Views of the European Network on Inclusive Education & Disability on the EPSCO Council Recommendation on Implementing a Youth Guarantee

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The European Network on Inclusive Education & Disability, incluD-ed, a pan-European network co-financed by the European Social Fund through the Operational Programme "Fight Against Discrimination 2007-2013", wants to express its impressions regarding the European Council of Employment and Social Protection Ministers’ (EPSCO) Recommendation on Implementing a Youth Guarantee.

On 28 February 2013, the EPSCO Council approved the Youth Guarantee; a measure intended to facilitate access to the labour market for young people within the EU. 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 Council of the European Union 2013, p.9).

The Youth Guarantee forms part of the Youth Employment Package, which aims to combat youth unemployment in the EU, and for which funding of €8 billion has been agreed upon on 27 June by the European Council and the European Commission (EP Library 2013).

- incluD-ed fully supports the good intentions and the engagement in this field shown by the EPSCO Council and the European Commission, since one of the objectives of this European network is to actively contribute to the promotion of equal opportunities in the educational context including access to higher education, with the aim of improving employability and work inclusion for people with disabilities.

However, incluD-ed would like to express its opinion regarding several aspects of the Youth Guarantee:

- incluD-ed welcomes the good practice implementation of a Youth Guarantee
- incluD-ed calls for higher funding of the Youth Guarantee
- incluD-ed demands investment in education and training systems
- incluD-ed calls to support people with disabilities in these moments of crisis
- incluD-ed proposes concrete national action plans
- incluD-ed requests to increase quality of national education systems
- incluD-ed asks for close monitoring of Member States’ actions
- incluD-ed requests to improve work and training mobility for young people with disabilities
- incluD-ed asks to develop the European and national level long-term solutions

inclusD-ed welcomes the good practice implementation of a Youth Guarantee

- inclusD-ed especially welcomes the Commission’s will to implement a programme that already showed its potential and efficiency in European countries such as “Sweden, Finland and Austria” (cf. EP Library 2013).
- inclusD-ed believes that the Youth Guarantee represents an important step towards tackling youth unemployment. In August 2013, youth unemployment rate was 23.3 % in the EU-28 (Eurostat 2013). Based on previous data on the trends of unemployment for young people with disabilities, we can...
consider their situation to be even more difficult. UN data confirms that “unemployment rates for youth with disabilities are much higher than their non-disabled peers in both developed and developing countries” (United Nations Enable 2011).

- incluD-ed supports the European Parliament’s request to extend the target group of the Youth Guarantee for young people up to the age of 30 in order to also include “graduates and those leaving training systems without qualifications” (EP 2013b), since it is more relevant to the reality of young people with disabilities.

incluD-ed calls for higher funding of the Youth Guarantee

- incluD-ed believes that the attributed funding of €8 billion over the period 2014-2020 is insufficient. The cost of youth unemployment and a poorly skilled workforce to the EU, is currently 1.2% of its GDP (about €153 billion) (cf. Eurofund 2012). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has therefore recommended a budget of €21 billion for the full and effective implementation of a Youth Guarantee “in the Eurozone alone” (EP 2013a).
- incluD-ed asks the Commission to further invest in this youth employment initiative and to use means of the European Social Fund (ESF), as funding “will be key the successful implementation of the Guarantee” (EPSCO 2013).
- incluD-ed asks that the attributed funding contain a specific percentage for actions targeting young people with disabilities.
- incluD-ed consequently calls on the Commission and EU Member States to avoid further budget cuts in the area of education, training and youth policy.

incluD-ed claims investment in education and training systems

- incluD-ed believes that education policy cannot be separated from labour market policy.
- incluD-ed therefore supports the Parliament’s view to invest in the “development of high-quality vocational education and training systems, with highly qualified teachers and trainers, innovative learning methods, high-quality infrastructure and facilities and a high labour market relevance” (EP 2013a).
- incluD-ed especially underlines the need to make the education and training systems more accessible and inclusive. The European Union, plus as a majority of its Member States, have ratified the “United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” (UNCPRD) that includes a specific article on education (Art.24) and on work and employment (Art.27). Article 24 requires the development of an inclusive education system for all, and at all levels. Article 27 states that the labour market and work environment need to be open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities and appropriate legislative steps (policies and measures) undertaken. (cf. United Nations Enable 2006).
- incluD-ed thinks that the Commission and the Member States must also guarantee the necessary support for young people with disabilities for the transition phase from fulltime education into work and in case of unemployment by tailored reintegration measures.

incluD-ed calls to support people with disabilities in these moments of crisis

- incluD-ed underlines that people with disabilities have been particularly affected by the current economic crisis and related measures to reduce public spending.
- incluD-ed wants to draw attention on a study released by the European Foundation Centre’s European Consortium on Human Rights and Disability (EFC) in 2012 on the specific impact of the crisis on the rights of people with disabilities. The study shows that in some countries, social services for people with
disabilities including vocational training, rehabilitation and schools, some of which were established with support from the European Social Fund (ESF), have been partially or completely closed down (EFC 2012).

• incluD-ed further emphasises that temporary contracts for young people with disabilities are increasing and wage subsidies for employers who recruit people with disabilities are being eliminated in some Member states (ibid.).

• incluD-ed believes that such financial incentives for enterprises to employ and train young people with disabilities are crucial supporting measures that need to be maintained and/or introduced in the Member states.

