that seems to be a relatively obvious first target group for the PES’ activities: namely, the group of young people who are inactive but want to work, as their registration rate tends to be below one in three. These young people typically think that there are no jobs available that match their skills. Clearly, these individuals would benefit from receiving more information about other jobs that might be of interest to them, or from having

access to upskilling or a mentor to motivate them – all of which are available through the Youth Guarantee. Those young people who say they currently do not want to work should also be viewed as potential PES clients. A very sizeable group of NEETs (especially in Poland and Hungary) is composed of mothers who are looking after their young children, and are likely to return to the labour market at a later stage. While these young people are currently almost completely outside of the scope of the PES’ activities, the PES can nonetheless consider offering them services and training, especially if they have low education, to prepare them for a future job search, and to help them avoid long-term unemployment or inactivity.

Collect more data on NEETs. Information on the composition of the NEET population, and on their labour market flows, may be collected at the national and local levels, and then used to tailor the support to the needs of particular subgroups. Local PES offices should be provided with support in developing and using tools to collect information on potential clients at the local level.

Cooperate with schools. Cooperation with teachers would allow the PES to find at-risk individuals, and to provide them with advice and guidance before they become disconnected from the labour market. Most of the PES in Poland and Hungary send employees to visit the public schools, and to meet students. However, the PES staff tend to focus on the most motivated students who are about to enter the labour market. In

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such cases, the most disadvantaged students may be left behind. Only a handful of employment offices exchange data with schools and track the school-to-work transition of dropouts or of individuals from less favourable environments.

Cooperate with local stakeholders. Local stakeholders, such as grassroots NGOs, often have more contacts and know-how, more experienced staff, and better reputations than the PES. Other stakeholders, such as municipal social services, support people at risk and their families on a daily basis. Although the PES employees are in contact with local governments, schools, and social welfare offices, more active cooperation with these stakeholders in the form of joint projects is rare. Moreover, the PES seldom cooperate with institutions that deal with people at risk (e.g., juvenile detention or re-education centres) or with youth in general (e.g., sports, cultural, or religious institutions). Study in Hungary showed that organising workshops for local stakeholders might be a first step towards effective outreach.

Customise and bring the PES services close to youth. The PES should increase their presence in areas in closer proximity to the potential target groups. This can be done by using mobile units, participating in various types of local (cultural or sports) events or establishing local branches. While the PES staff do venture 'outside the office', they often do so only to attend certain events, such as education and job fairs, or, even more rarely, to participate in various types of local (cultural or sports) events. These activities are usually held once or twice a year. The PES rarely use mobile or stationary counselling points that would allow them to provide information and services to

youth living in remote areas. There are no efforts to approach at-risk individuals in places where they usually meet, such as clubs, shopping malls, streets, or their homes (street social work). The study conducted in Spain showed that information provided to university students about the presence of a local PES branch on the university campus increased their willingness to use PES services.

Use social media. The PES offices mainly rely on traditional forms of communication and rarely use social media. In Poland, 40% of the PES offices report using social media to promote the Youth Guarantee. In addition, just 23% of the offices say they monitor the effectiveness of their information campaigns. This suggests that most of the PES offices do not monitor whether their messages are reaching potential clients.

Build trust between NEETs and the PES. Information campaigns should be provided by a trustworthy institution, and be supplemented by other activities that help people at risk of social exclusion overcome the various barriers they face, such as stigma; and initiate social change processes for the beneficiaries.

Reconsider the role of the PES in supporting NEETs. Reaching out to individuals who are outside the labour force is not perceived as a traditional task of the PES staff. While most of the staff agree with the goal of getting more NEETs registered, a considerably smaller share believe that this is the responsibility of the PES. Changing the attitudes of PES counsellors is crucial, as the effectiveness of such initiatives is correlated with their attitudes and efforts. The PES in these countries could draw from the examples of PES in other European countries that incorporated practices aimed at reaching out to unregistered and economically inactive individuals.

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Further reading: more information about outreach activities aimed at NEETs in Hungary, Italy, Poland, and Spain can be found at: <http://yepartnership.ibs.org.pl/publications>

The project "Youth employment partnership: evaluation studies in Spain, Hungary, Italy and Poland" aims to evaluate employment initiatives targeting youth in these four European countries. The project benefits from a €1.8 million grant from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Youth Employment.

ⁱ All of the data presented in this policy brief are based on the national reports that investigated various aspects of the PES' outreach efforts in Hungary, Italy, Poland, and Spain. The data presented in the national reports are, in turn, based on several sources, such as Labour Force Survey data, administrative data, data gathered by surveys distributed among local PES offices or by surveys conducted within the randomized controlled trials study, and data collected through desk research and the literature review. All national reports on outreach in Hungary, Italy, Poland, and Spain can be found on the website: <http://yepartnership.ibs.org.pl/publications>.

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