

## **European Conference “Investing in Europe’s Invisible Generation - young NEETs and the need for a coordinated approach”**

*Organized by Social DOers - Think-Tank & Resource Centre with the support of  
European Parliament Youth Intergroup & EU40 Network  
Hosted by MEP Victor NEGRESCU*

*Held on Wednesday, 25<sup>th</sup> of January, from 9:00 to 12:00 in the European Parliament  
Altiero Spinelli Building, Room A3H-1*

### **PROCEEDINGS**

#### **A. Background Briefing**

##### **The Context of the conference**

The European Conference “Investing in Europe’s Invisible Generation – young NEETs and the need for a coordinated approach” officially launched the European Coalition for the Rights of Young NEETs – a multi-stakeholder platform advocating for better programmes and policies for young people in NEET situations or at risk of becoming NEETs, across Europe.

The Conference brought together members of the European Parliament, representatives of the European Commission, researchers, NGOs, social partners and youth workers interested in the NEET topic. Among the speakers of the conference we mention: Prof. Howard WILLIAMSON (University of South Wales), MEP Victor NEGRESCU (S&D, RO), MEP Brando BENIFEI (S&D, IT), Ms. Elodie FAZI (European Commission, DG Employment), Mr. Andrea CASAMENTI (European Youth Forum), Ms. Danica VIHINEN (European Liberal Youth), Mr. Lorenzo FLORESTA (Giosef Italy).

##### **The Context of Young NEETs**

Currently, in the EU, there are 12% of young people aged 15-24 years old in NEET situations, nevertheless those numbers increase up to 19,7% for the young people aged 25-29 yrs. old and they stay almost unchanged for the age group 30-34, namely 19,4% - thus, showing a structural problem for the entire Europe, which is continuously creating and maintaining a lost and invisible generation.

The situation of young NEETs in different member states of the EU is even more dramatic reaching higher numbers up to 33,5% in Italy or 36,2% in Greece (for the 25 to 29 years old).

Furthermore, in the same category of young NEETs there is a significant difference between young women and young men.

If for the age group 15 to 24 the differences are not that significant - 11,8%-young men & 12,3%-young women, for the age group 25 to 29 the situation changes - 15,3%-young men & 24,3% young women. With countries like Romania that have almost the double of young women than young men in NEET situations – 17,7% young men compared to 33,6% young women (25 to 29 yrs old).

With a generation of children and young people at risk of poverty (children under 18 - 26,9% and young people - 31,2%), even more than the elderly population (18% - population 60 yrs old or over), Europe is missing the opportunity to use its most valuable resources and lacks the necessary measures to ensure a pro-active approach, focused on prevention and early intervention policies.

### **Why a specific Coalition for the rights of young people in NEETs situations?**

The “European Coalition for the rights of young NEETs” is a civil society response to the need for joint action among all stakeholders and better-coordinated policies addressed to young people in NEET situations or at risk of becoming NEETs.

Initially started as a pilot initiative funded by the European Commission, through Erasmus+ KA3 with partners from 6 countries (Austria, Belgium, Italy, Portugal, Romania & United Kingdom), the Coalition aims at creating a pan-European movement bringing together NGOs & youth workers directly working with young NEETs, Social Partners (trade unions and employers’ associations), Public Institutions (active at local and national level) and MEPs (the direct link between European Policies and EU citizens).

## **B. Highlights of the Speakers’ Presentations**

**Ms. Veronica STEFAN, President of Social DOers - initiator of the Coalition** highlighted that young people in NEET situations have been on the agenda of the European Union for several years. Nevertheless, there still are discrepancies between the different approaches taken by various Member States, very often treating the young NEETs as numbers and not real people who need constant and different types of interventions. The limited understanding of the NEET phenomenon led to insignificant changes in the lives of young people - “we hit the target but we miss the point”.

She underlined that while numbers for the young NEETs 15 to 24 years old have slightly decreased since 2013 (when it was the peak in the EU) a special attention should also be given to the age groups 25-29 or 30-34. The large number of young people in NEET situations, especially beyond the 25 years old, shows that there are young people getting in these situations and who still don’t have the necessary skills or support to move forward, even after they finish their high school or university studies.