• incluD-ed is concerned that the current unemployment situation of many young people with disabilities will evolve into long-term unemployment, thereby increasing their risk of social exclusion.

incluD-ed proposes concrete national action plans

• incluD-ed shares the opinion of the European Parliament that EU Member States and regional and local authorities should “set up integrated territorial development strategies, including training and employment components, starting with measures to avoid early school leaving” (EP 2013b).

• incluD-ed insists that it is time to involve all relevant stakeholders in the design and implementation of the national, regional and local action plans, including employment services, training and education authorities, employers and social partners, NGOs and DPOs, and especially student and youth organisations.

• incluD-ed believes that Member States need to actively design labour market policies that aim at job creation, and that include special measures for young people and special support offers for young people with disabilities. These measures should be flexible enough to meet their needs and the continuously evolving needs of the labour market.

• incluD-ed supports the European Parliament’s request to extent the target group of the Youth Guarantee for young people up to the age of 30 in order to further include “graduates and those leaving training systems without qualifications” (EP 2013b).

incluD-ed requests to increase quality of national education systems and Vocational Educational Training (VET)

• incluD-ed believes that improving quality standards and accessibility of national education systems must be a priority. Higher education and VET need to be accessible for young people with disabilities and skills taught should match the requirements of the labour market.

• incluD-ed asks to define necessary key competences together with concerned stakeholders. For young people with disabilities, it is even more crucial to be equipped with the right skills in order to not be doubly disadvantaged.

• incluD-ed believes that the implementation of the Youth Guarantee should go hand in hand with “structural efforts and reforms” (EP 2013a) to modernise education systems and labour markets in some Member States. Inclusive education and inclusion of people with disabilities should have greatest importance since the European Union and a majority of its Member states have ratified the UN CRPD.

• incluD-ed supports the opinion of the European Parliament to build on “the good experiences from countries with VET and dual-track education systems in improving the education-to-work transition, thus bridging the gap between training skills and labour market demands” (EP 2013a).

• incluD-ed recommends to offer early careers guidance for young people with disabilities and to better inform them about employment prospects, start-up support services and EU mobility programs.
inclusD-ed furthermore supports the European Parliament’s proposal to the Commission to “produce an annual report on the reform of vocational training systems in the Member States” (EP 2013a), highlighting best practices and innovative approaches. The report should **look closely at the inclusion of young people with disabilities** and other vulnerable groups at high risk of social exclusion.

**inclusD-ed asks for close monitoring of Member States’ actions**

- inclusD-ed asks to **closely monitor all Member States and their actions** in order to make the Youth Guarantee a reality.
- inclusD-ed proposes, according to its participatory structure, to **involve youth and disability organizations to get different stakeholder views within the monitoring process**. Member State national parliaments together with youth and disability organizations should “hold their governments responsible for delivering on the Youth Guarantee” (EP 2013a).
- inclusD-ed underlines the **importance of gathering all data at regional, national and European levels, with regards to policies combating youth unemployment and youth unemployment rates**, paying particular attention to people with disabilities. More quality information is needed, in order to produce valuable statistics that allow European comparisons and adequate policymaking regarding education, training and work for young people with disabilities.

**inclusD-ed requests to improve work and training mobility for young people with disabilities**

- inclusD-ed underlines that the **Youth Employment Package also wants to encourage mobility within the EU** and to create opportunities to work and train abroad.
- inclusD-ed requests to **improve work and training mobility for young people with disabilities** throughout the EU.
- inclusD-ed stresses the importance of **advancing the idea of an EU Mobility Card**, allowing students with disabilities to benefit during their stay abroad from the mutual recognition of disability cards and related entitlements.

**inclusD-ed asks to develop on the European and national level long-term solutions**

- inclusD-ed calls on the Commission and the Member States to develop an action plan together with all relevant stakeholders, defining short-, medium and long-term measures, in order to promote sustainable and high quality youth employment, especially for young people with disabilities.
- inclusD-ed believes that long-term commitments related to the investment in education and training, job creation, apprenticeship schemes and financial incentives for employers are needed.
- inclusD-ed believes that the modernisation of education systems and cooperation with labour market players are crucial in order to ensure a better integration of young persons, especially those with disabilities, into the labour market.

**inclusD-ed is aware that the Youth Guarantee is a recommendation to Member States and therefore does not constitute a binding measure.** However, considering the urgency and importance of the issue, inclusD-ed sincerely hopes that the Youth Employment Package will act as a starting point for a series of timely economic policies in all EU Member States.

inclusD-ed therefore shares the view of the EPSCO Council that “there is no time to lose in tackling this crisis and [that] it is imperative that the momentum behind the Youth Guarantee now be maintained” (EPSCO 2013).
Notes to the editors: The European Network on Inclusive Education & Disability, incluD-ed, promoted by Fundación ONCE, is a collaborative and multi-stakeholder initiative whose primary goals are promoting, identifying, disseminating and exchanging good practice on inclusive education for people with disabilities across Europe, in order to promote opportunities for employability and working inclusion. Currently, its member organisations are: Association des Paralysés de France (APF), Fundación ONCE, Kynn ry and Rytmus. In Local Promoting Groups (LPGs) in European cities, the network comprises local authorities, schools, universities, companies, public services, local associations, experts and other stakeholders who work together to promote initiatives in the areas of inclusive education and disability.

Documents referred to: