



First results of the Youth Employment Initiative

**A Final Report to DG Employment, Social Affairs
and Inclusion of the European Commission**

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List of abbreviations

- BE-BXL: Belgium – Brussels-Capitale
- BE-WL: Belgium –Wallonie-Bruxelles
- BG: Bulgaria
- CSR: Country-specific Recommendation
- CY: Cyprus
- CZ: Czech Republic
- DG EMPL: Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion
- EC: European Commission
- EL: Greece
- EU: European Union
- ES: Spain
- ESF: European Social Fund
- FR: France
- HR: Croatia
- HU: Hungary
- IE: Ireland
- ILO: International Labour Organisation
- IP: Investment Priority
- ISCED: International Standard Classification of Education
- IT: Italy
- LT: Lithuania
- LV: Latvia
- MA: Managing Authority
- NEET: Not in Employment, Education or Training
- OP: Operational Programme
- PA: Priority Axis
- PES: Public Employment Service
- PL: Poland
- PT: Portugal
- RO: Romania
- SE: Sweden
- SI: Slovenia
- SK: Slovak Republic
- SFC: System for Fund Management
- UK-EN: United Kingdom - England
- UK-SC: United Kingdom - Scotland
- VET: Vocational education and training
- YEI: Youth Employment Initiative
- YG: Youth Guarantee

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction to the report and structure

Ecorys and PPMI are pleased to present this Draft Final Report for the

Analysis of the first results of the implementation of the 2014-2020 Operational Programmes supported by the Youth Employment Initiative (thereafter YEI) and related YEI and ESF youth employment actions in the Member States.

This report provides an overview of implementation progress of the YEI from September 2013 to November 2015¹ across the 20 eligible Member States (BE, BG, CY, CZ, EL, ES, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LV, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK). To evaluate the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of joint support from the European Social Fund (ESF) as programmed in the same Operational Programmes (OPs) as the YEI, the study also includes an overview of implementation progress for ESF actions programmed under Investment Priority (IP) 8.ii "Sustainable integration into the labour market of young people, in particular those not in employment, education or training, including young people at risk of social exclusion and young people from marginalised communities, including through the implementation of the Youth Guarantee".

Out of the 34 operational programmes supported by the YEI, 22 programmes have been included in the scope of the study (i.e. the regional operational programmes for FR which contain around 30% of the total YEI allocation for FR have not been included in the scope of the study).

The analysis is based on qualitative and quantitative data collected through:

- a review of 22 operational programmes supported by the YEI,
- a review of national level documentation and the first national YEI evaluations submitted by the Member States in the end of 2015 and the beginning of 2016),
- a survey of 22 Managing Authorities (MAs)² in charge of the operational programmes reviewed,
- qualitative interviews conducted in 10 Member States carried out in November 2015³, and
- the structured data reports on the YEI submitted by the MS in April 2015..

This Draft Final Report is structured as follows:

¹ This specifies the reference period for the time period during which primary data collection took place. A similar reference period for the data collection has also been followed in a number of the national evaluations submitted to the Commission by the end of 2015 and the beginning of 2016. Some of the national evaluations may cover different reference periods as regards the data collection cut-off date. All these data sources were reviewed..

² The following 22 MAs have been covered by the study: BE-BXL, BE-WL, BG, CY, CZ, EL, ES, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LV, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK-EN, UK-SC. In the case of France only the response of the MA responsible for the national YEI OP was considered.

³ A small number of interviews was conducted after November 2015.

- **Chapter 1** provides an introduction to the report, including the context, aims and methodology of the study, including limitations;
- **Chapter 2** provides a summary of the programming arrangements of the YEI and related ESF actions programmed under IP 8.ii in the eligible Member States;
- **Chapter 3** provides an analysis of implementation progress across the 20 eligible Member States;
- **Chapter 4** presents the conclusions of this study.

Further information is provided in the Annexes, as follows:

- **Annex One:** 10 country chapters, providing in-depth analysis for a sample of countries;
- **Annex Two:** key points from the national evaluations in table format;
- **Annex Three:** the methodology of this study.

1.2. The Youth Employment Initiative

The global financial and economic crisis brought with it a significant rise in youth unemployment rates across Europe. The share of young people aged 15-24 in unemployment increased from 15% in the first quarter of 2008 and peaked at 24.3% five years later in the first quarter of 2013. While youth employment is typically more responsive to economic business cycle fluctuations, and also structurally higher, it is the extent of youth unemployment in the current situation which is unprecedented. The challenge faced has been described as a “youth employment crisis”⁴: more than 7 million young Europeans were neither in employment, education or training at its high point in 2012/2013.

From the onset of the crisis, the European Commission made the need to improve the labour market prospects of young people one of its key priorities. It reacted with a number of initiatives in rapid succession, in particular the Youth on the Move Flagship Initiative⁵ (2010), the Youth Opportunities Initiative (2011)⁶, the Youth Employment Package (2012)⁷ and the **Youth Employment Initiative (2013)**⁸. These initiatives were followed by the Council recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee (YG) (2013)⁹, the Call for Action Working together for Europe's young people (2013)¹⁰, the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (2013) and the Proposition for a Quality Framework for Traineeships (2013), which was later adopted by the Council (2014)¹¹.

⁴ ILO (2012), Youth Employment Crisis: A call for Action, Resolution and Conclusions of the 101 Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva 2012

⁵ European Commission, (2010b), Youth on the Move – An initiative to unleash the potential of young people to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the European Union, COM (2010) 477 final, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

⁶ European Commission, (2011a), Youth opportunities initiative, COM (2011) 933 final, Brussels

⁷ European Commission, (2012a), Moving Youth into Employment, COM (2012) 727 final, Brussels

⁸ European Commission, (2013a), Youth employment initiative, COM(2013) 144 final, Brussels

⁹ Council of the European Union (2013), Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee, (2013/C 120/01)

¹⁰ European Commission (2013b), Working together for Europe's young people. A call to action on youth unemployment, COM (2013) 447 final

¹¹ Council of the European Union (2014), Council Recommendation of 10 March 2014 on a Quality Framework for Traineeships, Brussels, 10 March 2014

Most recently, the European Commission made almost 1 billion Euros of accelerated pre-financing for the YEI available to the Member States (May 2015) in response to the call by a number of YEI beneficiary Member States for more financial liquidity allowing to mobilise YEI actions on the ground.

The YEI provides targeted funding of €6.4 billion to support youth employment by targeting young people aged below 25 years (or below 29 in some Member States) who are not in employment, education or training ("NEET") and who reside in the regions of the European Union which are particularly affected by this challenge, in particular to support the implementation of the Council recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee. The YEI is embedded into the ESF programming period 2014-2020. The YEI specific allocation is additional to investments under the European Social Fund. The YEI overall is designed to complement – and build upon – other national and ESF provision. Activities funded under the YEI target young people directly and typically include the provision of apprenticeships, traineeships, job placements and further education leading to a qualification, amongst others – in line with the Youth Guarantee Recommendation.

The YEI provides support for those NUTS2 regions of the EU where the youth unemployment rate in 2012 was higher than 25%, or where youth unemployment was more than 20% but had increased by more than 30% in 2012 (Article 16 of the ESF regulation). Member States were able to invest in the implementation of the YEI from the 1st of September 2013 onwards, with the opportunity to claim reimbursement of the expenditure after the operational programmes had been formally adopted. Resources allocated to the YEI are frontloaded, with operations under the YEI to be implemented within a shorter timeframe of implementation. The funding has been committed (i.e. engaged in the EU budget) in the first two years of the 2014-2020 implementation period, while the implementation of the YEI will end in 2018, under the same rules as for ESF spending.

This analysis of the first results of the YEI comes at a time when the deterioration of the youth employment situation in Europe has seemingly come to a halt, with youth unemployment rates showing some signs of improvement¹². However, these are small improvements after over half a decade of a consistently worsening labour market outlook for young people in the aftermath of the economic crisis. Equally, economic stability across the EU is still fragile or at risk, which could undermine the potential for sustainable improvements.

Assessing the first stages and results of YEI implementation, including an analysis of the overall implementation progress and the challenges faced by Managing Authorities and large beneficiaries, is therefore important in order to shed light on the successful use of the additional pre-financing, as well as YEI delivery overall.

¹² European Commission (2014), Draft Joint Employment Report from the Commission and the Council, COM(2014) 906 final, Brussels, 28.11.2014

1.3. *Aim and scope*

In this context, this study makes a crucial contribution to the monitoring of the YEI and its implementation on the ground. Its purpose is to provide the Commission with a narrative on the programming arrangements pertaining to the YEI, as well as the progress of the initial implementation of the YEI and other ESF funding relevant to youth employment measures, with a particular focus on the actions that are being undertaken. The study's purpose is to illustrate the added value of the YEI and its contribution towards the implementation of the YG. Its results will feed into Commission reporting on the progress of the YEI and the YG in 2016.

The study focuses on:

- the **current ESF programming period**;
- **22 national-level Operational Programmes (OPs)**¹³ which include the YEI. This typically refers to one OP per YEI eligible Member State. For Belgium, two OPs (Wallonia and Brussels) were reviewed. For the United Kingdom, the two OPs including YEI funding – England and Scotland – were reviewed. In the case of France, only the national OP was reviewed in detail, which excludes the analysis of 12 regional programmes in France, which also include YEI funding;
- **YEI actions** programmed in the 22 OPs mentioned above and **ESF actions programmed under Investment Priority (IP) 8.ii** “Sustainable integration into the labour market of young people, in particular those not in employment, education or training, including young people at risk of social exclusion and young people from marginalised communities, including through the implementation of the Youth Guarantee” **included in the same Operational Programmes as the YEI**. Only ESF actions under IP 8.ii, which are programmed in the same Operational Programme as the YEI are taken into account. ESF actions under IP 8.ii which were programmed in other OPs are not taken into account.
- Data collection for this report took place in October and November 2015, at which point up-to-date data was collected. As a consequence, the **reference period** for implementation progress is respectively September 2013 to November 2015 for the YEI, and January 2014 to November 2015 for other relevant ESF actions. Between the end of 2015 and March 2016, **the first YEI national evaluations as provided for under Art. 19(6) of the ESF regulation** were submitted to the Commission (end-2015 and early 2016) and were also reviewed. These evaluations frequently cover different reference periods. In order to ensure consistency and plausibility of the findings under the present study, quantitative data from the evaluations is included when it covers the same reference period as the primary data collection, while all qualitative data is taken into account. All data is clearly referenced throughout the report and evidence from the evaluations is additionally presented separately in the annexed country chapters.

¹³ In total 34 OPs contain YEI funding, which includes 12 OPs for France implemented at regional level.

