



european platform for rehabilitation



***Building capacity for
excellence in service provision
for people with disabilities***

Analytical paper on European Employment Policies and Initiatives

December 2015

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I. Introduction

This analytical paper examines a number of key EU initiatives in the field of employment, either that were launched in 2015 or are ongoing. The initiatives are described, and their relevance for the providers of employment services and vocational education and training are highlighted and analysis by key stakeholders are included.

According to the subsidiary principle, in its work towards developing a strategy for employment, the EU has the competence to coordinate, encourage cooperation and support national government's' actions. The European employment strategy (EES) dates back to 1997, when Member States established a set of common objectives and targets for employment policy. Its main aim is the creation of more and better jobs throughout the EU. It is now implemented through the **European semester**¹, an annual process promoting close policy coordination among EU Member States and EU Institutions. Employment features in these parts of the European Semester:

The **Annual Growth Survey** (AGS). The AGS reports on progress across Europe in terms of economic and employment growth, as well as social issues, and makes general recommendations. The annual **Joint Employment Report** is a document prepared by the European Commission and later approved by heads of state and government, published alongside the AGS. It has a stronger focus on employment and social developments in Europe and EU Member States' reform actions. It is based on (a) the assessment of the employment situation in Europe (b) the implementation of Employment Guidelines and (c) an assessment of the Scoreboard of key employment and social indicators. This paper examines the 2016 AGS and 2015 Draft Employment Report.

National Reform Programmes (NRPs)² are submitted annually by national governments as part of the European Semester and analysed by the Commission. Based on this assessment the Commission publishes a series of Country reports³, analysing Member States' economic policies and later issues **Country-specific recommendations (CSRs)**⁴. The recommendations that are given annually by the European Commission to national governments designed to promote growth and jobs, and which can cover areas from healthcare, to employment to taxation. Each country should report on how the recommendations have been implemented. This paper examines the CSRs.

The paper also examines **the Recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market**. Finalised in December 2015 it is a set of guidelines that national governments agreed to implement to assist long-term unemployed into the

¹ See http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/index_en.htm

² See http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm#map

³ Available at http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/country-specific-recommendations/index_en.htm

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm#map

labour market, for example in terms of support services or engagement with employers. Finally, the **Youth Employment Initiative (YEI)** and **Youth Guarantee** are discussed. National governments agree to guarantee people under 25 either an offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a training within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. Each Member State has to put in place a plan of how to ensure this. The YEI is one of the main EU financing instruments for the Guarantee.

After an explanation and analysis of each initiative, action points are proposed to service providers.

II. How services providers can make use of the initiatives

The Recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market

- ⇒ Identify which authority has been designated to implement the specific actions outlined in the recommendation and suggest collaborating to improve the services provision to long-term unemployed.
- ⇒ Use the proposals in the recommendation as justification for tailor made service provision in labour market integration work.
- ⇒ Use the focus on engaging with employers to promote actions by public authorities.
- ⇒ Examine how to use the EU Structural and Investment Funds to support initiatives promoting labour market integration, use the Recommendation text to support project applications.

Annual Growth Survey and Country-Specific Recommendations

- ⇒ Find the employment-related issues highlighted by the European Commission that you support (such as the importance of VET, the need to address labour market access for persons with disabilities, the importance of personalisation of services, the focus on people with a weak link to the labour market).
- ⇒ Check the EPR paper on the European Semester and the country fiches⁵ drafted by EPR to see which specific recommendations have been made to your country that you agree with:
 - Use the references to the issues and the specific recommendations to hold public authorities to account;

⁵ Available at <http://www.epr.eu/index.php/public-affairs/european-semester/476>

- Offer your services to public authorities as tools to respond to the issues raised and the recommendations made.

The "Joint Employment Report"⁶

- ⇒ Use the fact that the European Commission is stressing the importance of VR when in communication with funders, to help promote the significance of their work.
- ⇒ Examine the good practice outlined in the report.

The Youth Employment Initiative and Youth Guarantee

- ⇒ Consult the relevant European Commission report about the implementation of the Youth Guarantee – to know what initiatives are available to support the young people and what criticisms or proposals the Commission has, which could support advocacy work.
- ⇒ Promote services as a means for fulfilling the guarantee.
- ⇒ Examine the European Alliance for Apprenticeships and consider joining or connecting to organisations involved.
- ⇒ Consider registering or consulting apprenticeship and training opportunities on the Drop'pin website⁷.