The policies that the national governments have put in place haven’t proved full efficiency. Therefore, instead of looking just for immediate results, there is a need for governments to invest in prevention policies or integrated interventions (a young mother doesn’t need just a job, but also other support measures).

“One size doesn’t fit all” – young NEETs represent a specific category within the youth population, nevertheless, the causes for which they are in that situation can be completely different, thus, also the intervention measures have to be adapted accordingly. Funding programmes without having a correct impact assessments or concrete outreach tools could lead to more redundant and inefficient spending of the public money.

Ms. Stefan concluded: “The Coalition we are launching today is a call to join efforts. We need to understand that young NEETs are currently an *invisible generation* and therefore we need to have on board the stakeholders who are really in contact with them – the youth workers. We know there is not just one actor that can take care of “solving” the situation, so our aim is to create synergies between the European debates & concrete opportunities offered by the EU and the national stakeholders – supporting them in delivering quality and accessible services to as many young people as possible.

While the Youth Guarantee & the Youth Employment Initiative have been important tools for many governments, we need to make sure they are actually accessible for all young people across Europe, in particular to those who need it the most, and that the national governments complement it with permanent policies.”

**Dr. Howard WILLIAMSON, Researcher & Professor of European Youth Policies - University of South Wales and Expert for the European Commission and Council of Europe** highlighted that young people in NEET situations is a very old story of “I can’t get experience without a job, I can’t get a job without experience”. When looking at policy responses the questions is “are we looking at soaking up unemployment or is it about equipping young people with more relevant and appropriate skills for the future” - and often that policy response is confusing, it’s not very clear.

Young NEETs are not all the same; they are in that box for many different of reasons. We have to think about sensible ways to differentiate between the different sub-groups.

Another question is “how did they get there?”. And those reasons give us some ideas about the policy responses to we need to develop (poverty & exclusion is one of them). The most critical question is what happens if we do nothing?

He underlined that while we talk about investing in early intervention or prevention, there could also be a question of “why bother if in the end they all come through the tunnel and they become NEET by the time they are 26”? But we know very well that is very unlikely to be the case. Policies in UK have already shown that if you are a NEET when you are 16/17 you are nearly 10 times more likely to be unemployed when you are 26.

The critical policy question is how do we create barriers to minimize young people entering in that group and how do we create bridges for the young people who got there, to get back in the mainstream?

Youth work intervention is critical for some of the young people in the NEET situations; it is an actual safety net. But safety nets have to be sometimes trampolines – catch young people and bounce them back into the system.

Finally Professor Williamson concluded: “We have the patience and trust elements, which are obvious but they are in short supply in Public Employment Services or career guidance programmes. Not listening enough and not understanding enough about the needs of young NEETs or of what employers want, in order to build those bridges between labour market realities and youth aspirations.”

**MEP Victor NEGRESCU (S&D, Romania), Board member EU40, Member in the Committee on Budgets** pointed out that when we speak about young NEETs, we might be tempted to give a lot of advice, but when we have to talk about concrete policies and activities we also have difficulties in defining, identifying them or even in understanding the diversity of this issue.

In this context, he recommended that we should also speak about their difficulty in being entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship is not a direct solution for this specific group of young

people – in order to find real solutions for them we have to define very well their particular needs and adapt our solutions to the different existing contexts.

Mr. Negrescu mentioned that it could be true that young NEETs are invisible, especially for decision makers - at local, national but also at European level – for several reasons, mostly because young NEETs are perceived as a generation or group rather isolated and inactive. Since most of young people in NEET situations are “not productive” - don’t have a direct participation to the economic growth or to the political life, decision makers are often tempted not to address them in their political actions – a situation that this Coalition can change.

MEP Negrescu also emphasized that only thinking about solutions like online portals, will not help young NEETs. To make a real change we have to be in touch with them at grass roots, help them individually. Every young NEET has to be helped, has to be treated individually, because each NEET has a different story. In order to make a true impact across Europe we have to start by ensuring a tailored made approach for every young NEET.