1.4. Summary of the methodology, data sources and caveats

The analysis presented in this report is based on evidence collected using a mixed-method approach, which included:

- A desk review of programming documentation, such as the 22 relevant Operational Programmes, outputs from the SFC2014 electronic database / YEI Annual Implementation Reports submitted in April 2015, other national programming/ implementation/ evaluation documents related to YEI, Country-specific Recommendations (CSRs) and accompanying staff-documents
- An online survey of 22 Managing Authorities, with the purpose of collecting updated information on implementation progress in 2015 and in particular of gathering data on progress of ESF actions programmed under IP 8.ii. It also aimed to gather specific evidence on the complementarity between YEI and ESF actions both as programmed in the OPs and in their concrete implementation. The survey was implemented using a web-based format and distributed to the ESF Technical Working Group via DG EMPL. Responses were received from all Managing Authorities.¹⁴
- In 10 selected Member States, additional interviews with various national stakeholders, including Managing Authorities, implementing bodies/major YEI beneficiaries and evaluators of the YEI, were conducted. In total, national experts carried out 50 in-depth interviews (5 interviews on average per country chapter). This data provided richer insights and facilitated the interpretation of data collected using other research methods. In the 10 YEI-eligible Member States for which no country chapter was produced, interviews were also conducted in most cases for data validation purposes.
- The analysis of the evaluations submitted by Member States by the end of 2015 in accordance with Art.19 (6) of Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013 of the ESF. 19 evaluations had been submitted by Member States at the time of writing. Their results are included in this report and their key findings presented in summarised form in Annex 2. As the evaluation of the Bulgarian YEI implementation had not been concluded at the time of writing, the evaluators were interviewed. No evaluations had been implemented in England and Romania at the time of writing.

Based on all evidence, a cross-country synthesis was produced, which is presented in Chapter 2 in this report. Additionally, the 10 Country Chapters provide more details on programming and implementation progress for Belgium, France, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Spain. A full description of the methodology can be found in Annex 3.

When interpreting the synthesis of the implementation progress made in the eligible Member States presented below, it is important to note the limitations of the available data:

¹⁴ In the case of France, responses were received by a number of regional Managing Authorities, which were not analysed separately, but used for illustrative purposes only, as agreed with DG EMPL at inception stage.

- Evidence on results and outputs proved to be limited. This is in particular true in relation to information on the quality of the offers achieved. This is largely due to the fact that most MAs only launched their activities late in 2015 or even in 2016.
- There were some inconsistencies in evidence from different sources, namely the desk research, the survey of MAs, the qualitative interviews and finally the data provided in the national evaluation reports. Several reasons contributed to this: i) differences may be due to different reference periods used; ii) information provided by MAs in the survey sometimes went beyond the scope of the research in particular in relation to ESF-funded activities beyond IP 8.ii; iii) different MAs have sometimes interpreted concepts differently, for example what constitutes a personalised action plan. In cases where there were inconsistencies, the most up-to-date information was given priority as well as data provided through direct contact (interviews, emails) with the MAs. Where possible, the information provided has been double-checked ex-post with interviewees. Sources are specified throughout this report.
- Finally, national level documentation and key stakeholders interviewed were not always able to distinguish between the Youth Employment Initiative and the Youth Guarantee. In most Member States, the two initiatives are strongly intertwined, in particular in terms of communication. Usually the YG is seen as a youth employment policy programme and YEI is perceived as a fund to finance the YG. Thus, it proved difficult to make a clear distinction between the effect of the YG and YEI supported youth employment measures in some cases.

2. PROGRAMMING ARRANGEMENTS ACROSS MEMBER STATES

The following overview briefly summarises the programming arrangements of the YEI and ESF actions programmed under IP 8.ii across the EU, including their specific objectives, planned inputs and activities and how these aim to contribute to wider policy goals. It discusses the envisaged target groups, outputs and expected results.

2.1. *Integration into OPs and specific objectives*

Member States use the flexibility offered in the ESF regulation to programme the YEI. In the majority of OPs, the YEI is programmed in the context of a Priority Axis (PA), which also either includes other ESF-funded youth interventions or other labour market interventions in addition to the YEI. In 6 of the 22 OPs the YEI is implemented through a **dedicated Priority Axis** (ES, IE, PL, PT, RO, SK) whilst, in a further two – France and Italy - a **dedicated YEI OP** has been programmed.¹⁵ The Spanish OP in which the YEI funding is programmed is entirely orientated towards youth employment measures including both YEI and ESF funding.

The objectives of YEI interventions are very similar across the OPs reviewed and relate to increasing the participation of NEET young people in education, training

¹⁵ Note that for France part of YEI is implemented through regional OPs, which may also include ESF funding under IP 8.ii, but are not included in this analysis, as well as the through dedicated national level OP, which is included in this analysis.

and/or employment. In the majority of cases (BE, BG, CY, CZ, EL, ES, IT, HR, LT, LV, SE, SI, SK, PL, UK-SC) all or some programme specific objectives in relation to the YEI are clearly quantifiable and relate to reducing the number of young people not in employment, education or training, or vice versa increasing the number of young people in employment, education or training. In other cases, the objectives are less tangible, e.g. in the case of the Irish, English or some of the programme specific objectives in the Spanish OP, which set increasing skills, education and employability as (one) of their objectives, or in the case of the Hungarian OP, which aims to ensure that young people aged 15-24 get access to the Youth Guarantee scheme as soon as possible. In most cases, the OP sets a single specific objective for the YEI. In a small number of instances, two or more objectives are detailed in the OPs, for example: having separate specific objectives for employment and education/ training support (RO); for different age groups (EL); or, for different educational backgrounds and for inactive and unemployed young people (BG). In the case of Spain and England there are multiple objectives which relate to the nature of support intended (e.g. basic skills, work placements, support for enterprise) within the overall aim of supporting young people.

In most cases where **ESF-funded interventions beyond the YEI** are programmed under IP 8.ii in the relevant OP, their specific objectives mirror - exactly or almost exactly - those set for the YEI interventions. While objectives may be equivalent, ESF interventions may cover other geographical areas (e.g. those not eligible for YEI support) or a longer timeframe than YEI (e.g. to 2023) (see section 2.5 below for details). In a smaller number of cases, additional objectives are set for ESF interventions under IP 8.ii; for example, Hungary includes an additional objective focused on apprenticeships and enterprise, in addition to an objective mirroring that set for the YEI, while Bulgaria includes an objective focused on transnational cooperation regarding models of sustainable integration of young people into the labour market, in addition to three objectives mirroring the three set for YEI. Typically, ESF interventions are programmed within the same Priority Axis as YEI while, in a smaller number of cases, these interventions are programmed in one or more different priority axes (e.g. EL, ES, PT).

2.2. Contribution of the YEI to the CSRs and YG goals

In most Member States, the YEI activities are intended to contribute to addressing the Country-specific Recommendations (CSRs) issued by the Commission in the context of the European Semester, where they relate to the need to reduce youth unemployment and NEET rates. While this link is often not explicitly stated in the relevant documents, i.e. the CSRs and OPs, it is implicitly clear that the OPs containing the YEI operationally address the youth employment challenges highlighted in some CSRs.

The link between the YEI and the Youth Guarantee (YG) is more explicitly mentioned in the OPs and the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plans. In the majority of Member States, the **YEI** is seen as a **key mechanism or lever** through which to **operationalise the Youth Guarantee** (e.g. BE, BG, CY, CZ, EL, ES, FR, HU, IE, LT, LV, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK). In some cases, the YEI is being used to support all activities planned under the YG which are within the remit of the YEI, i.e. which directly support young people (in contrast to support for structural reforms or capacity building of PES

for example). In others, the YEI is one funding source for the YG complemented by others. Countries where large shares of YG funding comes from the YEI include Lithuania - where 2/3 of all financial resources allocated for the implementation of the national YGIP comes from the YEI, Poland - where 3/4 of all YG funding comes from YEI and ESF funding and Spain - where 80% of all YG actions are funded through the YEI (both the specific YEI allocation and ESF matched funding). Overall, there is a large degree of complementarity between YEI activities and national Youth Guarantee schemes, which is reflected in OPs and implementation documents relating to the YG. Even in cases, where the Member State has chosen not to organise its national youth employment policies around the YG recommendation (e.g. UK-EN, UK-SC) activities closely reflect the types of activities foreseen under the YG and support its broad aims.

Given the complementarity between YEI activities and other ESF support programmed under IP 8.ii, the links between other ESF activity and the YG are similarly apparent.

2.3. Planned inputs and activities

The total amount of EU support for the **YEI interventions** is just over €6.4 billion, of which €3.2 billion programmed under a dedicated YEI specific budget line. The remainder is ESF matching funding (at least another €3.2 billion euros complemented by national ESF allocations). While the YEI specific budget allocation does not require national co-financing, the ESF matching funding part is co-financed, with just under €1.1 billion. National YEI allocations are based on the numbers of unemployed young people in 2012 in each Member State. At the MS level, the largest specific allocation to YEI is the €943.5 million to Spain, while the smallest is the €9.2 million allocation to Slovenia. In general, the corresponding allocation of ESF matching support is equivalent to the specific YEI allocation, with the exception of Slovakia where it is larger, at €122.2 million compared to the specific YEI allocation of €72.2 million.¹⁶

The total amount of ESF support for **other ESF interventions under IP 8.ii** in the OPs, which also contain YEI funding, is just below €3.4 billion, which is nationally co-financed by an additional €730 million. In terms of the amount of ESF funding allocated to other ESF youth employment activities in the analysed OPs, Poland stands out as having allocated a far greater amount than other countries - almost €1.3 billion. It should also be noted that, in a number of OPs analysed (e.g. FR, IE, IT, SK, UK-SC) no other funding beyond YEI is used to support youth activities under the dedicated investment priority on youth employment. However, other OPs in these countries may include ESF funding under IP 8.ii.

The **types of activities** planned under the YEI are in general consistent across all OPs under review. Table 2.1 below provides an overview of the broad categories of activities; please note that there is some overlap between activities.

¹⁶ It should be noted that Slovakia has programmed all relevant ESF funding under Investment Priority 8.ii within the YEI. No actions under Investment Priority 8.ii are funded in the relevant OP.

Table 2.1 Planned activities for YEI support as specified in the OPs

Type of activities	Number of OPs where the activity type is planned	Share of all 22 OP reviewed	Operational Programme
Training and support to gain a qualification	20	91%	BE-BXL, BE-WL, BG, CZ, EL, ES, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LV, PL, PT, RO, SE, SK, UK-SC, UK-EN
Apprenticeships and traineeships	16	73%	BG, CY, CZ, EL, ES, HR, IT, LT, LV, PL, PT, RO, SE, SK, UK-SC, UK-EN
Subsidised jobs	16	73%	BE-BXL, BE-WL, BG, CZ, EL, ES, HR, HU, IT, LT, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK
Short-term work placements or internships	14	64%	BE-WL, BG, CZ, EL, ES, IE, HU, LT, LV, PL, RO, SK, UK-EN, UK-SC
Job-seeking support, guidance and counselling	15	68%	BE-BXL, BE-WL, BG, CZ, EL, ES, FR, HU, IE, LT, LV, PL, UK-EN, SE, UK-SC
Self-employment and entrepreneurship support	12	50%	EL, ES, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LV, PL, PT, SE, UK-SC
Second chance education	10	45%	BE-BXL, BE-WL, CZ, ES, IE, HU, LV, PL, PT, SE
Employer incentives	9	41%	CY, ES, IE, HR, PL, PT, SI, SK, UK-SC
Other	14	64%	BE-WL, BG, CY, EL, ES, IE, IT, FR, HR, HU, PL, RO, SE, UK-SC

Source: Operational Programmes

Other activities which are present in a small number of OPs include: initiatives to promote the registration of currently inactive or disengaged young people; schemes focused on training and employment in particular economic sectors; support for personal development and social inclusion; geographical mobility schemes; and, volunteering.