III. Annual Growth Survey 2016

The Annual Growth Survey (AGS) sets out the priorities for the next 12 months for the member state countries of the EU in terms of budgetary policies, and is the starting point of the European Semester.

The **2016 AGS "Strengthening the recovery and fostering convergence"**, published on 26th November 2015, recommends pursuing economic and social policies based on three main priorities: relaunching investment, pursuing structural reforms to modernise the economies (including labour market policies, focusing on young and long term unemployed and more competitive markets to stimulate job creation) and responsible fiscal policies (including making tax systems addressing disincentives to employment creation and modernisation of social protection systems to efficiently protect against the risks throughout the life cycle while remaining fiscally sustainable to cope with demographic changes).

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/2016/ags2016_draft_joint_employment_report.pdf

⁷ <https://ec.europa.eu/eures/droppin/en>

This year's AGS for the first time emphasises the necessity to deal also with questions of social justice as indicators for economic policy objectives – not only to boost economic growth and convergence, but as an end in itself. Hence, for the first time the Alert Mechanism Report 2016, which identifies issues that risk hindering the smooth functioning of Member State economies, of the euro area, considered three indicators related to employment, namely the “activity rate, long-term and youth unemployment”. The inclusion of new employment variables in the scoreboard⁸ is a concrete deliverable on the Commission's commitment to strengthen its analysis of macroeconomic imbalances. This should help monitor and take into account the social consequences of the crisis,, but it is not clear how this initiative really impacts the rest of the European Semester process, and a number of stakeholders had asked for social indicators to be included.

Under the investment pillar, the AGS explicitly mentions that *“it is essential that Member States promote social investment more broadly, including in healthcare, childcare, housing support and rehabilitation services to strengthen people's current and future capacities to engage in the labour market and adapt. [...]Social infrastructure should be provided in a more flexible way, personalised and better integrated to promote the active inclusion of people with the weakest link to the labour market.”*

Under the structural reform chapter, several references are made to policy actions which are needed in the Member States such as job creation, tackling unemployment and specifically youth and long term unemployment, tackling disincentives to entrepreneurship and job creation, tackling the gender gap in employment, ensuring flexibility and security, simplification of employment protection and promotion of labour market transitions, and comprehensive integration measures for those further away from the labour market and in response to the recent arrival of large number of refugees. However, the document does not provide guidance on how to achieve any of these actions.

IV. The “Joint Employment Report”⁹

The annual Draft Joint Employment Report is a document prepared by the European Commission and later approved by heads of state and government (The European Council). The 2015 version was published on the 26th November. The document aims to provide an overview of key employment and social developments in Europe as well as EU Member States' reform actions that come out of recommendations made to the different countries by the Commission during the European Semester process. It is supposed to stimulate reforms that promote job creation and social inclusion. It is a useful document to see trends across

⁸ More about the Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure (MIP) scoreboard at http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/economic_governance/macroeconomic_imbalance_procedure/mip_scoreboard/index_en.htm

⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/2016/ags2016_draft_joint_employment_report.pdf

Europe, both positive and negative, in terms of statistics but also initiatives taken in various countries to tackle social and employment challenges.

The document specifically mentions the situation of persons with disabilities in the context of employment. It notes that *between 2010 and 2014, the difference in activity rates¹⁰ between older workers (55-64) and prime age workers (25-54) decreased from 35.4 to 29.6 pps¹¹. In contrast, the differences between nationals and non-nationals and between persons with and without disabilities have not diminished.* The report also mentions that several Member States (Bulgaria, Denmark, Croatia) introduced more stringent criteria and procedures regulating access to disability benefits.

The importance of vocational rehabilitation is highlighted. The report states (in bold) that **Vocational rehabilitation is key for the participation of persons with disabilities in the labour market.** Positive developments that promote VR are then highlighted: *Finland made changes to enable early access to vocational rehabilitation to prevent retirement on a disability pension. From October 2015 a rehabilitee should be able to receive a partial rehabilitation allowance from the Social Insurance Institution for those days of rehabilitation when a person works only part-time. Croatia introduced amendments to the Act on Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities in December 2014 to improve their professional rehabilitation and employment and the Act also provides for establishment of regional centres for vocational rehabilitation.*

