



Data and information gaps on how intended or non-intended effects have been achieved and why certain effects have not been achieved

A review of policies, practice and investment in GE and PVET.

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Purpose and scope of the deliverable

The core of this document is a set of data and information gaps on the intended or un-intended effects of policies, programmes and investments on supporting young people making decisions about their pathways through education, training and into the workplace have been achieved and why certain effects have not been achieved.

Deliverable D2.1 is therefore a report outlining the results of the critical systematic literature review on the effectiveness and efficiency of policies from across the European Union and beyond designed to support young people through their transitions from education into the labour force.

First, the report identifies and engages with current understandings about the effectiveness and efficiency of such policies.

Second, the report identifies key sets of data on the effectiveness and efficiency of policies.

Third, the research includes an exploration of the unintended effects and explore existing work on why certain effects have not been achieved by the different types of policies and investments.

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List of project-specific terms and abbreviations

EDU-LAB The EU-funded project “European Youth in Transition to Education and Labour”

EEA European Education Area

EEI Exploratory Expert Interview

GDPR General Data Protection Regulation

GE General education

PMB Project Management Board

PVET Professional and vocational education and training

WP Work package

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1 Executive Summary

1.1 Purpose and Scope

Deliverable D2.1 is part of the EDU-LAB project (2025–2027) and focuses on identifying data and information gaps regarding the intended and unintended effects of policies, programmes, and investments supporting youth transitions from education and training into the labour market. It reviews effectiveness and efficiency of policies in general education (GE) and vocational education and training (PVET), highlights key datasets, gaps in knowledge and practice and explores why certain goals have not been achieved.

1.2 Methodology

The report is based on a systematic literature review of peer-reviewed and grey literature, policy documents, and legal frameworks.

Data collection was focused on material relating to policies, programmes and investment in youth transitions from education and training into the employment. Data was only used that related ISCED levels 3 and above, or to young people aged 15-30. Hence material was not used that related to primary or early secondary levels (ISCED 0-2). Data sources include Eurostat; YEI; ESF+ evaluations; OECD; ILO; Cedefop; ETF; and national statistics.

Research questions addressed: (1) current understanding of policy effectiveness and efficiency; (2) key datasets for evaluation; (3) unintended effects and gaps. Analysis was focused on data largely from 2020-25, although some material from prior to this period was useful in setting contexts.

1.3 Key Findings

1.3.1 Aim to reduce NEET rates

Policies aim to reduce NEET rates and improve transitions from education to work. NEET rates across Europe have generally fallen since 2014 during the period in which the Youth Guarantee has been in operation. The EU average fell from 15.2% (2015) to 11.1% (2024), but UK and Southern Europe lag.

1.3.2 Effectiveness Factors

Integrated support systems, targeted programmes for disadvantaged youth, and strong vocational pathways correlate with better outcomes. Effectiveness factors: integrated support structures, targeted programmes for disadvantaged youth, strong vocational pathways.

1.3.3 Efficiency Drivers

Early investment, coordinated funding, and robust evaluation frameworks improve cost-benefit alignment. Efficiency factors: cost-benefit alignment, early investment, coordinated funding, work-based learning and apprenticeships.

1.3.4 Investment Analysis

ESF+ (€142.7B) and Erasmus+ (€5B) dominate EU-level funding, with the UK apprenticeship budget being £2.7B annually. However, gaps persist in guidance services, outreach for hard-to-reach youth, and employer engagement. At EU-level, ESF+ and Erasmus+ dominate funding. They have a focus on VET modernization, digital/green skills and the reduction in numbers of youth who are NEET. At country-level, for instance, Italy (€14.8B) and Greece show high NEET despite large investments and UK underutilizes apprenticeship levy funds. Cross-cutting gaps are gender employment disparities, mental health barriers, apprenticeship quality vs. quantity trade-offs, teacher supply shortages.

1.3.5 Regional Variations

Nordic regimes show smooth transitions; Continental regimes leverage strong VET systems; Southern and Eastern Europe face persistent NEET challenges despite high investment. Regional patterns: Nordic (rights-based systems), Continental (strong dual VET), Liberal (UK/Ireland – flexible labour markets), Southern/Eastern Europe (high NEET, structural challenges).

1.3.6 Unintended Effects

Policies often reinforce inequalities and place responsibility in the wrong place. The danger is that current approaches might reinforce stratification because better-resourced youth benefit most from activity as mobility schemes. However, mobility schemes such as Erasmus+ can help to prolong transitions as they mean that participants are not available to opportunities. At the same time, the hardest to reach youth are usually the most difficult to reach, so young people in the system (registered) are easiest to reach. The nature of funding can lead to short-term activation and pushing young people into precarious jobs with weak progression. Overall, the existing approaches tend to place the emphasis on individual employability whilst giving less attention to structural labour market issues. This is all compounded by fragmented governance characterised by overlapping schemes with weak coordination.

1.3.7 Reasons for Unachieved Goals

There are several reasons for policies aimed at improving youth transitions to fail or only partially achieve their goals. Institutional path dependence and regime logics have emerged as an important issue to consider. Despite widespread alignment to EU frameworks, all member states bring their own contexts, histories and approaches to addressing youth transitions and sometimes these follow regional patterns. This can also lead to direct mismatches between EU frameworks and local implementation, although the scale of funding is not always enough to address significant structural problems. For example, underinvestment in guidance and outreach has been highlighted. As above in 1.3.6, the funding structure can lead to output-focused measurements over long-term quality. These structures have been established to address significant issues but there is limited youth voice and weak feedback loops.

1.3.7 Key information gaps

There is limited longitudinal evidence on long-term outcomes. This is an issue that has been challenging for some years. There is insufficient comparative data on efficiency across countries. Data tends to be collected and analysed at country level. Scholarship has identified a range of underexplored areas, in particular: mental health and gender disparities, non-standard career paths and global comparisons exploring the experiences of the poorest countries as well as focusing on the wealthiest. Finally, scholars have pointed to a weak integration of youth voice in policy design. There is a continuing need to research the experiences of young people, both from disadvantaged groups and those who are regarded as advantaged.

1.4 Conclusions

Success depends on comprehensive, integrated systems, strong VET pathways, and targeted support for vulnerable youth. Efficiency requires early, high-quality investment, robust evaluation, and alignment of funding with outcomes. Persistent gaps include regional disparities, gender employment gaps, and mental health barriers.

1.4.1 What is needed

Achieving equitable and sustainable youth transitions requires:

- Comprehensive, integrated systems linking education, training, and employment.
- Inclusive, targeted measures for vulnerable groups.
- Strong vocational pathways and employer partnerships.
- Monitoring frameworks focused on long-term outcomes rather than short-term outputs.

1.4.2 Implications for future development

1. Strengthen Integrated Support Systems: Expand one-stop guidance centres and digital platforms.
2. Prioritize Inclusivity: Embed mental health and gender equity measures in youth programmes.
3. Enhance VET and Employer Engagement: Scale dual systems and incentivize SMEs.
4. Improve Evaluation: Shift to outcome-based indicators and invest in longitudinal tracking.
5. Amplify Youth Voice: Institutionalize co-creation and feedback mechanisms.
6. Future-Proof Skills: Integrate digital and green competencies into curricula and lifelong learning pathways.

2 Introduction

2.1 Purpose and scope of the deliverable

The primary purpose of Deliverable 2.1 is to identify and bring together a set of data gaps relating to policies, programmes and investments designed to support young people through their transitions from education, through training and into the workplace. It explores what goals have been achieved and what goals have not; it explores and identifies the unintended consequences of some of these policies and programmes. Deliverable D2.1 therefore critically reviews the literature and other source material on the effectiveness and efficiency of policies designed to support young people through their transitions in education and training and into the labour force.

First, the report identifies and engages with current understandings about the effectiveness and efficiency of policies designed to support young people through their transitions from education through training and into the labour market. This is drawn from a wider review of literature that underpins the first four work-packages of the EDU-LAB project.

Second, the report identifies key sets of data on the effectiveness and efficiency of policies designed to support young people through their transitions from education through training and into the labour market across the European Union and beyond. This is aimed at providing a resource for others in the field. It is not only a list of data sets but one that provides broad information about the data sets.

Third, the research includes an exploration of the unintended effects and explores existing work on why certain effects have not been achieved by the different types of policies and investments designed to support young people through their transitions from education through training and into the labour market across the European Union and beyond. This is primarily an analysis of policies, programmes and investments that identifies their effectiveness.

2.2 EDU-LAB project

The deliverable provides essential context to the wider EDU-LAB project and informs other parts of the project. The EDU-LAB project is a three-year project, running from 2025–2027, which is focused on understanding how young people make the transitions from education and training into employment across Europe. The project has 11 partners from 9 countries, including the United Kingdom and Kosovo, reflecting experience in different regions and different educational and training systems.

EDU-LAB analyses the complex interplay of political, economic, sociological, psychological and organizational determinants and the contextual conditions of young people's pathways and transitions from secondary education level to the labour market across Europe. The project investigates the experiences of young people aged 15–30 as they access and move through general and vocational education focusing on ISCED levels 3–8; their participation, progression and completion of upper secondary and tertiary education; and making transitions into and out of the labour market.