In many OPs, there is **no particular prioritisation of activities** or a specific focus on one or two large types of activity (either in terms of the amount of funding allocated or expected level of participation). More commonly, activities are presented as a **menu of types of support** likely to be available and/or a range of activities are gathered together within a larger or integrated measure (e.g. EL, ES, IT, LT, PL). Such integrated measures may include a range of consecutive interventions, such as participation in training, followed by a work placement, followed by support to enter or sustain employment. Equally, in most instances, planned funding is not disaggregated at the level of activity types, adding to the difficulty of identifying the principal focus in terms of different forms of activity.

In the vast majority of cases where additional **ESF-funded interventions are planned within IP 8.ii**, these largely or totally mirror the activities planned for YEI (see also section 2.5 on the complementarity of YEI and ESF below).

In the case of both YEI and other ESF youth activity funded under IP 8.ii, there is a clear relationship between the types of actions anticipated or being implemented and the overall stated objectives guiding the development of activity. This is perhaps unsurprising, given the broad objectives of the activities outlined above.

2.4. Target groups, outputs and results

In most of the reviewed cases, the YEI targets both **unemployed and inactive young NEETs**. The described characteristics of envisaged target groups often do not go beyond this general level. There are some notable exceptions, e.g. in Slovenia, where only young people who are unemployed are targeted (not the inactive). In many countries there is a specific focus on the **long-term unemployed** (BG, HU, IT, LV, PL, SI, UK-EN).

There is only a limited explicit focus **on particular sub-groups** (e.g. the low skilled, disabled people, etc.) beyond a more generic discussion of 'disadvantaged' or 'hardest to reach' young people. Particular sub-groups are also often not reflected in output targets. In some cases, strands separately target those with certain educational levels (e.g. BG, ES, UK-SC) or people with disabilities (e.g. ES, PL, UK-EN). Some countries have defined target groups, for which support is specifically relevant to their country context. For instance, Roma, who generally display high NEET rates, are a target group in Bulgaria, Italy and Romania, women are a specific target group in Spain, Romania targets those living in rural areas and Italy has a focus on migrants.

Commonly, whilst sub-groups are cited in discussions of target groups, and sometimes reflected in output and result targets, the **development of specific activities to support particular groups** are not always clearly spelled out in the OP. There is also little evidence in the text of the OP of engagement methods for particular sub-groups as the OP often do not go down to this level of detail.¹⁷ While challenges are recognised in some national level documentation around, for example, engaging those who are not registered with the PES, or are distant from the labour market, the precise engagement approach intended to be used is not explicit.

The above assessment also holds true for those targeted with ESF funding programmed under IP 8.ii.

In terms of **age groups**, 14 out of the 22 programmes reviewed target their activities at the 15-29 age group, while only 8 countries focus on the age group of 15-24 year olds (see table 2.2 below). Again, this is largely mirrored in the ESF activities under IP 8.ii. The only exceptions here are Cyprus which, while focusing YEI support on the 15-24 age group, also supports 25-29 year olds through related activity under other ESF support within IP 8.ii, and the English OP, which only supports 15-24 year olds with

¹⁷ It should also be noted that the OP template has a character limit, providing only limited space to outline a detailed approach

other ESF funding under IP 8.ii (in contrast to the YEI, which supports 15-29 year olds).

Table 2.2 Age groups targeted through YEI and ESF in IP 8.ii activities in the reviewed OPs

	15-24	15-29	Not applicable
YEI activities	BE-WL, CY, ES ¹⁸ , FR ¹⁹ , HU, IE, RO ²⁰ , SE	BE-BXL, BG, CZ, EL, HR, IT, LT, LV, PL, PT, SI, SK, UK-EN, UK-SC ²¹	-
ESF (other than YEI) allocated to IP 8.ii	BE-WL, ES ²² , HU, RO ²³ , SE, UK-EN	BE-BXL, BG, CY, CZ, EL, HR, LT, LV, PL, PT, SI	FR, IE, IT, SK, UK-SC

Source: Operational programmes; not applicable refers to those OPs, which only contain YEI funding under IP 8ii (i.e. they contain no ESF other than YEI for this IP).

In terms of **both YEI and other ESF IP 8.ii outputs**, all OPs reviewed have a basic indicator to capture the number of (NEET) young people participating. Beyond that, they vary in respect of the number and type of specific output indicators used. Seven OPs specify one output indicator (BE-BXL, CY, FR, IE, SE, SK, RO), while 13 OPs specify a small number of output indicators (BE-WL, CZ, EL, ES, HR, HU, IT, LT, LV, PL, PT, SI, UK-SC). Where multiple output indicators are used, these typically relate to numbers of young people in the relevant age group, unemployment, and inactivity. In some cases (e.g. BG, UK-EN), a large number of indicators exists for both the YEI and other ESF IP 8.ii support, including those focused on particular sub-groups such as lone parents, the disabled, Roma, etc. The focus on one or a small number of output indicators in most Member States reflects the limited focus on specific sub-groups, e.g. the low skilled, those with disabilities, in the OPs (see also 2.4 above). This is not problematic per se, although more detailed output indicators for specific sub-groups can ensure that those – often more disadvantaged – sub-groups are in fact targeted specifically. It is noteworthy that, in the case of BE-WL, one output indicator refers to a non-participant related output, namely the number of training hours organised.

The **level of engagement anticipated** relative to the NEET population also varies significantly. Member States typically expect to engage between 15-40% of the NEET population in the relevant age group. Some OPs appear to be relatively ambitious in targeting a large proportion (based on a comparison with Eurostat data on the number of NEETs) of eligible NEET young people (e.g. ES, IT, PT).

Conversely, relatively small proportions of young people NEET are expected to be engaged on the basis of output indicators in the case of Brussels-Capitale (1510 NEETS overall²⁴), Czech Republic (2,480 NEETs or 13% of the total relevant NEET population in the targeted region), Cyprus (5,800 NEETs or 29% of the total relevant

¹⁸ Following an OP modification, the target group has been expanded to include 25-29 year olds.

¹⁹ The specific age group targeted is young people under 26.

²⁰ The specific age group targeted is 16-24.

²¹ The specific age group targeted is 16-29.

²² The specific age group targeted is 16-25. The OP is currently being revised to include 25-30 year olds.

²³ The specific age group targeted is 16-24

²⁴ No reference population available, so that no share can be calculated.

NEET population), and Sweden (20,000 NEETs or 18% of the relevant youth population in unemployment) for example.

Anticipated results vary significantly across OPs. While the result targets follow the indicators set in Annex II of the ESF regulation across Member States, there is significant variation in how ambitious these targets are, varying between relatively low numbers or proportions (>20%) to high (<80%) in respect of proportions gaining employment, qualifications etc. Of all participants who join a YEI measure, it is expected that approximately 75% complete; of those who complete the intervention, typical expected proportions for those who will achieve qualification, training or employment outcomes range between 25 and 50%.

2.5. Comparison of the foreseen YEI and ESF interventions

There is a **high degree of complementarity** between YEI and other ESF IP 8.ii interventions in the same OP, with regard to the objectives, activities, anticipated outcomes and results. Only in a small number of cases are countries implementing activities that could be considered distinctively different with these two funding sources. Table 2.3 below summarises the ways in which YEI and ESF interventions programmed under IP 8.ii complement each other.

Table 2.3 YEI and ESF IP 8.ii programming complementarity in the OP

	Number of OPs	Share of total OPs	Operational programme
ESF supports similar actions but in regions not eligible for YEI	9	41%	BE-WL, BG, CY, HU, PL, RO, SE, SI, UK-EN
ESF supports similar actions but for different target groups	5	36%	BE-BXL, CY, HR, SE, UK-EN
ESF supports similar actions but for a different time period	10	45%	BE-WL, BG, CY, CZ, EL, ES, HR, LT, LV, PT
ESF supports different actions	1	5%	HU
Not applicable	5	23%	FR, IE, IT, SK, UK-SC

Source: MA survey, self-reported data based on 22 MAs, and interviews, multiple responses possible, not applicable refers to those OPs, which only contain YEI funding under IP 8ii (i.e. they contain no ESF other than YEI for this IP).

3. IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS

The following section reports on the implementation progress of both the YEI and ESF actions under IP 8.ii in the same OP until November 2015. As outlined in Chapter 1, data collection for this report took place in October and November 2015, on the basis of interviews and a questionnaire survey among the MS. As a consequence, the reference period for implementation progress is September 2013 to the end of November 2015 for the YEI and January 2014 to November 2015 for other relevant ESF actions respectively. Updated quantitative information from the national evaluations due by the end of 2015 and reviewed in March 2016, is included where it covers the same reference period as the primary data collection (i.e. end-November 2015). Qualitative data is included throughout.

3.1. *Financial implementation progress*

According to the MA survey, approximately 36% started implementation in 2014 while the majority of MAs started the financial implementation of the YEI after January 2015 (ca. 55%). Only Ireland and Spain stated that they began financial implementation already in 2013. At the same time, and despite having already engaged participants, both Ireland and Spain stated in the survey - that no YEI funding had been committed, contracted out or paid to beneficiaries implementing the actions at the end of 2015. In the case of Spain, evidence from the national evaluation suggests that advance payments had been made to beneficiaries. Projects promoters seem to have submitted applications for financing but, as noted by the Commission services, in the absence of formally launched YEI operations not all may eventually be eligible for YEI funding. In the case of Ireland, it was unclear if the financial implementation had commenced and to what extent.

The most frequently cited reasons by MAs for not starting the financial implementation earlier – when it would have been possible from September 2013 – were the late adoption of the OPs and related lengthy preparation for their implementation, including the set-up of structures and procedures. As the YEI is implemented in the context of the ESF, overall delays with ESF implementation also affected the process in relation to YEI: despite a number of flexible arrangements provided in the legal framework as regards early implementation of YEI, the large majority of the MAs opted to wait for the adoption of the OPs and took time to set-up the structures necessary for the delivery of the entire OP (including ESF funding) and ultimately kick-off YEI implementation.

Table 3.1 below illustrates the progress of financial implementation of the YEI in the 20 eligible Member States for the 22 OP reviewed, including those MAs with no financial implementation progress up to October/November 2015.