The report also promotes certain Dutch and Estonian reforms. *Estonia started to implement a Work Ability Reform that introduced a qualitative shift from evaluating the incapacity to work to focus instead on assessing an individual's ability to work and facilitate integration into the labour market and social life. Similarly, the Netherlands adopted a Participation Pact to boost participation in the labour market of people with disabilities, and unskilled people, both in the private and the public sectors.*

V. Country Specific Recommendations 2015 – Tackling unemployment

Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs) are a set of recommendations made to each member state (with the exception of Cyprus and Greece which are subject to an economic adjustment programme). The recommendations lay out the measures which national governments should take within a period of 12-18 months in order to reach the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy¹² and to maintain economic stability and growth. The European Commission publishes them every spring, as part of the European Semester, the cycle of economic and fiscal (tax) policy coordination within the EU. They reflect the general priorities identified at EU level in the Commission's Annual Growth Survey published each November

¹⁰ The ratio of the total labour force to the population of working age.

¹¹ P12

¹² See http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm

and build on the Commission's analysis on each Member State published in February (Country Reports), as well as on the information presented by Member States in April in their economic reform programmes and medium-term budgetary plans (National Reform Programmes). Ministers and leaders (the EU Council) discuss and endorse the CSRs in June and formally adopt them in July.

The country-specific economic policy recommendations for 2015 and 2016 for 26 EU countries call for national actions to create jobs and stimulate growth. These recommendations reflect different priorities¹³ among which is **Improving employment policy and social protection** to enable, support and protect people throughout their lives and to ensure stronger social cohesion as a key component of sustainable economic growth. However, this priority includes some more controversial elements such as *"Rigid rules on dismissal and lengthy labour disputes can impede new hiring on open ended contracts restrict professional mobility and encourage the excessive use of temporary contracts"*, *"The promotion of job creation also requires real wages to move in line with productivity developments and reflect differences in situations across industry and companies"* and *"High levels of labour taxation, particularly on low income earners, may inhibit job creation and incentives to work. These should be designed with the involvement of the social partners, in line with national practice and tradition"*. The Research organisation the European Trade Union Institute found that there was an increased focus on social issues in the CSRs, and wrote, *"Increased attention to eradicating poverty can hardly be called a bad thing. Whether the same can be said about other CSRs – calling for a reduction of labour law rigidity and thereby leading to lowering or "flexibilising" of social rights, raising the retirement age, or "freezing" wage developments/indexations – is highly questionable"*¹⁴.

Of importance to VET providers, the text also notes that *"Efficient and effective vocational education and training programmes play a key role in improving the chances of employment"* and that *"Long-term unemployment needs to be tackled by combining effective social assistance with measures to enhance the chances of finding employment"*.

EPR screened the 2015 CSRs for the countries where it has members in order to examine whether they contained provisions relevant for the thematic area "employment of persons with disabilities"¹⁵. In contrast to the recommendations issued in previous cycles, the 2015 CSRs have notably little to say about employment. The example of employment-related CSRs adopted in 2014 and 2015 for Belgium show how vague CSRs are to address concrete implementation.

¹³ Other priorities are: (1) **boosting investment to support future growth**, lower barriers to entry and increase domestic and cross-border competition. (2) **Removing barriers to financing and supporting investment**. (3) **Adapting public finances to make them more supportive to growth**. *Country-specific recommendations 2015: Further efforts needed to support a robust recovery*, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-15-4975_en.htm

¹⁴ <http://www.etui.org/Publications2/Background-analysis/The-country-specific-recommendations-CSRs-in-the-social-field.-An-overview-and-comparison-Update-including-the-CSRs-2015-2016>

¹⁵ For in-depth overview refer to the country fiches available at <http://www.epr.eu/index.php/public-affairs/european-semester/476>

Country Specific Recommendations 2014¹⁶: *The Council recommended increasing labour market participation, in particular by reducing financial disincentives to work, increasing labour market access for disadvantaged groups such as the young and people with a migrant background, improving professional mobility and addressing skills shortages and mismatches as well as early school leaving; across the country, strengthen partnerships of public authorities, public employment services and education institutions to provide early and tailor-made support to the young.*

Country Specific Recommendations 2015¹⁷: *The Council recommends improving the functioning of the labour market by reducing financial disincentives to work, increasing labour market access for specific target groups and addressing skills shortages and mismatches.*

In 2015 the number of CSRs has been significantly reduced in order to focus on key priority issues¹⁸. In seeking to reduce the scope of the recommendations, the Commission has undone the progress made to date in improving the relevance, applicability and value of the employment-related CSRs.