Mr. Negrescu acknowledged that there is a need to start working more on the concrete steps that are able to help young NEETs. The Social Rights Pillar discussed last week in the European Parliament is a concrete example – the document proposes measures, policies & programmes designed to help young people, including young NEETs. The MEPs have brought on the table concrete elements such as: stronger social protection, internships have to be paid, 0 hours contract have to be forbidden, the European Youth Guarantee should be strongly financed, Erasmus+ has to be used also to reintegrate young people across Europe etc.

His final recommendation was “You have to make this coalition work in a broader context – your efforts have to be continued, your work has to be focused on concrete elements, concrete policies – such as funding for mentorship & apprenticeship programmes, having internships paid for everyone, supporting schools at local level in ensuring psychological services for all young people, investing in both formal and non-formal education.

Here in the European Parliament, in the EU40 network & Youth Intergroup there are several MEPs that are willing to work with you and support this initiative, by making your voices heard.”

**MEP Brando BENIFEI (S&D, Italy), Co-Chair Youth Intergroup, Member in the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs** highlighted that from the very beginning the youth guarantee was created as an instrument to reach the NEETs. The NEETs are an unused potential of our society, because if we don’t integrate them in education, training or labour market they will become even a bigger cost than any immediate investment we have to do now.

The studies already show that young NEETs who remain in these situation for a long time (one year or more) can also loose their soft skills, the ability to organize their own life, can develop psychological problems, drug addiction or even get engaged in organized crime, thus taking them further from the possibility of proper social and economic inclusion.

The New Skills Agenda - is an important piece from the reaction to the urgency of the situation of young NEETs in Europe. It proposes a Skills guarantee – using Structural Funds (money that is already available to Member States) to promote schemes that support people in terms of ensuring minimum language, math and digital skills. It’s an important proposal from the European Commission because often, at local level, money is poorly spent, thus, this agenda sets the priorities and what should be the minimum package of skills for everyone, including older people who didn’t finish their education. This is not solving all our

problems, but is part of the solution.

MEP Benifei underlined that another dimension related to the Youth Guarantee is not about having more money, but how the existing funds are spent and how the services work for the young NEETs, how the PES are working in Europe and how can we ensure they are really effective.

He acknowledged that the involvement of the youth movement and all stakeholders is another issue. As a shadow rapporteur (from S&D) on the implementation of the Youth Guarantee he had as a 1<sup>st</sup> proposal to ensure that the youth movement is a stakeholder actively involved. The EU institutions have data showing clearly that when the youth movements are involved at local and national level the programmes are better designed, delivered and respond better to the actual needs of the young people.

Mr. Brando Benifei concluded: "The Youth Guarantee is not a magic wand but is a tool that we can improve and we have to do it at all levels, at the European level, but also at national and local level – and we all have to contribute to that.

The success of this programme will be if we reach the people with fewer opportunities, which currently don't trust institutions to help them and don't look actively for support.

We need to help young people to regain trust in institutions as well as in the European project, for that we need to better communicate and deliver tangible solutions."

**Ms. Elodie FAZI, DG Employment, European Commission** underlined that all Members States have committed in 2013 to create a Youth Guarantee. Since then there has been an overall decrease of youth unemployment and young NEETs. As it is clear we still have about 6,6 million young people who are NEETs.

In the report of the Commission released in October 2016 it was highlighted that there are about 1.6 million fewer young unemployed in the EU, almost 900,000 fewer NEETs in the EU, the employment rate for young people has started to rise again and about 1.4 million young people directly supported by the EU (YEI).

Ms. Fazi mentioned that what we see on the grounds is far from being perfect, but somehow the Youth Guarantee has become a reality across the EU. All Member states have started to implement the Youth Guarantee in 2014, in most of the cases working through Public Employment Services and we know that in some countries has been a strong cooperation with the youth sector and social partners. Since then we have about 14 million young people who entered in the Youth Guarantee Scheme and 9 million who took up an offer.

Ms. Fazi added "it's not all about the money and I really want to insist on that the YG has been a driver for accelerated reform in some countries (like Italy), even though in some others the reforms have been more limited (like Romania) – depending on how the measures were implemented and how much it was prioritized at national level."

The European Commission plans to continue building on the momentum and the lessons learned about the Youth Guarantee are:

- it needs a full and sustainable implementation with both continued political commitment and financial support
- better engaging with non-registered NEETs and the low-skilled
- strengthening capacity and coordination
- increasing the number and quality of offers (especially of apprenticeships)
- better cooperation with the youth sector

Ms. Elodie Fazi concluded: "As next steps we will work for a full roll-out of the national Youth Guarantee Schemes; continue to use Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) support until 2018 + Commission has proposed EUR 1 billion more for YEI over 2017-2020 (matched by



EUR 1 billion from ESF). In December 2016 the Youth Package was launched: stepping up efforts in support of youth more generally (e.g European Solidarity Corps, mobility and quality framework for apprenticeships, European Pillar of Social Right).

The conference also benefitted of the presence of **MEP Eva KAILI (S&D, Greece)** – in a short intervention, Ms Kaili stressed that through policies like the European Youth Guarantee there is a need to prioritize countries that suffer more (with the highest NEET rate). Nevertheless, because the national governments don't always successfully implement the European policies we should give these opportunities directly to young people.

As a recommendation MEP Kaili mentioned: "Sometimes the national governments delay these opportunities, so that's why it would be important to have a platform that would support young people to identify these opportunities. If you are interested in extending your platform, I would be happy to connect you with organizations and activists for youth rights in Greece."

### **C. The role of the European NEET Coalition and Next steps:**

**In this context, the multi-stakeholder platform "European Coalition for the Rights of young NEETs" aims at:**

- giving voice to the real needs of young NEETs and organizations active at grass roots level
- understanding the diversity of the phenomenon and different categories of young people in NEET situations
- supporting national governments in implementing European policies & making better use of the existing funding – targeting both prevention and intervention measures
- engaging in Monitoring and Evaluation initiatives for the existing European policies and funding (YEI, ESF other funding addressed to young NEETs)
- supporting the Youth Guarantee to ensure (1) it is extended to young people aged 25-29 years old, (2) it reaches the most disadvantaged young NEETs, (3) it has a real quality approach
- developing instruments to outreach, identify and monitor young NEETs (currently most Member States just estimate the numbers of young NEETs, but don't have real databases or tools to identify & outreach them)
- supporting the reform of public employment services and increasing their capacity to offer youth friendly services
- raising awareness on the situation of young refugees, as a group at risk of becoming NEET (and thus prevent another potential crisis that will lead to even bigger numbers of young people in NEET situations)
- fostering cooperation between Member States and a ensuring better synergy between the European opportunities and the national contexts.

**As next steps the Coalition plans to:**

- reach organizations and other stakeholders in all EU Member States
- involve MEPs interested in supporting a European agenda for young NEETs
- prepare another European conference (April/May 2017) in order to launch the 1<sup>st</sup> policy paper and proposing concrete policy recommendations, at European level, together with European stakeholders, MEPs and civil society organizations.

Note: The Briefing has been drafted by Social DOers.

## ANNEX: Conference Agenda

### European Conference

#### **Investing in Europe's Invisible Generation - young NEETs and the need for a coordinated approach -**

**Date and time:**

25<sup>th</sup> of January 2017, 09:00-12:00

**Location:**

Room A3H-1, European Parliament

**Description:**

**09:00 – 09:15 Registration & welcome**

**Opening & introduction – the European context of young people in NEET situations**

**Veronica ȘTEFAN**, President Social DOers – Presentation of the “European Coalition for the rights of young NEETs” initiative.

**Key Note Speech: Dr. Howard WILLIAMSON**, Professor of European Youth Policy - Introduction in the history of young people in NEET situations

**The Youth Guarantee, young people in NEET situations and the role of the European Institutions**

**MEP Victor NEGRESCU**, Board member EU40 & Member in the Committee on Budgets

**MEP Brando BENIFEI**, Co-Chair Youth Intergroup & Member in the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

**Ms. Elodie FAZI**, Team Leader on youth employment - DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

**Young NEETs, Inclusion & Participation in the decision making process - perspectives of Youth Leaders**

**Mr. Andrea CASAMENTI**, Board Member - European Youth Forum

**Mr. Lorenzo FLORESTA**, President Giosef Italy & Coordinator of International Youth Panel-project Catch EyoU

**Ms. Danica VIHINEN**, Secretary General - European Liberal Youth.

**Next steps & final remarks - Corina PÎRVULESCU & Veronica ȘTEFAN – Social DOers**