Table 3.1 Financial implementation progress of YEI up to Nov 2015

Stage of financial implementation	Total amount (€)	Total amount as a % of all YEI resources	Managing Authorities with no implementation progress
Funding committed, i.e. approved by the Monitoring Committee for launching operations	1,803,380,676	28%	ES, IE, UK-SC
Funding contracted out to beneficiaries, i.e. implementing organisations	1,300,045,796	20%	CZ, IE, RO, SI, UK-EN, UK-SC
Payments made to beneficiaries, i.e. implementing organisations	312,330,433	5%	CZ, ES, FR, IE, HR, HU, RO, SI, SK, UK-EN, UK-SC

Source: MA survey, self-reported data based on 22 MAs; updated information from the national evaluations included for ES, IT, HU, LV, SI

Financial implementation progress across MAs is varied. Some had advanced well as regards commitments of funding to concrete YEI measures: 12 MAs (BE-BXL, BE-WL²⁵, CY, CZ, EL, HU, IT, LV, LT, PT, SE, SK) had committed more than 75% of their funding and six MAs (BE-BXL, BE-WL, EL, IT, LV, PT, SE) had contracted out more than 50% of the available funding to beneficiaries by October/November 2015. However, payments made to beneficiaries follow a slower curve in the majority of Member States. An exception is Cyprus, which indicated in the MA survey that it had made payments amounting to 16% of total YEI funding. There were three Member States who had not yet committed any funding by the end of November 2015 (ES, IE, UK (Scotland)).

According to the MA survey results, the The €930 billion additional YEI pre-financing paid by the Commission in 2015 did have a positive impact for half of the MAs, who were able to commit more funds to existing projects and/or launch more projects. An example of positive impact of the increased financing is Greece, which was able to kick-off its voucher scheme programmes due to the increased pre-financing.

Overall, the evidence suggests that financial implementation progress was less advanced in November 2015 than had been intended given the frontloading of YEI funding in 2014 and 2015. Overall delays in the set-up of implementation arrangements and the launch of operations in the Member States were among the key factors which, although not specific to the YEI (but relevant for all 2014-20 operational programmes) seriously affected YEI implementation progress.

As concerns the financial implementation of the **ESF actions under 8.ii**, 72% of Member States implementing actions under 8.ii in the relevant OPs had already committed funding by the end of November 2015, 39% had contracted out funding and 22% had paid out money to beneficiaries, according to the MA survey. A notable

²⁵ Information on Belgium is based on an interview with the WL MA, who stated that 100 % of funding was expected to be committed by the end of the year 2015. Differing statement was made in the survey.

example of implementation of ESF actions under 8.ii is Cyprus, which in the MA survey claimed to have committed 100% of its ESF funding and already paid out 40% to beneficiaries. At the other end of the spectrum, Greece, Portugal, Scotland and Spain had not yet committed any ESF funding under IP 8.ii in the relevant OPs by the end of November 2015.

3.2. Ongoing actions and activities in planning

18 Managing Authorities (BE-BXL, BE-WL, BG, CY, CZ, EL, ES, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LV, PL, PT, SE, SK) had started to engage young people in YEI activities by the end of 2015. MAs which had not yet started the implementation of activities as regards young people covered include England, Romania, Scotland and Slovenia.

47% of MAs who have programmed the implementation of **ESF actions under IP 8.ii** in the same OPs had started implementation (BE-BXL, BE-WL, CY, HR, HU, PL, RO, SE). The qualitative evidence indicates that this slower start (compared to YEI actions) seems to be mainly due to the fact that in many Member States the ESF is programmed as a follow-on from YEI activities after 2018 (see also section 2.5 above).

Types of measures supported

The majority of countries implemented a range of measures under the **YEI**, all revolving around the idea of supporting young people to take up employment, education or training. Table 3.2 below shows that most MAs provided traineeship or apprenticeships, a first work experience or quality VET in October/November 2015. More than half supported young entrepreneurs or offered job and training mobility measures. Somewhat less prevalent were programmes for early school leavers, wage and recruitment subsidies and measures reducing non-wage labour costs.

Table 3.2 Types of measures implemented under the YEI up to Nov 2015

Type of measure	% of MAs currently implementing such measures	MAs currently implementing such measures	MAs allocating main share of funding to such measures
Provision of first job experience	83%	BE-BXL, BE-WL, CZ, EL, ES, FR, HR, IE, IT, LT, LV, PL, PT, SE, SK	BE-WL, EL, IE, PT
Provision of traineeships and apprenticeships	72%	BE-BXL, BE-WL, BG, CY, EL, ES, FR, HR, IT, PL, PT, SE, SK	BE-BXL, BG, CY, ES, IT, PL
Quality vocational education and training courses	65%	BE-BXL, BE-WL, ES, FR, HR, HU, IE, LV, SE, PL, PT	LV
Job and training mobility measures	59%	BE-BXL, CZ, ES, FR, HR, HU, IT, LV, PL, SE	

Type of measure	% of MAs currently implementing such measures	MAs currently implementing such measures	MAs allocating main share of funding to such measures
Start-up support for young entrepreneurs	53%	BE-WL, ES, FR, HU, IE, IT, LV, PL, SE	
Wage and recruitment subsidies	47%	BE-BXL, ES, HR, HU, IE, IT, LV, SK	HR, HU, SK
Second chance programmes for early school leavers	44%	BE-WL, ES, FR, IE, IT, LT, PL, SE	
Other ²⁶	39%	BE-WL, ES, FR, HU, IE, IT, LT	FR
Reduction of non-wage labour costs	24%	HR, ES, IT, SK	

Sources: MA survey, self-reported data from MAs; as well as interviews, where data sources inconsistent; cross-validated with national evaluation reports

NB: SE is not indicated in the final column since it spreads its funding relatively evenly across measures. CZ and LT are not indicated in the final column as there is no information on the focus of activities.

According to the MA survey, the vast majority of MAs implemented **three or more types of measures under the YEI**, with the exception of Bulgaria²⁷ and Cyprus, which focused exclusively on traineeship and apprenticeship provision and Greece, which exclusively focused on first job provision. Across measures implemented there is a **strong focus of funding on first job experience and on the provision of traineeship and apprenticeships**. An exception is France, which estimated that it will allocate 60% of its funding to job search counselling measures ("*accompagnement*"). There is limited evidence in how far the activities implemented are tailored to the particular needs of the target groups (even where the set of activities itself is based on a personalised plan and profiling).

Further, as pointed out by a number of national evaluations, activities supported by the YEI up to the end of 2015 were not always new or innovative. They often came in addition to or scale up already existing activities funded through national funding sources. Examples include: France, where Youth Guarantee activities and '*Emplois d'avenir*' had previously been funded through the national budget; Ireland, where this is the case for the activities Youthreach, Tus, Momentum and Jobsplus; and, Bulgaria.

When it comes to **ESF activities implemented under Investment Priority 8.ii**, Table 3.3 below presents types of measures under implementation by November 2015. These measures generally showed a similar focus to those supported by the

²⁶ This includes job counselling and mentoring (ES, FR, HU, IE, LT), national and regional civic service (IT) and activities to include Early School Leavers (BE-WL)

²⁷ Bulgaria started implementation of three relevant YEI operations on youth employment as from January 2016, i.e. beyond the reference period for the study.

YEI, but also include some measures which are typically not supported under the YEI, for example the identification and registration of young people as a structural measure.

Table 3.3 Types of measures implemented under the relevant ESF IP 8.ii up to Nov 2015

Type of measure	% of MAs implementing such measures	MAs currently implementing such measures	MAs allocating main share of funding to such measures
Job and training mobility measures	70%	BE-BXL, ES, HR, HU, LV, PL, SE	
Quality vocational education and training courses	60%	BE-WL, ES, HR, HU, LV, PL	LV
Start-up support for young entrepreneurs	50%	BE-WL, ES, HU, LV, PL	
Provision of traineeships and apprenticeships	60%	BE-BXL, BE-WL, CY, ES, HR, PL	CY, ES, PL
Provision of first job experience	50%	BE-BXL, BE-WL, HR, LV, PL	
Wage and recruitment subsidies	30%	HR, HU, LV	HR, HU
Second chance programmes for early school leavers	30%	BE-WL, PL, SE	SE
Other	30%	HU, RO, SE	RO
Reduction of non-wage labour costs	10%	HR	

Source: MA survey, self-reported data from MAs, additional information from the evaluation reports

NB: BE-WL is not indicated in the final column since it spreads its funding relatively evenly across measures

Overall, however, there were no vast differences between the focus of YEI and ESF measures implemented under IP 8.ii, at least when analysing from an aggregate level. In Cyprus for example, while YEI funding was used to finance in-company training for unemployed secondary graduates, the same type of training for unemployed tertiary graduates was financed through the ESF.

Examples of measures supported by the YEI

Examples of national level initiatives ongoing in Oct/Nov 2015 include (more examples can be found in the annexed country chapters):

- **Counselling:** In France, the PES carried out personalised support and mentoring activities with young NEETs, including individualised activities (lasting up to 6 months) and group activities (lasting up to 3 months). A dedicated mentor was assigned to the young person, who was responsible for identifying the young person, preparing and facilitating the personalised support actions and providing

the related counselling. All actions were developed in close collaboration with the young person and participatory approaches were seen to be fundamental to the expected results. The available budget amounts to €25 million (€11.5 million YEI, €11.5 million ESF and €2 million from Pôle Emploi). The first activities were launched in September 2014. The objective was to target 53,000 young NEETs by the end of 2015. Between September 2014 and June 2015, around 37,000 young NEETs participated in the YEI actions. Similarly, in the Czech Republic, the project Nestuj a pojd II (Do not stand – go! II) focused on counselling and motivational support to gain first practical work experience.

- **First job experience:** Greece had started the implementation of two voucher schemes for the provision of first work experience for labour market entry for young people aged up to 29, including elements of theoretical training, work experience placements (up to 6 months) and guidance and counselling during the placement. Similarly, in Cyprus the YEI supported in-company placements of upper secondary graduates who are NEETs. The scheme was run by the Cyprus Human Resource Development Authority (HRDA). Up to the end of November 2016, 2,255 applications from young people and 1,946 applications from companies had been received. 1,946 applications had been approved and 1,550 work placements were realised. The programme was anticipated to cost €4.3 million instead of the €8.5 million originally budgeted. In Belgium (BXL), young people were provided with fixed-term jobs in public interest companies.
- **Traineeship and apprenticeships:** In Italy, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Handicrafts and Agriculture and Google developed a traineeship schemescheme called '*Growing Digital*', which included online training sessions, laboratory sessions and paid traineeships (6 months). Companies could receive incentives of up to €6,000 for the provision of internship places. 3,000 such traineeships were planned.
- **High-quality VET provision:** Latvia implemented initial VET programmes under the Youth Guarantee for young people to participate in a second chance VET programme to acquire a second vocational qualification within 1.5 years. The measure was funded with €29,421,641 until 2018.
- **Second chance programme for early school leavers:** Poland ran the programme '*Idea for Yourself*' for NEETs aged 15-17 to return to education and training and facilitate the acquisition of professional qualifications.
- **Comprehensive approaches:** In Lithuania, the programme '*Discover Yourself*' provided comprehensive support services for active and inactive NEETS, including actions to enhance their motivation, skills and professional experience. Similarly, in Sweden, the programme '*Ung Framtid*' aimed to help young men and women aged 16-24 in going to work or training, through improved and individualized matching

services. It is also to support employers to organize work experience opportunities for young people²⁸.

- **Other innovative approaches:** In Belgium (WL), a street art and urban renewal project supported the integration of young people (*'Popul'artCite: street art et rénovation urbaine au rendez-vous de l'insertion des jeunes'*) through an integrated system of career guidance, pre-qualification, qualification, employment and education support actions for job-seekers using the context of urban art and urban regeneration. The measure had funding of €1,275,670 and targeted 100 people aged 18-24. Another innovative approach was the programme *'Beru to za své'* (Czech Republic), which focused on job sharing between a NEET young person and an older worker.

Types of measures in the pipelineAs outlined before, in November 2015 a number of MAs had not yet started the actual implementation of the YEI, i.e. young people have not yet participated in YEI interventions (RO, SI, UK-EN, UK-SC). However, these MAs had taken **preparatory steps towards its implementation**. The majority were preparing to launch measures to provide a first work experience (100%), provision of apprenticeship, traineeship and quality VET courses (75%; RO, UK-EN, UK-SC). Half of these MAs were preparing either job and training mobility measures (RO, UK-EN) or wage and recruitment subsidies (RO, UK-SC). Where information on the start date was available (RO, UK-SC), MAs expected to launch these measures by mid 2016 at the latest.

In some Member States where the implementation of the YEI was already ongoing, **future measures were intended to address more specific target groups**, following learning in the early implementation phase that some vulnerable groups had not been sufficiently engaged. An example is Slovakia, where several projects are planned to remove obstacles to labour market entry for specific target groups, including young people with disabilities and young people in foster homes, crisis centres, re-education facilities, social integration centres, youth who have served time in prison, or who are homeless. Similarly, further calls for proposals for provisions for specific target groups are planned in Poland.

Of the nine MAs which were yet to launch measures under the **ESF IP 8.ii in October/November 2015** (BG, CZ, EL, ES, LT, LV, PT, SI, UK-EN), 67% were preparing to launch measures for the provision of a first work experience (BG, CZ, EL, SI, PT, UK-EN), 67% to provide apprenticeships, traineeships or quality VET courses (BG, CZ, EL, ES, SI, UK-EN), 44% to implement measures to provide start-up support for young entrepreneurs (EL, ES, LT, UK-EN), and 44% to launch measures to provide job and training mobility (CZ, ES, SI, UK-EN). Wage and recruitment subsidies were planned to be launched in Bulgaria, Lithuania and Slovakia. Preparation progress for these measures was varied. While some MAs had not yet started any preparation, e.g. Portugal, others had already launched calls for proposals, e.g. England or Bulgaria.

²⁸ Swedish Public Employment Service, *Information on YEI*. Available online: <http://www.arbetsformedlingen.se/For-arbetssookande/Stod-och-service/Fa-extra-stod/Ar-du-under-25-ar-/Ung-framtid.html> [Accessed 28 October 2015].

3.3. Details of implementation

Calls for proposals

According to the MA survey, information from stakeholder interviews and additional information provided by the Commission, all but four MAs had launched calls for proposals to implement (at least part of) the YEI by the end of 2015. One further MA (RO) was going to launch a call but faced delays in approving specific selection criteria on which it was conducting a public consultation at the time of reporting. Hence, only three MAs (IE, SK, UK-SC) did not plan to launch calls for proposals for the implementation of the YEI. In the case of Ireland, this is due to the fact that the YEI is primarily implemented through the Public Employment Service in collaboration with local partners. Similarly, in Slovakia, the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family and local Labour Offices are the main implementing bodies for the YEI projects, hence no call for proposals was launched. Finally, at the time of reporting, the Scottish MA was in the progress of implementing a negotiated process of defining and planning activities between the Lead Partners and the Scottish Government, which is not formally seen as a process of call for proposals.

National evaluations highlight some of the **challenges around calls for proposals**. In Lithuania for example, the evaluation found that the qualification requirements for the bidders did not ensure high quality provision and selection is primarily based on price. In France and Belgium, the aim to both promote rapid implementation and innovation was seen as irreconcilable through calls for proposals and the overall share of new and innovative respondents to calls for proposals was low due to the tight timeframe for implementation. These challenges are not specific to the YEI and relate to implementation through calls for proposals more generally. However, they may have been intensified by the need for a quick set-up of the YEI and its shortened implementation period.

Main beneficiaries

Public Employment Services (PES) are the main beneficiaries of the YEI across Member States, with 91% of MAs stating that PES were involved in the implementation of the YEI in their Member State (BE-BXL, BE-WL, BG, CY, CZ, ES, EL, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LV, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK, RO). Other types of beneficiaries included other public bodies, such as regional and local authorities and – much less frequently cited - NGOs, training providers, social partners and private employers.

The strong presence of the PES in the delivery can be considered problematic where its capacity to deliver services efficiently and effectively is called into question. This is the case in a number of Member States (e.g BG, ES, PT, SK, RO) where the 2015 CSRs highlighted issues such as lack of coordination between different employment agencies, limited progress in improving the efficiency and moderations of the public employment services, as well as lack of capacity particularly to provide personalised support to young people. This implies a risk for effective/efficient delivery of the YEI in cases where the PES lack administrative capacity (see also section 3.6 below). It should be noted that capacity-building activities funded through the ESF are implemented in some Member States, complementing the YEI and ensuring that it can

be delivered more effectively. However it should also be taken in account that even where PES are the primary beneficiaries of YEI funds, the actual implementation may involve third parties for example via subcontracting of services.

Similar patterns were observed for **ESF actions implemented under IP 8.ii**, although a much smaller share of MAs have launched (55%) or plan to launch (59%) calls for proposals in this case.

Partners' involvement

There is limited evidence of the **extent and success** of partnership working by the end of 2015, often because it is too early in the implementation process to judge the efficiency of such partnerships (as noted for example in the BE-WL national evaluation). Overall, partnerships were seen as crucial to tailor the YEI provision to the local/regional context (PT), to facilitate greater flexibility in the implementation of activities, in particular in the context of resource constraints (IT) or to ensure the effective implementation of activities by building on pre-existing relationships (IE).

A small number of Member States (LT, PL, SE) seem to have made **conscious efforts to promote multi-stakeholder** working with the goal of delivering tailored approaches for young people. In the case of Sweden, for example, the focus was on regional collaboration between municipalities, employment offices, social assistance and healthcare in some of its YEI funded measures. In other cases, the need for collaborative approaches was implicit, for example where the focus is on apprenticeship, traineeship or VET measures, which involved VET providers and employers. In some cases partnership working has come with challenges: in Lithuania and Poland, evidence from the national evaluations suggested that partnerships faced coordination challenges, especially where partners had no prior experience of working together to deliver activities outside of the YEI.

Linked to the challenges around calls for proposals, some interviewees suggested that the short timeframe for implementation of the YEI may actually have prevented collaborative working and the involvement of a wider range of diverse (and smaller) stakeholders. Eligibility criteria to deliver YEI projects within a short timeframe may have been favourable for larger organisations which were 'ready to start' implementation quickly, instead of partnerships which had yet to be established.

Personalised action plans

All MAs stated that the youth employment activities implemented under YEI/ESF include the establishment of a personalised action plan for each person, in which the various activities follow and/or complement each other. In some cases, the scope of actions which include personalised action plans was limited to specific aspects, for example they would only be implemented for actions implemented by the PES (e.g. FR, HU) or those targeting specific age groups only (e.g. EL). In the case of Slovakia, the national evaluation pointed out that it is not clear if a more personalised approach was induced through YEI/ESF funding, or was the result of a broader reform process, e.g. called for by the Youth Guarantee implementation.

However, it is observed that MAs had a **different understanding** about what constitutes a personalised action plan ranging from an initial needs assessment to a detailed step-by-step plan of consecutive actions, which will eventually support sustainable integration into education, training or employment. In Portugal for example, evidence from the national evaluation suggested that there are three different kinds of 'personalised' pathways, i.e. activation through training, support into employment and entrepreneurship. It is unclear, however, how tailored these three approaches were. In Lithuania, young people were also offered one of the following three packages of services: 1) a package for returning to the labour market, 2) a package for returning to the educational system, or 3) a package for self-employment. Each package included different classroom-based individual and group activities as well as short traineeships in selected enterprises or visits to various companies and educational institutions. In Belgium (both BXL and WL), personalised pathways comprised three phases, including the finding and contacting of young NEETs, the determination of their needs and their guidance and monitoring (as referred to as the FIND-MIND-BIND methodology in the BE-BXL OP).

In the case of Poland, the understanding and intensity of personalised support evidently differed even within a country context. The national evaluation highlighted that participants of PES-led projects received two types of services (e.g. a counselling and a training measure) on average, while participants of projects led by the Voluntary Labour Corps received nine types of services. This is partially due to the fact that the latter addressed target groups, which are more difficult to reach, but the evaluation also pointed out that the Public Employment Service needed to put a stronger emphasis on a real, in-depth diagnosis of participants' needs.

3.4. Characteristics of the target population and targeting progress

Outputs to date

At the time of writing, there is limited information available on outputs achieved and the characteristics of the supported target group. Some output data on the **YEI**, obtained through the YEI structured data reports from April 2015, the MA survey, the stakeholder interviews and the national evaluation reports was available for 15 MAs (BE-BXL, BE-WL, BG, CY, EL, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LV, PL, PT, SE, SK). Where data was available, there were often inconsistencies between the data reported in the MA survey, data provided during stakeholder interviews and the national evaluation results.²⁹ In some cases output data was only available for some measures or some providers (SK).

This highlights that monitoring systems used in the end of 2015 did not always (not yet) facilitate the extraction of up-to-date output data. Some of these issues were due to the fact that reporting requirements set out that output data was collected and submitted to the Commission on an annual basis and that – in the absence of real time monitoring systems at MA level – data could not be extracted readily for the

²⁹ Evaluation results were only taken into account, where they referred to a similar reference period as the national evaluation.

purpose of this study. Spain, as one of the major recipients of YEI funding for example, delivers the YEI through regional and local authorities and was – at the end of 2015 – yet to finalise a comprehensive monitoring system which would bundle the information from all its implementing partners and enable it to distinguish participants of YEI-funded activities from those young people who have registered in the national Youth Guarantee scheme. This may lead to future challenges on the feasibility of such an undertaking, where data will have to be gathered and entered into the consolidated system retrospectively (see also section 3.6.).

As regards all MS, Table 3.4 presents the data that was available by the end of November 2015. It should be noted that averages do not add up to 100% due to incomplete data in some Member States.