The EU Parliament in its Report on European Semester for economic policy coordination: implementation of 2015 priorities¹⁹ welcomes the Commission initiative of streamlining the European Semester, simplifying the reporting cycle and making it more focused with clear priorities and fewer country specific recommendations, but believes that further efforts are needed in order to ensure that social and environmental targets are mainstreamed in the new assessment and CSRs are proposed to all countries that are not making progress in combating poverty or providing decent jobs leading to quality employment. Efforts are needed to reinforce the process and increase the implementation rates and the effectiveness of CSRs, as well the national ownership of CSRs.

VI. The Recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market

The European Council, heads of state and government of the EU member countries, reached an agreement on the recommendation²⁰ which aims at providing guidance to support Member States in securing a return to work of people who are long-term unemployed²¹.

¹⁶ [Council Recommendations 2014](#)

¹⁷ [Council Recommendation 2015](#)

¹⁸ In its October Communication on “steps towards completing economic and monetary union”, the Commission introduces further steps to streamline the European Semester, simplify the reporting cycle and made it more focused with clear priorities and fewer country specific recommendations.

¹⁹ Report available at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=REPORT&reference=A8-2015-0307&language=EN>

²⁰ The Council can, on a proposal from the Commission, make recommendations to the Member States (Art. 292 sentence 1-3 TFEU).

Long-term unemployment exists when a person is unemployed for more than twelve months and has been actively seeking work²². Workers with low qualifications and third country nationals are twice as likely to experience long-term unemployment, while people with disabilities and disadvantaged minorities such as the Roma are also disproportionately affected. Long-term unemployment is three times higher among low qualified workers than among those with high qualifications. The age distribution of the long-term unemployed persons is quite even, with slightly higher rates before 30 and after 55. Older workers have more stable employment and are overall less affected by unemployment. However, when they become unemployed, they have higher risk to remain so²³.

As result of the crisis, the number of long-term unemployed in the EU has risen sharply. Whereas, in 2007 there were 6 million long-term unemployed people in the EU, in the third quarter of 2015 long-term unemployment affected 10.5 million people. The level of long-term unemployment not only depends on the quality of the reintegration measures but also on the macroeconomic situation, economic structure and labour market functioning in each Member State. Tackling long-term unemployment requires in particular structural reforms (in the areas of employment, economy and fiscal policies) as well as investment in human capital.

In order to help Member States to decrease the number of long-term unemployed, the recommendation proposes specific actions to be taken at national level to strengthen service provision and individualised services for the long-term unemployed that are implemented by employment and social services. How the recommendation will be implemented depends on different national, regional or local situations. Member States designate the authorities in charge, which can be employment services or other service providers, depending on national circumstances.

The recommendation identified four main steps which contribute creating a more integrated labour market:

- 1. Encouraging registration with an employment service.** In most Member States, unemployed people only receive assistance ("support measures") when they are registered. Member States will increase the registration rate of the long-term unemployed with public employment services or other social assistance services through "improved information provision" on the assistance available.
- 2. Ensuring that all persons who are long-term unemployed are offered in-depth individual assessment** and guidance at the latest when they reach 18 month of unemployment. It should cover (1) advice based on the previous employment

²¹The recommendation capitalises on the exchange of best practices.

²² Eurostat: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Long-term_unemployment

²³ Long-term unemployment: Council Recommendation– frequently asked questions
<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=2409&furtherNews=yes>

experience and job search efforts of the long-term unemployed person and (2) an examination of the long-term unemployed person's skills and lack of skills based on the needs of the labour market.

- 3. Offering "job integration agreements"**, i.e. a written agreement between the jobseeker and single point of contact with the objective of facilitating the transition into employment. The job integration agreement includes explicit goals and obligations, that the long-term unemployed job seeker must meet, such as taking active steps to find a job, accepting job offers and participating in education, training or other activities to improve their skills and qualifications. In addition, the job seeker will be informed about job offers in different sectors of the economy and where appropriate, in other Member States.

Member States will appoint a **single point of contact** for the long-term unemployed to coordinate the work of the national agencies that are responsible for unemployment benefits and social support as well as assistance.

- 4. Improving employer involvement** and minimising the administrative burden to engage employers in employing people who are long-term unemployed. This could be for activities such a pre-screening candidates by the recruitment services, matching clients to vacancies, filling job placements or providing workplace training. It could also involve the development of tax incentives to create more job openings. For this purpose, partnerships will be set up between employers and employees, employment services, social services and other agencies.

To implement these measures, the recommendation encourages Member States to make best use of the European Structural and Investment Funds and in particular the European Social Fund. Other funds, like the European Regional Development Fund and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, may also complement the measures financed by the European Social Fund in accordance with the allocations for the relevant investment priorities for 2014-2020, namely by supporting job creation, and modernisation of public employment services and vocational education.

EPR welcomes the specific actions outlined by the European Commission in its proposal, such as the focus on individual assessment and support, as well as the recognition that people with disabilities, similarly to other disadvantaged groups, are often excluded from the labour market and particularly vulnerable to long-term unemployment due to barriers posed by society. Efforts should be done to remove barriers and ensure that persons with disabilities have equal access to education and vocational training and to the labour market in inclusive and accessible settings.

The recommendation clearly highlight that the services will ensure a personalised approach and a clear identification of rights and obligations of the unemployed and the organisations

providing support. However, as noted by EAPN in its analysis *"nothing is said in the proposal about the involvement and ownership of beneficiaries of the proposed individualised plan, whereas engagement with the person and devising together the reintegration process is fundamental, not only as a matter of transparency and good governance, but also to ensure empowerment, as well as suitability and effectiveness of the intervention"*²⁴.

In this respect, it is essential that the European Commission encourages and supports Member States in taking the necessary measures to ensure that individualised (and specialised) services are available not only in the early stage of unemployment when actively seeking a job but also during employment, by supporting the employee and cooperating with employers to also increase job retention.

The Commission rightly points out that, in order to reduce long-term unemployment, Member States primarily have to increase investment in human capital. However, the Recommendation does not address the key role of VET (and other key stakeholders), despite highlighting its importance in other documents relating to employment, rather focusing on guidance. As mentioned in the EAPN analysis, *"there is no explicit role and involvement for civil society organisations in the design, delivery, and evaluation of the proposed initiatives, and no role given to NGOs and social enterprises –as employers, but also as key stakeholders. Conversely, these organisations have a wealth of knowledge and experience in working directly with beneficiaries, and the social economy sector has provided alternative forms of employment (whether as a stepping stone to the open labour market, or permanent) for key groups facing multiple obstacles when engaging with the world of work and with labour markets"*.²⁵

EPR stresses the need to promote cooperation between labour market and vocational education and training actors, in particular, the involvement of local and regional authorities and stakeholders' associations that have direct linkages with and are able to mobilize individual services providers and individual employers.

There is also a need to promote synergies between industrial/economic and social/education/employment policies at all levels: at ministerial level with the development and funding of joint programmes, at regional and local levels with appropriate initiatives involving stakeholders from the worlds of work and VET²⁶.

²⁴ EAPN response To the European Commission's Proposal for a Council recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market, <http://www.eapn.eu/images/stories/docs/EAPN-position-papers-and-reports/EAPN-reaction-to-the-proposal-for-a-Recommendation-on-LTU.pdf>

²⁵ See note 24.

²⁶ Memorandum of recommendations in Learnabil-IT project available at <http://www.epr.eu/index.php/about-epr/epr-projects/502>

VII. The Youth Employment Initiative and Youth Guarantee

In February 2013 the European Council (heads of EU member states) agreed²⁷ to create the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI). It aims to support particularly young people not in education, employment or training in regions with a youth unemployment rate above 25%. The YEI, a specially created EU budget line, is one of the **main EU financial resources** to support the implementation of Youth Guarantee²⁸ schemes. In April 2013 the Youth Guarantee Recommendation²⁹ was formally adopted to ensure young people's successful transition into work. The other financial source is the European Social Fund. The directly targeted YEI and ESF investment towards labour market integration of young people amounts to €12.7 billion for the period 2014-2020. A further €11 billion from the ESF aimed at measures such as the modernisation of employment services and self-employment will also support youth employment. All the funding is implemented through the ESF.

The Guarantee that all governments of countries in the EU agreed to states "*Anyone up to the age of 25 "shall receive an offer of [good quality] employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a training within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education"*". The core principle behind the youth guarantee is ensuring equality of opportunity for young people in the labour market. The schemes are designed and managed by the national authorities, including the identification of criteria for selecting the beneficiaries (such as beneficiaries with a disability).

Each country had to submit a **Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan (YGIP)**, explaining the measures to be taken to implement the Guarantee, including the timeframe for youth employment reforms and measures, the roles of public authorities and other organisations, and how it will be financed.

The Recommendation on Establishing a Youth Guarantee (1) calls on national Member States to consider that young people are not a homogenous group when designing their Youth Guarantee schemes. It calls, among other things, for effective outreach strategies, such as for young vulnerable people facing multiple barriers, and emphasises in this context the need to take into consideration the young peoples' diverse backgrounds, in particular differences due to disability. Key dimensions of the schemes should be to

- Develop **strong partnerships with stakeholders**,
- ensure **early intervention** by employment services and other partners supporting young people,
- take supportive measures to enable **labour integration**,
- make full use of the European Social Fund (ESF) and other **structural funds** to that end,

²⁷ <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&f=ST%2037%202013%20INIT>

²⁸ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1079&langId=en>

²⁹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2013:120:0001:0006:EN:PDF>

- assess and continuously improve the Youth Guarantee schemes and

The European Commission writes on their website: *Compared to other structural reforms in Europe, the Youth Guarantee is probably one of the most rapidly implemented.* By May 2014, all 28 EU member states had submitted their YGIP, and they had to be integrated into their ESF programmes. Every year the European Commission publishes a report about the implementation of the Youth Guarantee for each country³⁰.

Analysis by the think tank the EPC found that the YGIP triggered a range of new mechanisms in several member states, for example the reference to an intervention within four months has been introduced in most national frameworks. In many countries consultation tools aimed at empowering youth organisations have been created and/or reinforced, and new monitoring mechanisms have been planned. In a fact sheet³¹, the European Commission highlights a number of results of the scheme in different countries, including initiatives aimed at developing VET, employer partnerships and personalised support. Good practice success stories are also presented. Young people can find out how to register [here](#)³². *"We can see that the Youth Employment Initiative and the Youth Guarantee are starting to bear fruit,"* a Commission spokesperson told the online newspaper EurActiv in November 2015. *"500,000 young people have found work since last year"*.

However, the EPC research found considerable variations in how the schemes are implemented, even between regions in some countries. They also highlight the issue that most member states do not provide any definition of what a "quality" offer entails, and in a number of circumstances young people are offered very precarious jobs or placements, which do not fit their level of qualifications. The monitoring process is also seen to be insufficient. Other criticisms include that measures to reach out to the most vulnerable are absent from most national plans, reliance on (often overburdened) employment services is high, and there is insufficient cooperation between employment services and education and training institutions. VET organisations could benefit from contacting the relevant person from the respective government.

To facilitate school-to-work-transitions, the Youth Employment Package also launched a **consultation of European social partners on a Quality Framework for Traineeships**, aimed at enabling young people to acquire high-quality work experience under safe conditions. It also announced a **European Alliance for Apprenticeships** (EAfA) to improve the quality and supply of apprenticeships available by spreading successful apprenticeship

³⁰ All of the country reports and information about the different schemes can be found here: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1094&langId=en>. The contact people for the Youth Guarantee in the governments of the different countries can be found [here](#)³⁰.

³¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=13933&langId=en>

³² <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=14412&langId=en>

schemes across the Member States and outlines ways to reduce obstacles to mobility for young people.

The European Commission reported that the EAfA, a platform that brings together European institutions, countries and regions, social partners, companies, chambers of commerce, industry and crafts, VET providers and youth organisations helped provide more quality offers under the Youth Guarantee. It has prompted at least 45 pledges so far. The Alliance offers a platform for sharing experiences and learning from best practices. Providers may be interested to join the platform. To find out more there is a frequently asked questions³³ document and it is possible to receive the EAfA Newsletter, register by email³⁴. Apprenticeship and training opportunities can be registered on the Drop'pin website³⁵.

The Youth Employment Initiative is not guaranteed to be continued beyond 2016. The Commission has said it will decide whether or not to extend the funding for the initiative based on the member states' reports on its implementation and impact, which are due for submission both at the end of 2015 and in March 2016.

The European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR) is the Network of providers of rehabilitation services committed to excellence and innovation. EPR and its members contribute to a society where every person with a disability and persons in other vulnerable situations have access to the highest quality services that create equal opportunities for all and independent participation in society. More information on www.epr.eu

³³ [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release MEMO-15-5241_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-15-5241_en.htm) (June 2015)

³⁴ <mailto:empl-eafa@ec.europa.eu>

³⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/eures/droppin/en>