Table 3.4 Characteristics of the NEET population supported through YEI up to Nov 2015, total and shares %

MA	Total	15-24 years	25-29 years	Female	Male	ISCE D 1-2 ³⁰	ISCE D 3-8 ³¹	Unemployed	Inactive
BE-BXL	318	-	-	37%	63%	-	-	-	-
BE-WL	6,204	-	-	35%	65%	-	-	-	-
BG	5,198	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
CY	1,123	100%	-	50%	50%	4%	96%	-	-
EL	31,638	29%	71%	65%	35%	3%	97%	100%	0%
FR ₃₂	32,194	93%	7%	46%	54%	51%	32%	17%	77%
HR ₃₃	5,364	57%	43%	61%	39%	41%	59%	100%	0%
HU	19,376	100%	0%	48%	52%	19%	81%	89%	11%
IE	6,810	100%	0%	-	-	-	-	-	-
IT	153,160 ₃₄	63%	37%	49%	51%	25% ³⁵	75% ³⁶	-	-
LV	8,513	84%	16%	56%	44%	-	-	71%	29%
PL	6,634	69%	31%	50%	50%	-	-	62%	38%
PT	40,709	55%	45%	57%	43%	14%	86% ³⁷	100%	0%
SE	2,414	100%	0%	39%	61%	-	-	-	-
SK ₃₈	70	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

³⁰ Primary or lower secondary education.

³¹ Upper secondary education and above.

³² Some indicators do not add up to 100, provided by the MA.

³³ Only some of the interventions.

³⁴ The MA stated that 521,394 young people have been enrolled in the measures; however, this number refers to eligible young people the majority of which are currently waitlisted.

³⁵ Data only for those who registered through local employment centre.

³⁶ Data only for those who registered through local employment centre.

³⁷ Upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary (33,000) and tertiary (53,000).

MA	Total	15-24 years	25-29 years	Female	Male	ISCE D 1-2 ³⁰	ISCE D 3-8 ³¹	Unemployed	Inactive
Total/averages ³⁹	319,725	77%	28%	49%	51%	22%	75%	77%	22%

Source: stakeholder interviews, MA Survey, self-reporting, some data based on estimates, national evaluation reports where reference period relevant, only MS which reported outputs are displayed, averages are unweighted

The table above shows that the number of young people supported (by November 2015) varied widely across Member States. Some larger Member States and key recipients of the YEI, such as Greece, France, Italy and Portugal, had engaged large numbers of participating young people.

Overall, the focus of the YEI was on the younger age group of 15-24 year olds with the exception of Greece, where 71% of people supported to date are aged 25-29.⁴⁰ Young females were supported more frequently than young men (51% vs. 49%), although the focus varied slightly between Member States. 75% of YEI provision to date primarily targets young people with secondary and tertiary education which means that this group tends to prevail in the mix of NEET youth targeted by the Member States⁴¹. At the same time, 22% of YEI participants have only lower secondary qualification or below. This suggests that there is some effort to engage the low skilled, though there is significant scope for improvement. Some countries such as France and Croatia had a clear stronger focus on those with low qualifications and early school leavers. Finally, the target population to date primarily consisted of unemployed – rather than inactive – young people. However, some Member States such as France and Portugal had a stronger focus on engaging inactive young people than the other Member States.

Table 3.5 presents the data that was available by the end of November 2015 for the interventions supported by the ESF IP 8.ii, which is more limited.

Table 3.5 Key characteristics of the NEET population supported through ESF IP 8.ii, total and shares (%)

MA	Total	15-24 years	25-29 years	Female	Male	ISCE D 1-2	ISCE D 3-8	Unemployed	Inactive
CY	2,043	-	-	-	-	0%	100%	-	-
HR	2,400	63%	37%	55%	45%	63%	37%	100%	0%

³⁸ Only some of the interventions.

³⁹ Unweighted averages.

⁴⁰ Spain is currently planning an OP modification to extend the YEI coverage to the 25-29 age group.

⁴¹ In the Commission guidance note on programming and implementation of the YEI this aspect is discussed. While MS can themselves choose the mix of characteristics of targeted NEET population (unless these characteristics are explicitly defined in the OP), they are encouraged to pay special attention to low-educated and low-skilled NEETs, which tend to be harder to reach out to.

MA	Total	15-24 years	25-29 years	Female	Male	ISCED 1-2	ISCED 3-8	Unemployed	Inactive
HU	2,715	100%	0%	50%	50%	24%	76%	97%	3%
PL	3,301	61%	39%	45%	55%	-	-	47%	53%
Total	10,459	75%	25%	50%	50%	29%	71%	81%	19%

Source: stakeholder interviews, MA Survey, self-reporting, some data based on estimates

In the absence of detailed monitoring data on the characteristics of the NEETs supported, it was not possible to ascertain the extent to which specific disadvantaged persons, including those from marginalized communities and early school leavers, had been engaged. However, several national evaluations (e.g. ES, HR, PL, SK) pointed out that there has been a limited take-up in particular from vulnerable groups and that future activities would focus more strongly on these groups. The annexed country chapters provide some qualitative insights on disadvantaged groups engaged where data was available.

Finally, it should be noted that the data provided can only give a partial snapshot of the situation across Member States, as data was incomplete and often inconsistent across sources. The annual implementation reports covering the year 2015, to be submitted by the Member States by 31 May 2016, should provide more comprehensive information on output indicators.

Targeting and engagement

Across Member States, communication activities on the YEI and the Youth Guarantee are closely connected. Typically, communication efforts focused on the Youth Guarantee (as a national scheme) and/or specific activities under the YG (which can be financed by the YEI or ESF, or national budgetary allocations). As such, both the YG and YEI were communicated simultaneously, with little obvious distinction for the target audience. In some cases, only the Youth Guarantee was widely promoted, e.g. in Romania. It is the Youth Guarantee 'brand' that was communicated as a policy measure towards the target audience, even though the YEI was the funding mechanism behind many of its activities.

Communication activities – of both the YG and the YEI – to the target group – used a range of methods across Member States and were often embedded in overarching youth employment communication plans (e.g. BE-BXL, BE-WL, BG, IT, ES, PL). Across Member States a range of traditional and more innovative communication tools were used, including:

- classical advertisements such as in newspapers, TV, radio, websites;
- social media, such as Facebook or dedicated apps (e.g. SI);
- awareness-raising through career days or fairs, directed both at young people and employers and often implemented locally;
- direct promotion through Public Employment Services, schools and training providers.

However, it should be noted that, as regards the YEI, while communication measures are outlined in the OP, at the time of writing there was little evidence of ongoing campaigns. Information campaigns were sometimes connected to the **identification of the hardest to reach NEETs**, e.g. through the use of promotional caravans which seek to engage youths in remote areas – for instance in Lithuania and Romania.

There was some evidence that **communication and outreach arrangements in the context of the Youth Guarantee and/or YEI actions are not effective** in some Member States. A survey conducted by the Confederation of the Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria at the end of 2014 showed that information about the Youth Guarantee measures was insufficient, as was the information about the YEI measures implemented within the framework of the Youth Guarantee⁴². Similarly, the promotion of the Youth Guarantee in Croatia had a strong focus on state officials informing employers in seminars and is not implemented in a youth-friendly way. No specific communication of YEI-funded activities towards young people was undertaken. In the Czech Republic, a planned information campaign on the YG which was to be carried out locally was not put into action as it was considered ineffective and the target group could easily be reached through PES. Finally, the national evaluation for Spain attributed the lower than anticipated take-up in certain YEI activities, in particular amongst vulnerable groups, to an unsuccessful communication campaign.

Several national evaluations noted particular issues around **low participation** of the most vulnerable (e.g. ES, HR, PL), which may have been due to a 'creaming' effect, i.e. the engagement of those young people who were closest to the labour market. In other cases, countries lack mechanisms to identify, register and monitor NEETs, so that the focus of intervention is on those young people who are registered with the Public Employment Services.

Nevertheless, Member States seem to be **successful in engaging young people overall**. In some Member States, measures were in fact oversubscribed in October/November 2015. In Greece for example, the '*Voucher scheme for a first work experience for labour market entry*', which aimed at 12,000 NEETs aged 15-24, actually attracted 47,215 applications from unemployed young people, while the '*Voucher scheme for a first job experience for labour market entry*', which aimed to engage 30,000 young people aged 25-29, actually attracted in total 64,971 applications from unemployed young people. Similarly, in Italy, approximately 850,000 young people had registered on the Youth Guarantee portal by November 2016, of which 520,000 were eligible for support. Currently, 72% of these 520,000 eligible young people are waitlisted for support. However, engaging young people was an issue for some Member States. In Spain, the national evaluation points out that participant numbers were lower than expected up to the end of 2015, in particular amongst vulnerable groups. A new outreach concept, which involves collaboration with NGOs already in contact with these vulnerable target groups, has been developed to address this challenge.

⁴² Eva Kostova (2015), Youth Guarantee – Guarantee France, Newspaper DUMA, Available at: <http://www.duma.bg/node/104142>

MAs interviewed generally stated that the regulatory requirements of informing beneficiaries that their intervention is funded by the YEI is fulfilled.

3.5. Results achieved by the end of November 2015

Data on results across MAs is limited for the reporting period. This is primarily due to the fact that the majority of interventions started in 2015 with only a few young people having completed the interventions.

Examples of results achieved

By the end of 2015, information on results was available for seven MAs (CY, EL, FR, IT, LV, SE, PL). Some more detailed information on results – where available - is provided in the country chapters in Annex 1. An overview of results achieved is given in the following.

In **Italy**, 33,793 of young people had completed an intervention as of September 2015. Close to 35% of all completers were employed after 4 weeks. Males, older participants and those with higher educational levels displayed higher employment rates. Amongst the long-term unemployed, 24% had been offered employment after finalising the programme. According to the national evaluation, those who had taken part in the YEI displayed a 7.8% higher probability of getting a job compared to a similar population not enrolled in the programme. Further, it investigated the impact of taking part in a YEI traineeship on employment status, compared to participants in regular traineeships. It was found that there were no significant differences between both groups in the short term (immediately after completing the experience), but that those taking part in YEI traineeships were less successful in securing a job after one or two months of completing the experience. While the evaluation itself provides no explanation for the observed patterns, the evaluators independently suggested that this might be due to the fact that regular traineeships include a higher level of employer investment (instead of being funded through the YEI). In this way, employers may have a larger incentive to make the traineeship experience successful and sustainable. Subsequently, the measure for traineeships within the YEI OP has been revised as of 1st March 2016, and it now foresees a compulsory financial contribution from the company hiring the trainee.

In **Greece**, out of the 31,638 young people who participated in the YEI, 24,760 (78%) completed the intervention. Of those who participated, 15.6% received an offer of employment after or during the intervention; 83% received jobs in the host organisation of the YEI intervention and 88% accepted the offer. Those who refused primarily did so due to low wages, geographical distance from home, personal reasons or better employment. Of those who received an offer for practical work placements, 88% accepted. However, 74% of those who took up the offer received a second offer of a practical work placement after they had completed the first one. This raises

concern that work placements may lead to a series of precarious placements, rather than sustainable employment.⁴³

According to the national evaluation in **France (national OP)**, results at the end of 2015 were above the targets set in the OP. 31% of participants who responded to the exit questionnaire had obtained a fixed-term contract of a more than 6-month duration or a permanent contract, while 7% were in some other form of employment (internship, fixed-term contract below 6 months, subsidised or entrepreneurship contract), and 14% were in education or training. Overall, 52% of exits were considered 'positive exits' into employment, education or training, which is more than twice the objective set in the national OP.

In **Poland**, 1,661 (25%) of participants completed the YEI supported interventions. 600 (36% of those completing) received an offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship upon leaving. First indications of long-term results from some projects implemented under the YEI show that, 2-6 months after participation, 69% of participants were in employment, education or training..

In **Cyprus**, 33% of participants were in employment 6 months after leaving the intervention. 39% of those in employment held a full-time and permanent position. Out of the remaining 67% of participants, 65% were unemployed and 2% were inactive. The main reasons were difficulties in finding any type of employment, not having adequate qualifications for existing job vacancies, non-satisfactory working conditions and the fact that jobs were often not in line with a young person's career ambitions.

In **Latvia**, out of 2,532 people who completed one of the active labour market policy interventions supported by the Public Employment Service, 40% were employed six months after finishing their participation.

In **Sweden**, out of 2,414 participants, 1,019 finalised the intervention (42%). 61% of those who finalised the intervention moved into education or employment. There is currently no information on the outcomes of those who did not take up education or employment.

Information on results from **other ESF interventions implemented under IP 8.ii** in the relevant OPs is only available **for Hungary** where, by the end of October 2015, 2,715 participants were supported through the ESF interventions, and 421 participants had left or completed the programme (16%). Out of those who had left or completed the programme, two inactive participants had been seeking employment, 57 participants were in education/training (13.5%), 160 participants had gained a qualification (38%), and 202 participants were employed or self-employed (48%). 95 of this group (22.6%) were disadvantaged participants.

⁴³ The data on the YEI results in Greece refers to the sample of 501 YEI participants (taken from a database of 4,000 persons) that were interviewed by phone for the YEI national evaluation in Greece. The data should be treated with caution. It should also be noted that these results are preliminary only.

Good quality of the offer

A number of Member States did attempt to define qualitative aspects of the YEI-supported offers of employment, education and training. However, there is some variation as to if and how MAs defined a good quality offer. In many cases there was no specification in the OPs or the national evaluation reports about what is understood as a good quality offer. Where a good quality offer was directly or indirectly defined this generally falls into the following categories:

- **Suitable offer:** In Lithuania for example, it was debated whether work suitability should be used as criteria for a good quality offer including the compatibility with person's qualifications, work experience, health conditions and family commitments. The national evaluation suggested that both an external assessment against these criteria and a young person's own judgement should be taken into account to determine quality. Similarly, in Greece, the assessment of a good quality offer looked at a range of criteria including the sustainability of employment, its relevance to a person's previous work experience and their studies, as well as the associated salary.
- **Sustainable offer:** A number of evaluations assessed the sustainability of an offer using the criteria of contract quality. In Italy, for example, 35% of the employment offers were fixed term contracts, 31.9% offers were apprenticeship contracts and 26.4% were permanent offers.
- **Satisfactory offer:** A number of MAs determined the satisfaction of a young person with their offer using self-assessment surveys. In Italy, 85% of young people were satisfied with the measure and believe that it has improved their skills. Only 14% rejected an offer because it did not meet their expectations. Similarly, in Bulgaria, the ongoing evaluation defined a good quality offer asking beneficiaries to assess their experience using a range of criteria, including satisfaction derived from the work, wages, duration, type of contract and correspondence to educational background. In Cyprus, 91% of beneficiaries were satisfied or very satisfied with the programme and 84% felt that it improved their employment prospects. Similarly, in Poland, 90% were satisfied with the quality of the offer they received. In Greece, 66% of surveyed young people (the sample of 501 YEI participants) were satisfied or very satisfied with their offer of employment.
- **Fast offer:** The Croatian national evaluation stated that a good quality offer of continuing education, training or an apprenticeship is a placement up to four months after completing education or becoming unemployed or upon registration with the Public Employment Service.
- **Well-designed offer:** In the case of Ireland, for example, the national evaluation report finds that the quality of the offer in the '*Momentum*' and '*Jobsplus*' programmes was high, as they are long-term (two years in duration) and based on labour market intelligence around emerging and growth areas, with the resulting potential for the integration of participants in the labour market.

The above analysis illustrates that there was little consensus about how a good quality offer is defined. The Greek national evaluation pointed out that young people may have a very different idea of what constitutes a good quality offer compared to policy-makers or researchers (based on the sample of 501 YEI participants that were interviewed by phone). When asked, 76% of young people said that, for their quality of employment, a good working environment was crucial, while 62% thought it was important to maintain health and safety at work; 49% thought it was important to have full social security coverage and 47% thought it was important that the jobs are relevant to an individual's qualifications and previous experience.

3.6. Looking ahead

At the end of 2015, the vast majority of Managing Authorities was confident or very confident that the **objectives of the** Youth Employment Initiative, which in most cases relate to a decrease of young people not in employment, education or training, **would be met**. The level of confidence expressed was frequently justified by the high demand for YEI interventions to date (named by CY, EL, FR, IT, SE, SI) or the fact that programming and implementation arrangements are designed well (named by BG, IT, HR, HU, LT, PL, PT). Notable exceptions were the English MA and the Latvian MA. The former stated that they were not very confident that objectives would be met, due to the fact that "additional restrictions" (possibly referring to tighter implementation requirements) of the YEI would make the implementation difficult. The latter noted that, while they were confident that output indicators could be reached, it would be challenging to meet the specific result indicators.

Added value and influence of the YEI

Notwithstanding the initial delays in the launch and implementation of the YEI, the collected evidence suggests that Member States were engaging large numbers of young people in YEI activities. Further, the vast majority of MAs agreed (45%; BE-WL, ES, FR, HU, IE, IT, PL, PT, RO, SI) or strongly agreed (27%; BG, CY, EL, HR, LT, SK) that the **YEI will have an important influence** on the design of youth employment policy – beyond the end of the YEI - in their country.

The YEI was perceived as key to the rapid introduction of the Youth Guarantee in some countries, for instance in the case of Hungary, despite its relatively narrow scope of action, limited resources and additional monitoring requirements. In Greece and Lithuania, national evaluations highlighted that the YEI had led to a shift to demand-based delivery of active labour market policies for young people, with a much stronger focus on individualised assistance for the young people themselves.

The anticipated influence and added value of the YEI of course also depended on its role in terms of its budgetary share in the overall youth employment and education policy allocations in the various Member States. In this context, four MAs were not sure if the YEI will have an important influence (BE-BXL, LV, SE, UK-SC); in the case of Sweden for example, the YEI-funded activities were just a small part of the effort to tackle youth unemployment alongside a vast range of other measures and reforms targeting the same or similar groups within the Youth Guarantee. The case is similar for the UK (England OP), which stated, along with the CZ MA, that they did not think

the YEI would have an important influence on youth employment policy in their country.

Finally, the **impact of the YEI**, in particular as regards longer-term outcomes largely depends on the overall **economic context**, notably the still ongoing fiscal consolidation process and reduced public spending in some Member States (e.g. EL, IT). The focus of the YEI on supply-side interventions, i.e. active labour market policies, may not be sufficient in an overall context of still limited labour demand. At the same time, other macro-economic aspects, notably the economic recovery or demographic change have also been pointed out in the national evaluations for Latvia and Lithuania as potential important factors influencing the decrease of the NEET population. To this extent, the overall impact of the YEI would of course also be influenced by the combination of such external/context factors.

Implementation challenges and associated risks

While the MAs expressed a high degree of confidence regarding the achievement of the YEI objectives in October/November 2015, evidence from the primary data collection and the national evaluations suggested that there are implementation challenges in many Member States, which might inhibit the success of the YEI, particularly in terms of quality of delivery, effectiveness and monitoring. Some of the key challenges identified are set out below, as well as – in certain cases – how these are already being addressed in certain Member States.

The **shorter timeframe for YEI implementation compared to the ESF actions** was found to be an obstacle to successful delivery (e.g. BE-WL, CY, EL, ES, LT, PT). Many Member States were not institutionally ready to deliver the YEI from 2013. Where structures existed in 2013, these were still involved in the delivery of the previous ESF programming period, with little capacity to set up additional activities or public procurement procedures.

Several countries encountered **delays in the designation of authorities**⁴⁴. As discussed above, this challenge is not specific to the YEI but concerns all ESIF operational programmes. In France for example, uncertainties around the designation of authorities meant that many beneficiaries did not respond to calls for proposals initially or at all. The national evaluations for several countries have pointed out the urgency of immediate implementation, including Lithuania, where some activities are expected to only kick-off in mid 2016, but also Cyprus, where the national evaluation calls for the need for the development of a detailed roadmap and/or timeplan for the implementation of activities up to 2018, given certain observed delays as regards some implementation aspects. Another MA with significant delays is Scotland, where the financial implementation only started in early 2016. In these countries (and others facing significant delays), there is a significant risk that output and result targets set out in the OPs may not be achieved until 2018.

⁴⁴ By the end of 2015, the following MS had designated the authorities for their YEI-supported OP: BG, PT, GR, FR, IT, PL, LV, HU.

There was **insufficient capacity of (some) PES or other intermediary organisations** to deliver the programme (e.g. BG, CY, ES, IT, LT, LV, PT, SK, RO). National evaluations in Cyprus and Italy for example pointed to the slow process of modernisation and capacity building of the PES, as well as the lack of (human) resources. There were issues in particular in relation to interventions targeted at young people, but also to the monitoring of data. In the case of Lithuania and Latvia, national evaluations pointed to the high workload of case workers. Given the strong involvement of PES in the delivery of the YEI in most Member States, this was a serious issue in particular as the YEI cannot be used to fund the institutional capacity building needed. The use of ESF funds to complement YEI activities in many countries may mitigate this challenge. Most Member States had programmed significant ESF funding under the respective investment priority on modernisation of labour market institutions (the Public Employment Services, also large YEI beneficiaries, are typically targeted by such support).

At least at the initial YEI implementation stage, in some Member States the YEI seemed to fund **predominantly already existing programmes** and there was only **a limited focus on innovative approaches** (e.g. BE-WL, BG, FR, IE). Some of these existing programmes may be tried and tested provisions, which engage young people very effectively. It would however be important to ensure that YEI interventions do not merely replicate inefficient measures, in particular given the need to develop new and better-tailored approaches for the difficult-to-reach target groups which typically are not effectively captured through traditional measures.

Linked to the above, the effectiveness of YEI actions very much depended on **the quality of employment, education and training services** offered in the Member States. Evidence from national evaluations suggests that in some Member States some services had not been as effective as anticipated and would need further refinement to produce results. In Greece and Latvia for example, it had proven to be challenging to link VET institutions and employers to deliver high quality vocational education and training under the YEI. However, learning on the design of the measures from the first phases of YEI implementation was taking place. In the case of Italy, for example, the national evaluation showed a low degree of effectiveness of the traineeship measure compared to traditional provision. This had led to a revision of the guidelines for the measure.

There were **difficulties in identifying inactive or administratively excluded NEETs** in several countries (e.g. BE-BXL, BE-WL, HR, HU, LT, PL, RO) and - related to this - issues around the activation of those NEETs furthest from the labour market. The focus had been, at least initially, on highly educated young NEET. National evaluations also point to this aspect (e.g. the report on Croatia). Following learning from the early implementation phase, several Member States were stepping up their efforts to engage those harder to reach. In Spain for example, a new outreach campaign involved collaborations NGOs already in contact with vulnerable groups to get access to this target group. In Slovakia and Poland, activities in the next phase of implementation of the YEI were set to focus more strongly on specific vulnerable groups.

The absence of - or delays in - the implementation of integrated monitoring systems for the ESF operational programmes in general was pointed out as an obstacle to efficient delivery in several Member States (e.g. CY, CZ, ES, HR, HU, IT). This is an issue since it inhibits the correct reporting on outputs, results, as well as financial management on the side of the Member States. In Spain for example, there were significant issues with the monitoring system, which neither distinguished between participants registering with the Youth Guarantee and those taking part in YEI-funded activities, nor between those registered in the monitoring system, those eligible for support and those who actually participate in measures. Spain was improving its monitoring and reporting system in late 2015/early 2016.

Given the limited results data available, **there was little evidence of the sustainability of the offers** made as a result of YEI-supported measures. However, the national evaluation in Greece highlighted that the sustainability of some of the placements for young people might be questionable in some cases. After finishing a practical work placement under the YEI, a high share of young people was offered a second practical work placement in the company, instead of being offered full employment. This raises concerns around the precarity of employment offers and the potential substitution of regular staff.

Asked what would be **needed to reach the objectives of the YEI**, MAs emphasised the importance of the smooth implementation of the YEI through beneficiaries, the extension of the YEI implementation period, the successful identification of NEETs, the simplification of procedures and a favourable social and economic environment.

Finally, in some cases there were **difficulties in positioning YEI-funded activities in relation to national youth employment policy measures (e.g. CY, SE, UK-SC)**. In Scotland for example, the economic and policy context means that the OP needed to focus on those furthest from the labour market with multiple barriers to work to provide additionality. Given the focus of the YEI on relatively fast to achieve employment, education and training outcomes, the YEI funding alone might not be sufficient to provide such comprehensive support. The smaller target group of those closer to labour market entry was already extensively supported by domestic programmes at national, regional or municipal level. Similar concerns were raised by the national evaluations for Cyprus and Sweden.

3.7. Comparison of the ongoing YEI and ESF interventions

As outlined in relation to the programming arrangements in section 2.5 above, there is a high degree of complementarity between the YEI and other ESF interventions under IP 8.ii programmed in the same OPs. With regard to implementation progress, achieved outputs and results to date, YEI interventions were generally more advanced than the related ESF interventions. This was often due to the fact that ESF funding was programmed to be used to continue the YEI actions after 2018. Where the implementation of ESF interventions had already started, evidence on their progress was often more limited than for YEI interventions due to different reporting

requirements and the fact that first outputs and results did not have to be reported until mid-2016⁴⁵.

4. OVERALL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has shown that considerable progress had been achieved by the end of 2015 in the implementation of the YEI with a large number of young people already having benefited from the support. However the study also pointed to a lack of evidence of progress in implementation from certain Member States, at least in this early phase, and indicated some implementation challenges which should be addressed for the YEI to achieve its full potential. Some Member States were already in the process of addressing these.

Up to the end of November 2015, close to 320,000 young people had been included in actions supported by the Youth Employment Initiative and 18 out of 22 Member States had launched actions under the YEI. Larger Member States and some of the main recipients of the YEI (EL, FR, IT, PT) had already managed to engage large numbers of young people. The total number of young people engaged in YEI actions was likely to be even higher than 320,000 since data for many Member States, including the large beneficiary Spain, was not yet available at the time of reporting.

A range of measures funded through the YEI had been set up in most countries, offering a 'menu of support' for young people NEET with the overarching objective to integrate them into employment, education or training. There was a strong focus on the provision of qualification and work experience type activities, such as the provision of first job experience (implemented in 81% of cases where implementation has started), traineeships and apprenticeships (71%) and high quality VET courses (65%). All countries developed personalised action plans when young people took part in YEI activities, although to varying degrees. In some Member States this policy practice was a novelty.

Based on the available data, the YEI more frequently reached those aged 15-24 (rather than those aged 25-29), females (rather than males) and the unemployed (rather than inactive). YEI provision primarily targeted young people NEET with upper secondary and tertiary education. At this early stage of YEI implementation, results data was limited and only available for a small number of Member States and often for individual interventions only. The annual implementation reports to be submitted by the end of May 2016 and further should provide further evidence on the results of the YEI

As regards the financial implementation, 28% of the available YEI funding had been committed by the end of November 2015, 20% had been contracted out to beneficiaries and 5% had been paid to beneficiaries. Three Member States had not yet committed any funding by the end of November 2015 (ES, IE, UK-Scotland). The €930 billion additional YEI pre-financing paid by the Commission in 2015 had a positive

⁴⁵ The first Annual Implementation Reports were submitted by Member States in May 2016.

impact for half of the Managing Authorities, who were able to commit more funds and/or launch more projects.

The implementation of other ESF IP 8.ii interventions dedicated to youth employment in the 22 programmes analysed was less advanced overall. This was partially due to the fact that the ESF funding is often programmed to finance the continuation of YEI activities after 2018. Overall, there is a high degree of complementarity between the YEI and other ESF interventions under IP 8.ii programmed in the same OPs.

However, some important implementation challenges remain. These relate on the one hand to challenges which may directly impact on the effective delivery of the YEI and the success of the YEI to integrate young people into the labour market and, on the other hand, to challenges regarding the monitoring of the YEI. First and foremost, the evidence suggests that financial implementation progress was less advanced than had been intended with the front-loading of funding in 2014 and 2015, largely due to the late set-up of programme implementation arrangements on the ground. Financial implementation will have to be significantly speeded up in the later years of YEI implementation. It will be crucial to ensure that the funding available will be fully used in order to tackle the continuing challenges of high youth unemployment and NEET rates. As such, Member States should be called upon to speed up financial implementation, taking into account the learning on effective measures which has taken place during the first phase of implementation.

During the first stages of YEI implementation Member States have tended to focus for the most part on highly educated young people NEET instead of those low-skilled. A 'creaming effect' seems to have been observed in the early phases of delivery in some Member States. Some Member States have started to put into place additional measures to identify and engage vulnerable target groups, e.g. through collaboration with stakeholders who are already in contact with such groups such as NGOs, or through the launch of additional activities with a focus on more specific target groups.

Issues with regard to the effectiveness of the services delivered have been raised in some Member States, and the national evaluation reports in particular have highlighted where there are shortcomings to certain provisions. Member States should make changes where necessary to current service delivery.

Finally, the absence of fully functioning integrated systems in several countries by the end of 2015 raises concerns in some cases regarding the completeness and quality of data collected.

The majority of MAs were confident that the objectives of the YEI will be met when asked in October/November 2015. However, in light of the ongoing youth employment crisis in Europe, it will be essential to ensure that the YEI is implemented effectively over the remaining time period through close monitoring and, where necessary, support for implementation in the Member States.

**ANNEX ONE: 10 COUNTRY CHAPTERS
PLEASE SEE SEPARATE FILE**

**ANNEX TWO: KEY POINTS FROM THE EVALUATIONS
PLEASE SEE SEPARATE FILE**

ANNEX THREE: METHODOLOGY

Six Work Packages were designed to address the scope and objectives of the study

Work Packages (WP)	Purpose
WP 1: Inception phase	<p>The kick-off meeting took place at DG EMPL on 22 September 2015 and minutes were provided (annexed to the Inception Report). To refine the research methodology and tools initial desk research was conducted by the core research team. The research tools developed included the template for the 10 YEI progress report and accompanying guidance note; the template for the 10 country chapters and an accompanying guidance note; semi-structured topic guides for stakeholder interviews and a survey questionnaire (all annexed to the Final Inception Report). All research tools were piloted in Lithuania prior to finalisation and submission of the Draft Inception report. The Draft Inception Report, submitted as agreed on 08 October 2015, provided a detailed methodology and updates on progress to date, the work plan and time schedule, as well as the draft research tools and country chapter pilot. Following the inception meeting on 14 October 2015, subsequent exchanges with DG EMPL and some adjustments, the Final Inception Report including the research tools was approved by the client on 16 October 2015.</p>
WP 2 and WP3: YEI progress reports and country chapters (including MA survey)	<p>Under the instruction and supervision of the core research team, country experts for the 20 Member States undertook research to gather data and populate the templates. This included desk research for both the YEI progress reports and country chapters and 50 additional interviews with key stakeholders for the country chapters. For the progress reports, no interviews were required, but most country experts conducted interviews to validate the evidence from the desk research.</p> <p>Simultaneously, the core research team implemented a survey of Managing Authorities, which was to provide an updated assessment of the YEI implementation progress to date. All Managing Authorities answered to the survey. Findings from the web-based survey were included in the YEI progress reports and country chapters by the country experts. The 10 country chapters can be found in Annex 1.</p>
WP 4: Synthesis and Interim Reporting	<p>The Draft Interim Report was submitted as agreed on 14 December 2015. In this report, we presented a summary of progress to date, any challenges encountered and solutions found, and most importantly the results from WPs 2-4 (Task 2 and 3 in the TOR) in a synthesis overview, for which the YEI progress reports and country chapters provide the basis. It also</p>

Work Packages (WP)	Purpose
	<p>provided an overview of the final steps for completion of the study including an updated work schedule. The annexes include the 10 completed country chapters and the minutes of the inception meeting with the Steering Committee. The Interim Report meeting was held on 12 January 2016. Following comments received during and after the interim meeting, this revised interim report was submitted on 29 January 2016 and approved on 22 February 2016.</p>
<p>WP 5: Update of the overview and country chapters</p>	<p>Following the submission of the national YEI evaluations in Q1 2016, country experts reviewed the evidence from the evaluations and updated the YEI progress reports and country chapters, where evaluations provided new evidence towards the key evaluation questions. 19 evaluations were received up to the cut-off point of the 15th of March. No evaluation was received for Bulgaria, Romania and England. In the case of Bulgaria, the evaluators were interviewed, as the evaluation was already in progress.</p> <p>Following this the synthesis overview was updated taking into account any new evidence. All learning and qualitative key points from the evaluation reports were integrated in the synthesis review. Quantitative data was integrated, where the data from the evaluation made reference to the same reference period than the data collected to date. Quantitative data was not updated where the reference period of the evaluation was longer, so to ensure the comparability of data across Member States. This synthesis can be found in Chapter 2 of this report.</p>
<p>WP 6: Final reporting</p>	<p>This Work Package included the drafting of the Draft Final and Final Reports, as well as the final meeting with the Steering Committee. The submission date of the Draft Final Report is the 15 April 2016. The final meeting with the Steering Committee will take place 25 April 2016. This final report was submitted on 27 June 2016.</p>

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