This is achieved through three main approaches. First, existing data is explored to identify current knowledge based on existing data. This is achieved through work-packages 1 and 2. Second, the project surveys expert perspectives on the key factors which influence the choices young people make when making transitions from education into training and the labour force. This is achieved through expert interviews and a Delphi expert survey conducted in work-package 3. Third, the project provides an opportunity to hear directly from young people themselves through focus groups, workshops and structured diaries. This process, which forms the basis of Work-package 4, involves seven project partners.

2.3 Work-package 2

Deliverable 2.1 is the first of three deliverables in Work-package 2 (WP2). Overall, WP2 is designed to develop an assessment matrix to estimate the efficiency of policies, practical measures and investments that promote participation, equity, inclusion and completion in general education and

professional, vocational education and training. The work-package identifies, maps and categorizes policies and investments implemented in European Education Area (EEA) countries to promote equity, inclusion, participation, progression and completion in general education and professional, vocational education and training (ISCED 3-8) and during the transition to the labour market.

WP2 then creates a comprehensive set of indicators of the effectivity of policies (and their practical measures) and investments. It then identifies gaps in data and information to be filled by the research of WP3 and WP4. The goal is to gain a better understanding how intended or unintended effects have been achieved and why certain effects have not been achieved by the different types of policies and investments. Finally, the work-package creates a comprehensive system (e.g. in the form of a matrix) of relations between effectivity indicators, types of policies and investments of the above-mentioned education area, the measured effectivity, the amount of investment and the respective efficiency score (qualitative or quantitative).

The need for the matrix is to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of policies and investment that attempt to promote equity and inclusion, and participation, progression and completion in general education and professional, vocational education and training (ISCED 3-8) and related transitions to the labour market. The points of departure are those already described in relevant research and analytical literature. WP2 focuses on the countries of the EEA and extends to other European countries according to needs for comparison and data availability.

2.4 Semantics: issues of terminology

In this report, there are several words and phrases that are used that need brief discussion here. The title of the report includes the word “effects” and the phrase “unintended effects”. The underlying concern of this report is with the goals and unintended consequences of “policies”, “programmes” and “investments” around supporting young people in their “transitions” from education to training and into the workplace.

2.4.1 Defining “policies”, “programmes” and “investments”

First, something needs to be said about the meaning of the words “policies”, “programmes” and “investments”. Initial definition is important. “Policy” is understood in this context, according to the *Cambridge Dictionary*, as “a set of ideas or a plan of what to do in particular situations that has been agreed to officially”¹; “programme” as “an officially organized system of services, activities, or opportunities that help people achieve something”²; and “investments” as “the act of putting money, effort, time, etc. into something to ... get an advantage, on the money, effort, time, etc. used to do this”³.

This report therefore focuses on national and supra-national policies, programmes and investment to support young people making choices about which pathways to take through education, training and into the workplace. Activities managed by local governments are included where they are part of the wider schemes of national or supra-national policy. Often, they form the working out *in practice* of national policy. Although there are many more localised activities, managed by organisations such as businesses and charities, these are not in the scope of this deliverable.

2.4.2 Meaning of “effects”?

The word “effect” is defined in a variety of ways. It can be (according to the *Cambridge Dictionary*) “the result of a particular influence”; it can be “to produce or achieve the results you want”; it can be “to achieve something and cause it to happen”; it can be a phrase meaning “in fact or in practice”; and it can be another word for “use”⁴. Each is slightly different, but all relate to results of a particular action. Hence, the effects of policies, programmes and investments are, broadly, the results of such

¹ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/policy>

² <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/programme>

³ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/investment?q=investments>

⁴ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/effect>

activity. Effects can, of course be negative as well as positive, they can also be intended or unintended. Policies, programmes and investments will be aimed at achieving a certain set of effects and may also have other effects that were unintended, whether positive or negative.

The notion of *effectiveness* of policy is a continuing and significant subject of concern and reflection. A simple search of publications in Google Scholar using the search term “Understanding AND Effectiveness AND policies” during the period 2024 to 25 lists nearly 18,000 results. A brief scan of the first ten pages of these results shows a range of material relating to policies on climate changes, industry, university and school management and covid. Hence, there has been much scholarly reflection and research in the field of political science (Mukherjee et al., 2021; Peters et al., 2018). As Peters et al. (2018) observe, the goal of all policy is effectiveness, so the effectiveness of policy is a key issue across many disciplines.

2.4.3 Meaning of “Efficiency”

Similarly, the word “efficiency” is defined in a variety of ways. Definitions (according to the *Cambridge Dictionary*) focus on three inter-related areas. First, it can be “the quality of achieving the largest amount of useful work using as little energy, fuel, effort, etc. as possible”; second, it can be “the relationship between the amount of energy put into a machine or process, and the amount of useful work that it produces”; third, it can be “the difference between the amount of energy that is put into a machine in the form of fuel, effort, etc., and the amount that comes out of it”⁵. Clearly, efficiency is evaluated as a characteristic of an intended activity and hence is closely related to the effects produced by any policy, programme or investment.

Effects and efficiency of any activity are clearly related, and the *efficiency* of policy is also a core concern of much scholarly reflection. A simple search in Google Scholar using the search terms “efficiency AND policies” lists over 89,000 items from 2021 onwards and a brief scan of the first few pages highlights evaluations of policies relating to a wide of issues, with a predominance of items on energy efficiency. Scholars have noted the connection between efficiency and effectiveness. Mergoni & de Witte (2022, p. 1337) observe that “efficiency and effectiveness are two complementary aspects” of any evaluation of public activity and is therefore a key issue.

2.4.4 Meaning of “Youth transitions”

Finally, the word “transition”, according to the *Cambridge Dictionary*, is defined as “a change from one form or type to another, or the process by which this happens”⁶. This report focuses on what are often referred to in the debate as “youth transitions”, leaving aside Worth’s (2009) discussion of transition as “becoming”, this is a phrase that is largely used to mean the moments of transition between different stages in young people’s lives,, in particular, their journeys through education, training and into the labour force (ADRU, 2024). Young people (focusing on ages between 15 and 30) face different issues at each stage in their development although they are characterised by a range of consistent barriers (see below, Table 1). Youth transition policies are generally designed to address these barriers (Youth Forum, 2016).

Table 1: Broad transition stages and their challenges

Transition Stage	Description	Key Challenges
Lower Secondary → Upper Secondary	Choice between general academic and vocational tracks	Early school leaving, misalignment with labour market needs
Upper Secondary → Post-Secondary/Higher Education	Entry into university, college, or advanced vocational training	Access barriers, uncertainty about returns, socio-economic inequalities
Education → First Significant Job	School-to-work transition, initial labour market entry	Skills mismatch, precarious employment, NEET risk
Training/Apprenticeship → Employment	Completion of vocational training leading to job	Non-guaranteed employment, quality of training, employer engagement

⁵ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/efficiency>

⁶ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/transition>

Transition Stage	Description	Key Challenges
Education/Training → Life-long Learning	Upskilling or reskilling after initial education	Low participation in adult learning, cost barriers
Unemployment/NEET → Employment	Activation of young people outside work and education	Weak networks, lack of experience, socio-economic disadvantage

The success of transitions into work is generally presented as the central outcome of youth policy. The progress of such policies and resulting programmes is monitored through measures such as rates of young people who are “not in education, employment or training” (NEET), quality of employment and sustained engagement in learning.

2.5 Data

The data for this deliverable is a mixture of findings from open-source statistical data, peer-reviewed and “grey” literature relating to policies, programmes and investments in support of young people making transitions from education through training and into the labour force. This involves an identification of the policies and programmes that have been developed and the investment that has been put into implementing such policies and programmes. In general, policies and programmes are those which have been established at national or supra-national level. In the European Union, national policies are intended to align with the European Union strategies. Local programmes are often designed in response to national policy and are thus, generally, out of the scope of this report, except where it is relevant and interesting for the case-studies being held in Work-package 4 of the EDU-LAB project.

2.5.1 Inclusion criteria

Data collection was focused on material relating to policies, programmes and investment in youth transitions from education and training into the employment. The focus was on material from 2020-25 although some earlier work was used where relevant. Data was only used that related ISCED levels 3 and above, or to young people aged 15-30. Hence material was not used that related to primary or early secondary levels (ISCED 0-2).

2.5.2 Evaluations

The effectiveness or otherwise of policies, programmes and investments is primarily understood through systematic evaluations to identify whether they achieved the intended outcomes, resources were used efficiently and what were their unintended consequences. These are by their nature, printed studies, available online and are based on a range of different sources. They are usually based on mixed methods approaches which are useful in understanding both what happened and why it happened.

2.5.3 Datasets

Several datasets track the effectiveness and efficiency of policies that aid youth transitions from education to the labour market in the EU and internationally. These include Eurostat's Labour Force Survey (LFS) and Adult Education Survey (AES), which provide indicators on youth employment rates, skills mismatches, and vocational training outcomes across EU countries⁷. Cedefop's *Key Indicators on VET* updates 36 comparable metrics on initial and continuing vocational education and training (VET), assessing alignment with Europe 2020 goals like reducing youth unemployment through targeted interventions⁸. These datasets emphasize cost-effectiveness, such as the YEI's role in boosting regional labour integration by providing jobs or training within four months of education completion.

OECD's *Education at a Glance* series offers cross-national data on transition durations, combining education and employment rates for 18-24-year-olds, highlighting how policies like apprenticeships reduce unemployment spells⁹. The European Commission's Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) and

⁷<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/european-union-labour-force-survey>; [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Adult_Education_Survey_\(AES\)_methodology](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Adult_Education_Survey_(AES)_methodology)

⁸<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/key-indicators-on-vet>

⁹https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/education-at-a-glance-2024_c00cad36-en.html

European Social Fund (ESF) generate comprehensive datasets on programme efficiency, including leavers' surveys from 2021-2023 that measure employment outcomes and skills development for participants in England and other EU states.

Beyond the EU, the ILO's *Harmonized Microdata* collection analyses global youth occupational trends and skills gaps, evaluating policy impacts on labour integration in regions like Asia and Latin America¹⁰. OECD and McKinsey reports provide broader datasets beyond the EU, such as analyses of active labour market policies (ALMPs) in combating youth unemployment, with quantitative estimates of their impact on job placement and skills acquisition in countries like Australia and Denmark. The Youth Futures Foundation's comparative study synthesizes Eurostat data on NEET rates, evaluating interventions in France, the Netherlands, and non-EU nations to identify best practices in reducing marginalization. ETF's (2022) indicators extend to candidate countries, linking VET programmes to employment rates and highlighting higher outcomes for vocational graduates compared to general education pathways.

2.6 Research questions (RQs)

A series of research questions were devised for the research underpinning this deliverable. Two research questions were drawn from the cross-work-package systematic literature review, and three questions were drawn from the core purpose and scope of this deliverable.

Two specific research questions were developed that concerned WP2 and these focus on the effectiveness and efficiency of policy programmes and practice measures that address, cover, focus the intersectional determinants and transitions of pathways in general education (GE) and professional or vocational education and training (PVET). The first research question focused on the effectiveness and efficiency of *policy*:

RQ1: How effective and efficient are policy programmes related to general education (GE) and professional or vocational education and training (PVET) and transitions to the labour market? Which intersectional determinants and transitions are addressed by these policy programmes?

The second research question focused on the effectiveness and efficiency of *practice*:

RQ2: How effective and efficient are practice measures related to general education (GE) and professional or vocational education and training (PVET)? Which intersectional determinants and transitions are addressed by these practice measures?

In addition to the two research questions above, which focused on the academic literature, three broad research questions were drawn from the scope of this deliverable and formed the basis of the findings chapter:

RQ3: What are the current understandings about the effectiveness and efficiency of policies designed to support young people through their transitions from education into the labour force (focusing on the European Education Area)?

RQ4: What are the key sets of data on the effectiveness and efficiency of policies designed to support young people through their transitions from education into the labour force?

RQ5: What are the unintended effects of policies and investments designed to support young people through their transitions from education into the labour force and why certain effects have not been achieved?

2.7 Research platforms

We conducted an internet search using standard platforms *Google*, *Google Scholar*, *Scopus* and *Web of Science*. In addition, large language models were applied through artificial intelligence tools *Perplexity*, *Elicit* and *Co-Pilot* to explore initial ideas and to search for and analyse other relevant

¹⁰ <https://ilo.org/about/data-collection-and-production/>

material. The issues associated with using artificial intelligence were considered. All references were checked and any that were irrelevant were discounted; “hallucinations” or claims made by the tools that were not supported by evidence were checked against other evidence and either developed or discounted.

2.8 **Search terms**

The search terms derived from the research questions posed in 2.6 above, the efficiency and effectiveness of policy and practice measures were:

- (policy OR policy programme) AND (general education OR professional education OR vocational education OR training OR transition to labour market) AND (effectiveness OR efficiency) AND (European Education Area);
- (measure OR practice measure) AND (general education OR professional education OR vocational education OR training OR transition to labour market) AND (effectiveness OR efficiency) AND (European Education Area).

3 Policies, Programmes and Investment

3.1 Focus of Policies, Programmes Investments: Youth transitions

Four distinct stages or clusters can be identified in education and training pathways, as noted in EDULAB WP1, Deliverable 1. Each comprises a range of determinants of the choices young people make during their educational, training and career pathways. *General selection* covers determinants that influence the way young people choose between or are allocated to different educational tracks and labour-market options. *Access* covers determinants that affect whether individuals can get into GE, PVET, or jobs in the first place. *Participation* covers determinants that shape whether and how people actually take part in education, training, and work once access is formally available. *Progression* and *completion* comprise determinants that affect the progress of young people through and out of programmes and employment. Each cluster includes conditions that both support and hinder young people: equity is key concern in each.

Youth transition policies therefore aim at ensuring equitable access to good quality education and training. At national, and supra-national level (notably EU and OECD), youth policies tend to define objectives in relation to ensuring equitable access to good quality formal and informal learning and to appropriate work and social protection. These link youth policy to education, training and labour-market systems and this includes measures to reduce inequalities in access particularly for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. There are several examples from across the world of policies and programmes that have been evaluated positively in supporting young people through these transitions (OECD, 2024c; Hughes and Smith, 2020) (See below, Table1).

Table 2: Policy levers relating to access, participation, progression and transition

Stage	Policy Levers	Examples of Practices / Programmes	Purpose
General Selection	Career guidance embedded in curriculum; labour market information (LMI); employer engagement	Gatsby Benchmarks (UK); Inspiring the Future (UK); My Career Path (France)	Helps young people make informed choices about subjects, pathways, and careers
Access	Early childhood education; financial aid; inclusive design; digital infrastructure	Free pre-primary education (OECD countries); Canada Student Financial Assistance; Computers for Education (Colombia)	Removes barriers to entry and ensures equitable opportunities
Participation	Integrated youth services; mental health support; employer engagement; flexible learning	One-Stop Guidance Centres (Finland); Youth Guarantee schemes, career talks and mentoring	Keeps youth engaged in education/training and prevents dropouts
Progression & Completion	Early warning systems; modular pathways; strong VET; recognition of prior learning	PuMPuRS (Latvia); Dual VET (Austria/Germany); Training Candidate Scheme (Norway); EBA apprenticeships (Switzerland)	Supports learners to complete programmes and move to next level
Transitions to Training & Work	Work-based learning; apprenticeships; ALMPs; entrepreneurship support; career management skills	Supra-company training (Austria); Youth employment subsidies (EU); Yes I Start Up (Italy); CMS frameworks (Scotland)	Facilitates smooth movement into quality jobs and lifelong learning

Sources: OECD (2024b; 2024c); Hughes and Smith (2020).

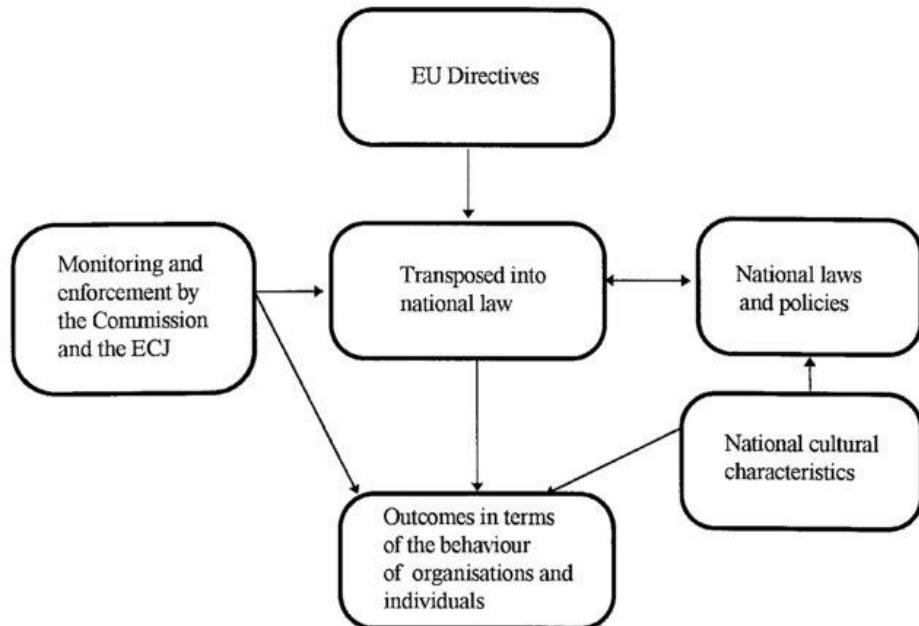
3.2 Policies

Youth transition policies distinguish between general education (GE) and professional and vocation education and training (PVET) but the degree and form of the distinction vary from country to country. In most cases, general education has been the route to further study and only indirectly into the labour force, whereas PVET policies have tended to focus on speeding up transitions from school to work. The Youth Guarantee highlights the importance of VET and attempts to help bridge the gap between GE and PVET (Eichorst and Rinne, 2017). Cedefop's notion of "permeability", where young people are

enabled to move easily between different types and levels of education and training, is an attempt to break down such barriers (Cedefop, 2019a).

Within the European Union, where the partner countries are members, aligned with or are accession nations of the European Union, policy tends to be developed under its influence. Hence, the European policies for youth transition are to be found throughout the EEA with some adaptation. There remains, however, the complex interplay between supra-national strategies, national government policy and local implementation plans, as once captured by McDonald (2000) (See Figure 1).

Figure 1 Interrelationships between EU directives and national systems



Source: Macdonald (2000)

3.2.1 European Education Area policies

The main set of policies that directly affect the EDU-LAB partner countries are the various European strategies and directives that are broadly implemented across the countries of the EEA¹¹. EEA-level policies and programmes are designed to improve young people's pathways through education into training and on into the workplace. There is a particular emphasis on inclusion and equity (European Commission, 2025a).

EU skills and youth employment initiatives fund programmes helping young people move from education into vocational training or work, often through apprenticeships, work-based learning and guidance services. The broader *European youth policy framework*, now in process for over twenty years, links transitions to active citizenship, youth autonomy, labour-market integration, mobility and recognition of non-formal learning, with explicit attention to disadvantaged and "post-adolescent" youth seeking stable work, housing and family life (Siurala, 2005).

There are two key EU/EEA instruments relevant to youth transitions. First is the reinforced Youth Guarantee, committing Member States to offer all under-30s a good-quality job, traineeship, apprenticeship or continued education within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education (Schmid et al., 2023). Second is the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and linked National Qualifications Frameworks. These are designed to support mobility between education, training and work and to make learning outcomes visible and comparable (Youth Partnership, 2025).

¹¹ For a summary of the policies, practice and investments in each country, see below, Appendix 1.

Mobility, apprenticeships and traineeships, including the previous European Alliance for Apprenticeships, are funded by Erasmus+ to embed work-based learning and cross-border skills recognition (Youth Partnership, 2025; Schmid et al., 2023). Non-formal learning and the recognition of youth work and lifelong learning as transition supports is also a focus of the Council of Europe/EU youth partnerships, with the funding of projects such as the SALTO-YOUTH resource centres and European Youth Centres (Youth Partnership, 2023).

EEA-relevant transition mechanisms include the promotion of high-quality apprenticeships and dual VET, building on European Alliance for Apprenticeships guidance (Schmid et al., 2023) and the recognition of skills from non-formal education and volunteering to bridge into labour markets (Youth Partnership, 2025).

3.2.2 Policies and practices and the EDU-LAB partner countries

Most of the EDU-LAB partner countries (i.e. Austria, Germany, Greece, Finland, Italy, Poland and Portugal) are EU member-states and work through the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027 and implement the (reinforced) Youth Guarantee. Both Kosovo and the UK have developed new national youth strategies in recent years. Kosovo has implemented the State Strategy for Youth 2024–2032 (Western Balkans Info Hub, 2025). In the UK, a core part of the new National Youth Strategy co-produced with young people is its Youth Guarantee, based on the EU model (Gov.UK, 2024) (See Appendix 1, Tables 4-11).

The Youth Guarantee, both the “reinforced” EU original and the new, similar UK version, are focused on addressing issues facing young people who are NEET. Kosovo sets NEET reduction within national youth/education strategies. However, Greece, Italy and Poland also run named NEET strategies, perhaps resulting from the requirement to allocate at least 12.5% of their ESF+ allocations to the issue where average NEET rates across the EU have been exceeded (European Commission, 2025a).

Digital and green skills are a universal priority across the partnership but the funding architecture for this differs. In Italy and Portugal, Resilience Plan (RRP) funds are used to address this concern; in Austria, Germany and Poland, ESF+ and national funding is applied; in Kosovo, funding is donor-led.

Employer incentives are widely used across the partner countries, although the form varies from cash hiring subsidies in Greece; wage and tax relief in Italy, Portugal and Poland; apprenticeship grants in Austria; and a levy framework in the UK.

VET and guidance is a common concern but approaches vary across the countries, in part because of the nature of the national systems. Dual VET is strongest in Austria, Germany and Poland. One-stop guidance stands out in Finland as a unique characteristic whilst Kosovo focuses on building school-based career centres. The UK’s T Levels & Career Hubs are key features of recent restructuring whereas systems such as Austria and Finland maintain established frameworks with enhancements.

3.2.3 Differences by geography

The types, reach and success of policies to support youth transitions across the EEA and further afield differ significantly by country, reflecting structural labour market variations, the strength of vocational systems, macroeconomic context, and local youth welfare approaches. Approaches to youth transitions have been differentiated by region since the seminal work on ‘three worlds of welfare capitalism’ of Esping-Andersen (1990). Esping-Andersen’s original social-democratic (Nordic), conservative (Continental) and liberal (Anglo-Saxon) welfare regime models have been built on by Gallie and Paugam (2000) to produce four main regimes: sub-protective (southern European), liberal/minimal (UK and Ireland), employment-centred (Western European) and universalistic (Scandinavian), to which, Raffe (2011) has, perhaps controversially, added the “post-socialist” regime. These five regions are generally covered in Table 3 below. Education-training structures, labour market regulation, and welfare arrangements are combined in different ways. These regimes shape both the transition policies and the likelihood that any given instruments will reach and benefit the intended groups (O'Reilly et al., 2018; Walther, 2006; Raffe, 2011) (See below, Table 3).

Table 3: Regional differences in policy

Regional type	Exemplar countries	Legacies	Policy types
Universalistic Nordic regimes	Denmark, Finland, Sweden	Comprehensive education; strong active labour market policies, universal welfare; smooth, fast transitions; lower NEET rates and shorter unemployment spells.	Policy tools such as individualised guidance, strong PES–school linkages, and rights-based guarantees tend to have high coverage and relatively equalising effects.
Employment-centred regimes	Germany, Austria, Netherlands, France	Rely heavily on structured vocational systems, especially dual apprenticeship, with strong employer involvement and clear occupational labour markets.	Here, policies that reinforce employer–VET linkages (training subsidies, apprenticeship expansion, youth guarantees tied to VET) usually perform well on swift entry and job quality, but can reproduce stratification between vocational and academic tracks.
Liberal regimes	UK, Ireland	Flexible labour markets, weaker employment protection, more emphasis on general education, and means-tested, often work-first welfare.	Activation, short training, and subsidised jobs can achieve rapid exits from unemployment but often into low-paid, precarious work; success is frequently measured in flows off benefit rather than stable career starts.
Sub-protective Southern regimes	Spain, Italy, Portugal, Greece	Segmented labour markets, high temporary employment, weaker youth income protection; often school-based VET with limited employer engagement.	Youth guarantees, hiring subsidies, and EU-funded programmes can raise participation but struggle against macroeconomic weakness and dualisation, with persistent high NEET rates and long unemployment durations.
Post-socialist Central and Eastern regimes	Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Slovenia	Legacies of school-based VET and weaker social protection, overlaid with rapid liberalisation and often substantial regional disparity.	EU-driven activation, guarantees, and VET reforms can be significant in scale but vary in effectiveness, depending on local institutional capacity, employer demand, and broader emigration and demographic dynamics

3.3 Investments

With youth transition policies and programmes come capital investment. An analysis of the 27 EEA countries, UK and Kosovo maps shifts in funding, focus areas and priorities over the period 2020–2025. The mapping, which focuses on ESF+ and similar schemes (i.e. in the UK and Kosovo), includes explicit gap statements for each country (See below Appendix, Table 16).

3.2.4 Totals invested

The ESF+ has a total budget of €142.7 billion for the period 2021–2027 and provides comprehensive support to employment, social, education, and skills policies (European Commission, 2025j). The largest ESF+ envelopes are Italy (€14.8bn), Poland (€12.9bn), Spain (€11.296bn), Portugal (€7.8bn), Romania (€7.3bn), France (€6.7bn), Germany (€6.5bn), Greece (>€5.3bn) and Hungary (€5.3bn). The smaller envelopes of funding are Austria (€393m), Cyprus (€222m) and Denmark (€120m). In the UK, the new Youth Guarantee has been granted £820m for the period 2025–2028 whilst further education has been granted capital upgrades of £1.5bn over the period, 2020–2026, highlighting a push on apprenticeships, college estates, and short-course pilots. Across the countries, the signals are of a concerted effort to address skills development, inclusion and youth measures. However, capacity for implementation is common issue.

3.2.5 Structural gaps in investment

Across Europe, three structural gaps between investment patterns and 2025 priorities recur. First, budgets concentrate on formal HE, VET and large training schemes, while guidance and intensive case-management for the hardest-to-reach youth remain relatively small lines despite being

highlighted in Youth Guarantee guidance and national strategies (European Commission, 2025a; European Commission, 2025b; Housing Europe, 2023; European Youth Forum, 2014).

Second, the ESF+ 12.5% youth earmark steers funds toward high-NEET countries and regions, yet implementation capacity and co-financing constraints mean that regions with the highest NEET rates and early school leaving often still have weaker, more fragmented provision than national priorities suggest (European Youth Forum, 2014; Eurostats, 2025; European Commission, 2025a).

Third, investments often favour training, apprenticeships and rapid activation to meet NEET targets, while medium-term outcomes such as job stability, wages and progression—central to EU and national policy rhetoric—are less systematically resourced and monitored (European Commission, 2025b; European Youth Forum, 2014; Eurostats, 2025; European Commission, 2025a).

3.2.6 Implementation “bottlenecks”

There are implementation bottlenecks that recur across many countries. Institutional and workforce capacity constraints are a common problem and include public employment services (PES) capacity, teacher supply. The effectiveness of PES is reduced in several countries because reforms lag behind targets despite high investment. Implementation of policies and programmes is also uneven across regions and there are continuing barriers to access in rural districts. Implementation is further hindered by the complexity of governance and coordination, fragmentation at several levels and administrative hurdles.

The effectiveness of investment is also affected by weak engagement with key stakeholders. Weak buy-in from employers affects the relevance and transitions relating to VET. At the same time, there is persistent difficulty in reaching young adults who are low qualified or are from isolated rural districts, or who are from disadvantaged groups such as Roma or migrants. Childcare appears as critical for women’s employment and NEET prevention but still under scaled in some entries. This highlights that, whilst there is strong consensus about what to fund, capacity, coordination, and employer engagement are the principal frictions that limit youth transition impact.

4 Effectiveness and Efficiency

4.1 Effectiveness of policy

The bottom line for governments, it might be argued, is to reduce the numbers of young people who are out of work. Thus, evidence of effectiveness tends to relate to the numbers of young people. The first concern is to see a reduction in numbers of young people who are NEET. Second is a concern to see growth in the numbers of young people employed. There is then a concern to see growth in the numbers of young people in skilled employment. Third, there is a broader concern to see growth in numbers of young people in employment that drives them.

However, there has been significant work that indicates that the focus on young people who are NEET threaten to ignore the “missing middle” (Woodman, 2013). Understanding the needs of young people who would not otherwise raise concerns has been identified by Irwin (2020) as a challenge as young people feel they are pushed to follow standard career-paths into university and do not feel able to choose alternative pathways.

The effectiveness and efficiency of policies in creating contexts for the best such decisions also need to be considered. Recurring factors in the success of policies have been highlighted by scholars such as O'Reilly et al. (2017) and Casey & Elliott (2025), amongst many others. The three main factors in the success of policies have been identified as: 1) integration of policies and implementation; 2) targeted policies and programmes; and 3) support from strong institutional frameworks.

4.1.1 Comprehensive support structures

Effective youth transition policies are characterised by comprehensive support structures that combine education, tailored guidance, work experience and active labour market policies (ALMPs) (Casey & Elliott, 2025; European Commission, 2025a; O'Reilly et al., 2017). These multi-faceted approaches are seen as key to improving young people's transitions from education to employment, with several core elements identifiable in higher-performing countries across Europe (O'Reilly et al., 2020; Curth, 2018; Eichhorst and Rinne, 2017).

The first characteristic of comprehensive support structures identified is well-integrated vocational education and training (VET) systems that combine classroom-based education with substantial work-based learning. These seem to have been effective in countries like Germany and the Netherlands, where there are lower rates of youth unemployment (Eichhorst and Rinne, 2017; O'Reilly et al., 2020).

The second characteristic of comprehensive support structures are identified as active labour market policies. These include youth guarantees, training schemes, activation programmes, and bridging courses. These all provide practical pathways and support for young people, particularly those who are NEET (Curth, 2018; Simões, 2022; Eichhorst and Rinne, 2017).

A third characteristic of comprehensive support structures relate to guidance and advice. These comprise early and ongoing guidance, mentoring and job search assistance. All of these are critical, argue commentators such as O'Reilly et al. (2020) and Curth (2018), especially for those at risk of disengagement or with multiple disadvantages. Effective models feature intensified, diversified support, particularly for disadvantaged groups, blending ALMPs, education, guidance, and outreach in tailored, pathway-focused programmes (Simões, 2022; Curth, 2018).

The fourth characteristic is coordination and integration between government bodies, public employment services, education providers, and social partners is essential to create seamless and accessible support, avoiding fragmentation and duplication of services (Schmid et al., 2023; Curth, 2018; O'Reilly et al., 2020). Approaches such as the German dual apprenticeship system and integrated vocational education and training combined with strong employer involvement have been found to ease school-to-work transitions and improve employment outcomes for youth (Eichhorst & Rinne, 2017; O'Reilly et al., 2020).

The EU Youth Guarantee and related national initiatives have driven increased investment in such comprehensive structures, highlighting the value of partnership and multilevel governance for sustainable and inclusive youth transitions (Simões, 2022; Schmid et al., 2023).

4.1.2 Targeted programmes with careful support systems in place

Targeted programmes involving blended approaches (safety nets with personalised skills support) foster higher impact for young people furthest from the labour market, especially when designed in consultation with local communities and employers (Schmerber, 2025). Empirical analysis, note Scandurra and Cefalo (2025), demonstrates that integrated measures combining training and social support significantly improve labour market reintegration for disadvantaged youth. Maguire et al. (2022) found that blended approaches and local partnerships are key success factors for NEET reintegration. Hence, the European Commission (2025a) has emphasized integrated measures for vulnerable youth, aligning with the concept of blended approaches whilst the OECD (2024b) toolkit reinforces the need for community involvement and personalized support.

4.1.3 Strong vocational training pathways

Countries with strong vocational training pathways and work-based learning opportunities, notably Germany, the Netherlands, Austria and Denmark, have generally achieved higher youth employment and smoother transitions than others, with integrated education and employment systems proving most robust against economic cycles. In Germany and Denmark, high-performing vocational systems incorporate dual vocational training which combines classroom instruction with paid apprenticeships in companies; strong collaboration between government, employers, and unions; and leads to high skill relevance and smoother labour market entry (Euler, 2013; Lüber, 2022).

In Denmark and the Netherlands, work-based learning integration emphasizes practical experience and employer involvement. Denmark's "production schools", founded in the 1970s, and Netherlands' "learning pathways" offer tailored, flexible support for diverse learners and involve close collaboration with local businesses and industry (Cedefop, 2020; Association of Production Schools, 2006).

Germany's implementation of the EU Youth Guarantee ensures early intervention and tailored support for young people who are NEET. Denmark's "flexicurity" model balances flexible labour markets with strong social protections, aiding transitions during economic downturns. These countries consistently report lower youth unemployment compared to EU averages. Vocational graduates often have better employment prospects than general education peers (Lüber, 2022).

Early career stability is more common due to industry-aligned training and recognized qualifications. Employers value vocational credentials, reducing mismatch and job search time. During recessions, integrated systems buffer youth from unemployment spikes and apprenticeships continue due to shared funding and long-term employer commitment (Euler, 2013).

4.2 Efficiency of policy

The concern with efficiency is primarily to ensure that the benefits of policies designed to support young people making successful transitions from education through training and into employment are worth the investment in it. Voss et al. (2017) treat efficiency as the relationship between resources invested and the educational, social and employment outcomes achieved. The aim of policy in terms of efficiency is to achieve benefits that are worth more than the amount of money spent to achieve them. Efficiency in programmes is viewed by authors such as Agasisti et al. (2017) as good employment outcomes are delivered within a particular cost, especially those that use granular targeting and smart partnerships (Agasisti et al., 2017) (See below, Figure 2).

Figure 2. Efficiency matrix

Effective	A) Goals are achieved, e.g. good PISA scores, but too many resources are used. The education system is effective but there is a waste of resources.	B) Goals are achieved (e.g. good PISA scores) by using a reasonable amount of resources. Of course, this is the best situation.
Non-effective	C) Goals are not achieved (the education output is bad) and a lot of resources are used. This is the worst situation.	D) Goals are not achieved (poor education output) but the number of resources used is low. The education system is efficient (because it uses wisely poor resources) but is non-effective.
Non-Efficient		Efficient

Source: Agasti et al. (2017)

4.2.1 Efficiency factors

Well-designed youth employment and skills participation strategies avoid duplication, engage local expertise and coordinate work between multiple departments to make the most use of resources (EUA, 2025). Vos et al. (2017) highlight the specific nature of public investment in education and training and argue that public funding is essential for equity and system-level efficiency. At the same time, they call for better coordination of company training and public support so private and public investments complement each other and avoid duplication.

Programmes with higher investment per-person but focused support (unit cost) produce better employment results for high-need groups, while maintaining favourable total system cost by preventing long-term unemployment (Grigoriou et al., 2025). Wößmann (2006) argues that policies for young people should prioritise early, high-quality investments that raise both efficiency and equity; returns to education are highest for disadvantaged children early in life, so targeting early childhood and basic-skill interventions for youth is the most cost-effective strategy.

Evidence suggests work experience schemes, apprenticeships, and pre-apprenticeship programmes supported by financial incentives for employers (especially SMEs), boost outcomes and system-wide efficiency (Cedefop, 2025). Higher apprenticeship incidence correlates with higher youth employment rates and lower youth unemployment at the country level, implying positive aggregate returns to expanding work-based learning (Echorys, IES and IRC, 2013).

4.2.2 Measuring efficiency

Voss et al. (2017) treat efficiency as the relationship between resources invested and the educational, social and employment outcomes achieved. They stress that efficiency should be measured by quality of learning, employability and social inclusion, rather than by short-term budget savings. Bartlett (2009) and Wößmann (2006) both view efficiency of policies in terms of cost-benefit analyses whilst Hanushek et al. (2011) found that general education tended to result in higher lifetime earnings.

The need for robust evaluation systems has also been emphasised by Voss et al. (2017) so that policy makers can identify which programmes deliver the best outcomes per euro, calling for improved data, impact evaluation and use of evidence to reallocate funding toward effective measures. Wößmann (2006) argued that countries should fund programmes that demonstrate strong learning gains and labour-market transitions for young people. Longitudinal tracking and cost-benefit analyses are necessary to identify programmes that both deliver the best returns and to avoid “deadweight” (training programmes that would have been undertaken with or without public policy intervention) or displacement effects (Echorys and IRC, 2013, p. 84).

5 Unintended Effects and Failure to Achieve Intended Effects

5.1 Main unintended effects

The youth transition policies, programmes and investments that have been the focus of this discussion have also had unintended effects or consequences. Some have been structural, relating to the nature of supra-national operations whilst some effects appear to have been quite the opposite of what was intended.

5.1.1 Reinforcing stratification between “advantaged” and “disadvantaged” youth

Competitive and information-intensive schemes (Erasmus+, high-quality traineeships, some Youth Guarantee offers) tend to be used more by already well-resourced students and graduates, who have higher educational attainment, language skills and institutional support. The Youth Forum (2025) refers to the “Creaming effect”: better-resourced youth benefit most from Erasmus+ and Youth Guarantee. This can widen gaps in skills, networks and international experience between them and young people from low-income, migrant or rural backgrounds, or with disabilities, despite formal inclusiveness goals (Goncalvez Ribeiro et al., 2025; European Commission / EACEA / Youth Wiki, 2024; European Commission, 2025).

5.1.2 Focus on unemployed NEETs over inactive or “hard-to-reach” youth

Evaluations of the Youth Guarantee, both that of the European Union (Eichhorst and Rinne, 2017) and that of the UK (HM Government, 2022), suggest that they work better for young people who are NEET who are registered as unemployed than for those who are not in contact with public services. This limits the Youth Guarantee’s reach to those outside formal systems. Unintentionally, this can channel resources towards those already in the system, leaving young people with complex disadvantages less supported and potentially deepening their exclusion, with complex disadvantages such as mental health issues, housing instability, or caregiving responsibilities who face barriers to engaging with formal services (O’Higgins & Brockie, 2024).

Policy reviews (including EU and UK contexts) highlight that outreach and tailored engagement strategies—such as community-based partnerships, mobile youth work, and digital outreach—are essential to avoid these gaps. The reinforced Youth Guarantee acknowledges that while millions of young people have benefited, *“significant action is still necessary in order to reach all young people in need of support”*, especially those hardest to reach and facing multiple obstacles (European Commission, 2025i). Tailored, individualized approaches are recommended to avoid leaving out vulnerable NEETs.

5.1.3 Short-term activation and precarious pathways

Many offers under Youth Guarantee-style schemes lead to short-term jobs, internships or training that improve job-finding rates but do not necessarily deliver stable, high-quality employment. There is pressure to meet placement targets leading to offers that lack career progression, resulting in precarious employment and limited skill acquisition (European Commission, 2024; O'Reilly et al., 2020). Sanctions and conditions may push vulnerable youth into unstable jobs or out of the labour force entirely, increasing cycling between inactivity, short-term work, and benefits (OECD, 2024; Maguire et al., 2022).

Policy reviews recommend shifting from a narrow ‘work-first’ approach toward blended strategies that combine income security, personalized skills development, and employer engagement to prevent exclusion and improve long-term outcomes (Youth Forum, 2025; Scandurra & Cefalo, 2025).

5.1.4 Over-emphasis on individual employability over structural issues

EEA and related strategies strongly emphasise skills, mobility and individual “employability”, sometimes downplaying labour-demand, segmentation and macroeconomic constraints that shape transitions. This can shift responsibility for difficult labour-market conditions onto young people and education systems, while under-addressing issues like low job creation in certain regions and sectors, dual labour markets where young people are concentrated in temporary or precarious roles and weak enforcement of labour standards for youth leaving them vulnerable to poor-quality work (O'Reilly et al., 2017; Hadjivassiliou et al., 2018).

5.1.5 Mobility effects that delay or misalign transitions

Erasmus+ mobility is associated with improved soft skills, confidence and sometimes higher employment probabilities, but empirical work shows that for some graduates, mobility can prolong transitions. Broadening geographical and occupational aspirations can, of course, lead graduates to search longer, hold out for better matches or seek work abroad rather than entering the first acceptable local job. For some graduates, the enhanced skills and widened horizons fostered by mobility raise reservation wages and preferred job characteristics, leading them to reject early offers that appear poorly matched to their new competences or expectations. This can produce longer education-to-work trajectories and, in some contexts, mismatches between mobility-enhanced expectations and local labour-market realities (De Benedetto et al., 2025; Goncalvez Ribeiro et al., 2025). This indicates the value of integrating targeted career guidance and employer engagement into existing mobility schemes to help students align their skills and expectations with more realistic pathways.

5.1.6 Complex governance and fragmentation of support

Youth policy evaluations document overlapping schemes, weak coordination between ministries (education, labour, social affairs) and parallel project logics driven by EU funding cycles. This complexity can confuse young people as they try and navigate multiple schemes with different eligibility criteria and objectives. At local level, it can also reduce accessibility, create administrative burden and dilute impact because as local actors spend significant time aligning with programme rules rather than focusing on service delivery rules and indicators rather than coherent long-term transition support (European Commission / EACEA / Youth Wiki, 2024; Lonean, 2020).

Instead of coherent, long-term transition support, interventions often prioritize compliance with EU funding cycles and performance indicators (e.g., number of participants) over sustainable outcomes. This reflects what some scholars call “projectification” of policy, where short-term projects dominate over integrated strategies. It also creates incentive misalignment—actors optimize for reporting requirements rather than systemic change (Jacobsen, 2022).

5.2 Why intended effects have not been fully achieved

Intended effects fail to be achieved because of a range of issues. Evaluations highlight challenges relating to deep institutional structures, to instruments linked to the Youth Guarantee and EEA; immediate outputs; youth impact assessment tools; EEA-level ambitions.

5.2.1 Institutional path dependence and regime logics

Comparative analyses of school-to-work transition regimes show that despite convergence in policies, long-standing institutional structures such as VET systems, employment protection, welfare regimes and wage-setting change slowly and continue to drive divergent outcomes. Where these structures favour segmented or precarious entry jobs, youth measures have limited capacity to transform the overall quality of transitions (Hadjivassiliou et al., 2018).

5.2.2 Insufficient scale and targeting relative to structural problems

In countries with very high rates of young people who are NEET, Youth Guarantee and EEA-linked instruments have often been under-resourced in relation to the scale of youth unemployment (HM Government, 2022). This has been particularly the case in regions with fiscal constraints. Budget limits, weak outreach and staff shortages in public employment services reduce capacity to offer tailored,

intensive support to those facing multiple disadvantages. Eichhorst and Rinne (2017) point out that while the Youth Guarantee was designed to ensure that every young person under 25 receives a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship, or traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education, the implementation gap has been stark in many regions.

5.2.3 Measurement focused on outputs, not long-term quality

Many programmes are judged on immediate statistical outputs, primarily the numbers of participants and short-term entries into any employment, education or training. Outcomes that are longer-term, such as sustained employment, job quality, reduced precariousness or subjective well-being, are harder to measure. This encourages designing offers that quickly move young people into the first opportunity that presents itself and discourages investment in slower, relationship-based interventions or structural reforms (Lonean, 2020; HM Government, 2022; Jonsson et al., 2022; Eichhorst and Rinne, 2017). Short-term changes over more substantive gains in security, progression and well-being that only emerge over years (Mathematica, 2023. Sanderson, 2020).

Output-driven performance regimes have been critiqued and are well documented in youth transition policy and evaluation literature. Focusing on rapid entries into any available employment, course or programme tends to privilege easily measurable. Immediate outputs (starts, completions, job entries) are cheap to collect, easy to aggregate and align neatly with annual budget and accountability cycles whereas longer-term outcomes such as sustained employment, reduced precariousness, progression, or improved health and well-being require longitudinal tracking, linked datasets and more complex causal analysis, which are technically and institutionally harder to deliver (Mathematica, 2023).

5.2.4 Limited youth voice and weak feedback loops

Although assessment tools exist to engage with young people about their experiences, they are applied unevenly and the participation of young people in the design of policies is partial (Lonean, 2020). Moxon et al. (2025) have highlighted inconsistent youth participation and tokenistic consultation. As a result, schemes may not fully reflect the lived experience of particularly disadvantaged groups such as care leavers, young people with disabilities or racialised minorities and this can limit the effectiveness of policies as well as reinforcing mistrust or low take-up (European Commission / EACEA / Youth Wiki, 2024; Lonean, 2020).

Similar conclusions appear in wider work on youth participation, which finds that consultation is frequently project-based, dependent on local champions, and dominated by already-engaged, more advantaged groups, so that marginalised young people remain under-represented and harder to reach (Alma Economics, 2021). The consequence that schemes may fail to reflect lived experience, limiting effectiveness and reinforcing mistrust and low take-up is consistent with evidence that top-down or symbolic engagement can actively discourage participation when young people feel that their views have little impact on decisions (Smith et al., 2023).

5.2.5 Mismatches between European frameworks and national/local implementation

EEA-level ambitions such as smooth cross-border transitions, international recognition of skills and strong youth guidance and support rely on actors at national and regional levels whose capacities, political priorities and institutional cultures differ. Implementation gaps, bureaucratic inertia and varying commitment mean that the same EU-level instrument can deliver very different outcomes across territories (O'Reilly et al., 2017; Hadjivassiliou et al., 2018; Lonean, 2020). Public services often lack staff and resources, limiting outreach and personalized support (European Parliament, 2017). Some countries underfund local schemes, causing delays and low-quality offers such as short-term contracts, unpaid traineeships; at the same time, financial support often fails to reflect real living costs, especially for mobility programmes (Youth Forum, 2025). Youth policies are often siloed within education or employment ministries and local actors lack mechanisms to align with EU priorities (Moxon et al., 2025).

6 Information gaps and future research needs

Much is known about the nature of the policies, practice and investment designed to support youth transitions from education and training into employment. However, this report has highlighted four main information gaps in current knowledge of youth transitions from education and training into employment.

6.1 Evaluation of youth transition policy and reforms

The first area of information gaps relates to the evaluation of youth transition policy and reforms. There is limited evidence on impact of recent reforms. Most reforms (e.g., Youth Guarantee, VET/apprenticeship reforms, ALMP strengthening) are recent, making long-term impact on school-to-work transitions unclear. Uncertainty remains about permanent institutional change (Hadjivassiliou et al., 2018). There is limited evidence about constraints in resources and implementation. There is little understanding of how financial and institutional capacity affects reform depth and effectiveness; gap between policy design and implementation persists (Hadjivassiliou et al., 2018). The impact of employment protection legislation changes on youth labour markets is uncertain; deregulation may increase precariousness (Hadjivassiliou et al., 2018).

6.2 Concept and theoretical debate

The second area of information gaps relates to conceptual and theoretical maturity. Traditional “youth transition regime” models (Pohl & Walther, 2007) fail to capture hybridization and convergence trends; new frameworks needed (Hadjivassiliou et al., 2018). Terms like “youth mainstreaming” and “youth perspective” lack clear definitions, causing inconsistent implementation (Moxon et al., 2025). At the same time, there is a lack of conceptual clarity and consistency. Multiple definitions (human capital, life course, developmental transition) coexist without integration whilst constructs like job search behaviour are treated inconsistently (Blokker et al., 2023). Dominant theories assume linear transitions, ignoring dynamic, non-linear trajectories and career shocks (Blokker et al., 2023).

6.3 Evidence and data collection

The third area of information gaps relates to evidence and data. There is limited longitudinal evidence. Most studies are cross-sectional; long-term effects of education investment and policy interventions remain underexplored (Halaskova & Halaskova, 2020; Höglberg, 2019). This is combined with a scarcity of comparative analyses. Few studies compare funding models or policy configurations across countries (Halaskova & Halaskova, 2020; Höglberg, 2019). This is compounded by fragmentation across disciplines. Psychology, sociology, economics and education operate in silos and there is a lack of integrated approaches combining micro and macro factors (Blokker et al., 2023).

6.4 Outreach and participation

A fourth area of information gaps relates to outreach and participation. There is limited evidence on NEET engagement. There are few studies on effective outreach strategies for hard-to-reach youth; online tools cannot replace face-to-face engagement (Hadjivassiliou et al., 2018). There is insufficient integration of youth participation standards. There are no common ethical standards for meaningful youth involvement and there is a risk of tokenism (Moxon et al., 2025). There are weak linkages between youth and child rights mainstreaming. The overlap between agendas is underexplored, risking duplication or gaps (Moxon et al., 2025).

6.5 Monitoring and Evaluation

The fifth area of information gaps is monitoring and evaluation. There is a lack of monitoring frameworks. Few cases systematically track the influence of youth mainstreaming on policy outcomes; absence of indicators (Moxon et al., 2025). There is limited evidence on the effectiveness of tools and it is unclear which mechanisms (participatory vs expert-led) work best. This runs the risk of tokenistic processes (Moxon et al., 2025).

6.6 Underexplored areas

Finally, there are four significant underexplored areas. First, research focuses on employment status and wages, ignoring career satisfaction and well-being (Blokker et al., 2023). Second, there is little information about nonstandard career paths. Entrepreneurship, gig work, and career shocks are rarely studied (Blokker et al., 2023). Third, there is little evidence on effective employer engagement strategies and how technology reduces inequalities (Hughes & Smith, 2020). Fourth, there is limited global comparative data. Most evidence comes from high-income countries whereas low- and middle-income contexts are usually underrepresented (Hughes & Smith, 2020).

7 Conclusions

This deliverable has described the complexity of youth transitions from education and training into employment across Europe. While significant progress has been made through policies such as the Youth Guarantee, VET reforms and targeted investment programmes, persistent challenges remain. Structural issues including institutional path dependence, regional disparities and fragmented governance continue to limit the effectiveness and efficiency of interventions. Unintended effects such as stratification, short-term activation and credential inflation highlight the need for more integrated and inclusive approaches.

The evidence reviewed in this research suggests that success depends on comprehensive support systems combining strong vocational pathways, tailored guidance and active labour market measures. Efficiency requires early, high-quality investment, robust evaluation frameworks and the alignment of funding with long-term outcomes rather than the pursuit of short-term outputs. Future strategies must address gaps in data, monitoring and youth participation. It must move beyond “quick wins” to tackle the systemic barriers such as employer engagement, mental health support and gender inequalities that inhibit successful youth transitions (see below Table 4).

Table 4: Needs and future work

Need	System level activity	local level activity
Strengthen Integrated Support Systems	Develop comprehensive youth transition frameworks that link education, training, guidance, and employment services.	Expand one-stop guidance centres and digital platforms to ensure accessibility for all youth, including those in rural areas.
Prioritize Inclusive and Targeted Measures	Allocate resources for intensive outreach to hard-to-reach NEET groups, including those with multiple disadvantages.	Embed mental health and well-being support within youth employment programmes.
Enhance Vocational Education and Employer Engagement	Scale up dual VET systems and work-based learning opportunities, ensuring strong employer participation.	Introduce incentives for SMEs to offer apprenticeships and internships, particularly in emerging sectors such as green and digital economies.
Improve Monitoring and Evaluation	Shift from output-based metrics (e.g., number of placements) to outcome-based indicators such as job quality, progression, and long-term stability.	Invest in longitudinal data systems and cross-country comparative analyses to inform evidence-based policy adjustments.
Address Structural Barriers	Align EU-level frameworks with national and local implementation through capacity-building and governance reforms.	Tackle gender disparities and childcare gaps to support equitable participation in education and employment.
Amplify Youth Voice	Institutionalize youth participation in policy design and evaluation through structured feedback loops and co-creation mechanisms.	Develop ethical standards for meaningful youth involvement to avoid tokenism.
Future-Proof Skills Development	Integrate digital and green skills into curricula and training programmes to prepare youth for evolving labour market demands.	Support lifelong learning pathways to enable continuous upskilling and reskilling.

This approach moves beyond “quick wins” and emphasises systemic reforms that promote equity, resilience, and sustainability in youth transitions and address structural issues like VET quality, guidance, and inclusive pathways. Achieving equitable and sustainable youth transitions will require coordinated action at EU, national, and local levels, underpinned by rigorous evidence and meaningful youth involvement. This report provides a foundation for subsequent work packages to build the empirical base needed for comparative efficiency analysis and policy innovation.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Policies, programmes and investments by Edu-Lab partner

Table 5: Austria, policy, practice and investments

Type	Name	Description
Policy	Youth Guarantee (Jugendgarantie)	Ensures that all young people under 25 receive a job, apprenticeship, traineeship, or continued education offer within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed.
	Training Guarantee (Ausbildungsgarantie)	Guarantees access to apprenticeship training for all young people up to age 25, including supra-company training if no company-based apprenticeship is available.
	National Youth Strategy	A cross-ministerial framework that includes employment and education as key pillars, promoting coordinated youth policy development.
	NEET Strategy	Targets young people not in education, employment, or training with tailored outreach and reintegration measures.
Practice	Dual Vocational Education and Training (VET)	Combines classroom instruction with hands-on training in companies. Around 40% of Austrian youth choose this path, which is highly integrated with labour market needs.
	Youth Coaching (Jugendcoaching)	Provides individualised support to students at risk of dropping out, helping them transition into further education or employment.
	Production Schools (Produktionsschulen)	Offer practical, low-threshold training environments for young people with limited qualifications or motivation, helping them build skills and confidence.
	Career Guidance and Counselling	Delivered through schools, Public Employment Service (AMS), and youth information centres to help young people make informed career choices.
	Apprenticeship Placement Services	The AMS and regional chambers of commerce help match young people with apprenticeship opportunities.
Investment	Public Funding for Supra-Company Apprenticeships	The government funds training centres that provide apprenticeships when company placements are unavailable.
	EU Co-Financed Programmes	Austria uses European Social Fund (ESF+) resources to support youth employment initiatives, especially for disadvantaged groups.
	Incentives for Employers	Financial subsidies are offered to companies that hire apprentices or young workers from vulnerable backgrounds.
	Digital Skills Initiatives	Investments in digital training programmes to prepare youth for emerging labour market demands.

Sources: European Commission (2025); Giannoni (2024).

Table 6: Finland, policy, practice and investments

Type	Name	Description
Policies	Youth Guarantee (Nuorisotakuu)	Ensures that every young person under 25 and recent graduates under 30 receive a job, study place, or rehabilitation offer within three months of becoming unemployed.
	National Youth Work and Youth Policy Programme	A four-year government strategy promoting youth wellbeing, participation, and employment. It aligns with the Youth Act and sets national goals for youth work and international cooperation.
	Upper Secondary Education Reforms (implemented 2017 and 2019)	Finland has restructured vocational education and training to ensure that students receive qualifications that support further study or employment, including stronger links between vocational education and working life. General upper secondary curricula have been reformed to enhance access to higher education and support employability.
	Extension of compulsory education (2021)	Raises the leaving age in compulsory education from the start of the autumn term 2021, in order to ensure every young person living in Finland completes a secondary-level qualification.
Practices	Career Guidance and Counselling	Provided throughout basic and secondary education, with personalised support from guidance counsellors and employment services.
	Vocational Education and Training (VET)	Strong emphasis on work-based learning and apprenticeships, with flexible pathways between general and vocational tracks.
	Ohjaamo One-Stop Guidance Centres	Local service hubs offering youth access to career advice, education counselling, health services, and job placement support.
	Municipal Youth Services	Tailored local programmes addressing NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) youth, including outreach work and mentoring.
	Digital Platforms	Tools like "Studyinfo" and "Job Market Finland" help young people explore education options and job opportunities, although they are not specific to young people.
Investments	Innovation and Skills in Finland 2021–2027 Programme	Co-funded by the EU and national government, this €3.16 billion initiative supports education, employment, and inclusion, with targeted funding for youth skills development and labour market access.
	European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)	Supports projects aimed at reducing youth unemployment, improving education outcomes, and preventing social exclusion.
	Employer Incentives	Financial support for companies hiring young people, especially those with limited work experience or special needs.
	Digital and Green Skills Training	Investments in future-oriented skills to prepare youth for evolving labour market demands.

Sources: OECD (2019); Finnish Ministry of Finance (2024); Ahlroth et al. (2025); Finnish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (2025); Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (2025; 2021). Finnish National Agency for Education (2019).

Table 7: Germany, policy, practice and investments

Type	Name	Description
Policies	EU Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan	Germany ensures that all young people under 25 receive a quality offer of employment, education, training, or internship within four months of leaving school or becoming unemployed.
	Vocational Training Act (BBiG)	Provides the legal framework for Germany's dual vocational education and training (VET) system, combining classroom instruction with company-based training.
	Flexicurity Measures	Policies that balance labour market flexibility with social security, including part-time work options and support for young parents.
	Integration of Disadvantaged Youth	Special programmes target youth with disabilities, migrant backgrounds, or low qualifications to ensure equitable access to education and employment.
Practices	Dual VET System	A hallmark of Germany's approach, this system integrates school-based learning with paid apprenticeships in companies. It covers over 300 recognized occupations and is widely supported by employers.
	Career Guidance and Counselling	Delivered through schools, employment agencies, and youth services to help young people make informed career choices.
	IJAB – International Youth Service	Promotes cross-border mobility and international vocational opportunities for young people.
	Youth Employment Agencies (Jugendberufsagenturen)	Local hubs that coordinate services from schools, employment offices, and social services to support youth transitions.
Investments	Federal and State Funding for VET	Substantial public investment supports vocational schools, training centres, and employer incentives for apprenticeships.
	European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)	Co-finances youth employment initiatives, especially for disadvantaged groups and regions with high NEET rates.
	Mobility and Exchange Programmes	Funding for Erasmus+, IJAB, and bilateral exchange schemes to enhance youth employability through international experience.
	Digital and Green Skills Training	Investments in future-oriented skills to prepare youth for evolving labour market demands.

Sources: European Commission (2025); Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (2025); Vogler-Ludwig (2005); Caroleo and Pastore (2003); Young (2018).

Table 8: Greece, policy, practice and investments

Type	Name	Description
Policies	Revised Youth Guarantee Action Plan	Targets young people aged 16–29 who are NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). Offers tailored pathways into employment, education, training, or apprenticeships. Aims to reduce youth unemployment from 28.4% (2021) to 22% by 2025 and 18% by 2030
	Law 4855/2021 – Youth Employment Measures	Introduced flexible employment schemes and incentives for hiring young people. Includes subsidies and support for reconciling private and professional life
	National Strategy for Youth Employment	Integrates NextGenerationEU (NGEU) funds to support youth employment and entrepreneurship. Focuses on digital skills, green jobs, and inclusive labour market access
Practices	Recruitment Subsidy Programme	Offers €1,200 to employers hiring young people up to age 29
	Vocational Education and Training (VET)	Strengthens links between education and labour market needs. Includes apprenticeships and work-based learning components
	Career Guidance and Counselling Services	Provided through schools and employment centres to help youth navigate education and job options
	Activation Programmes for NEETs	Outreach and mentoring for disengaged youth. Includes personalised support and job placement services.
	Cross-Border Mobility Initiatives	Encourages youth participation in EU programmes like Erasmus+ and EURES for training and employment abroad
Investments	€299 Million Fiscal Package (2021–2025)	Funds youth employment measures including subsidies, training, and support services
	Integration of NGEU Funds	Supports digital transformation, green economy training, and youth entrepreneurship
	European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)	Co-finances projects aimed at reducing youth unemployment and improving education-to-work transitions

Sources: ILO (2025); European Commission (2025); European Student Thinktank (2023).

Table 9: Kosovo, policy, practice and investments

Type	Name	Description
Policies	Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (2022–2026)	Focuses on improving employability, reducing NEET rates, and aligning education with labour market needs.
	Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (KESP 2022–2026)	Aims to enhance the quality and relevance of education, with emphasis on vocational training, digital skills, and inclusive access.
	Youth Law (2020)	Establishes youth participation rights, promotes youth work, and supports youth organisations in employment-related initiatives.
	National Qualifications Framework (NQF)	Standardises learning outcomes and qualifications to support smoother transitions from education to work.
Practices	Enhanced Youth Employment (EYE) Project	Supports school-based career guidance in vocational education and training (VET) institutions, helping students navigate labour market opportunities.
	Career Centres in VET Schools	Provide structured career counselling, employer engagement, and job placement support.
	Youth Participation Platforms	Encourage youth involvement in policy-making and local development, fostering civic and economic engagement.
	Non-Formal Education Initiatives	Offer life skills, entrepreneurship training, and digital literacy to complement formal education.
	Internships and Work-Based Learning	Promoted through donor programmes and public-private partnerships to bridge education and employment gaps.
Investments	EU and Donor Funding (ETF, Helvetas, GIZ)	Support vocational education reform, youth employment services, and capacity building for career guidance.
	Public Investment in VET Infrastructure	Includes modernising equipment, curricula, and teacher training to improve employability outcomes.
	Youth-Focused Grants and Start-Up Support	Funded by international donors and local institutions to promote entrepreneurship and self-employment.
	Digital Skills and Green Economy Training	Emerging investment areas aimed at preparing youth for future labour market demands.

Sources: European Training Foundation (ETF), (2024); Kelmendi (2023); Asllani (2021); Kelmendi (2023); Enhancing Youth Employment (EYE) project (2024).

Table 10: Italy, policy, practice and investments

Type	Name	Description
Policies	Youth Guarantee (Garanzia Giovani)	A national programme offering job, education, or training opportunities to young people aged 15–29. Includes personalised guidance, internships, apprenticeships, and job placement support
	National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP)	Allocates significant funding to youth employment and education reform. Focuses on digital and green skills, school-to-work transitions, and reducing regional disparities.
	NEET Strategy	Targets young people not in education, employment, or training with outreach, mentoring, and tailored activation measures
	Education Reform Policies	Strengthen vocational education and training (VET) pathways. Promote dual learning models and work-based learning
Practices	Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs)	Include job search assistance, training programmes, and wage subsidies for employers hiring young people
	Career Guidance and Counselling	Delivered through schools, employment centres, and regional youth services to support informed career decisions
	Apprenticeships and Internships	Widely used to bridge education and employment, often co-financed by public and private sectors
	Local and Regional Youth Services	Provide tailored support including mentoring, skills development, and entrepreneurship training
	Digital Platforms	Tools like "MyAnpal" and "Garanzia Giovani" portals help youth access services and track progress
Investments	Youth Employment Package (2021–2025)	Includes €200 million for hiring incentives, training, and support for disadvantaged youth
	European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)	Co-finances youth employment initiatives, especially in southern regions and among vulnerable groups
	NRRP Investments	Over €6 billion allocated to education and youth employment reforms. Supports school infrastructure, teacher training, and digital transition
	Employer Incentives	Wage subsidies and tax relief for companies hiring young workers, especially NEETs or those with disabilities

Sources: European Commission (2025); Gaspani, et al. (2025); European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) (2024); Bianchi (2012).

Table 11: Poland, policy, practice and investments

Type	Name	Description
Policies	Youth Guarantee (Gwarancje dla Młodzieży)	Ensures that young people under 25 receive a quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship, or traineeship within four months of leaving education or becoming unemployed.
	Strategy for Lifelong Learning	Promotes flexible education pathways and upskilling opportunities to support transitions and career development.
	Integrated Skills Strategy (Zintegrowana Strategia Umiejętności)	Aligns education and training with labour market needs, focusing on digital, green, and soft skills.
	National Youth Strategy	Sets priorities for youth inclusion, employment, and participation in public life, with emphasis on education-to-work transitions.
Practices	Vocational Education and Training (VET)	Includes dual education models combining school-based learning with company internships. VET is increasingly aligned with labour market demands.
	Career Guidance and Counselling	Provided in schools and through labour offices to help youth make informed decisions about education and employment.
	Activation Programmes for NEETs	Targeted outreach, mentoring, and personalised support for young people not in education, employment, or training.
	Youth Employment Initiative (YEI)	Offers job placement, training, and apprenticeships for youth in regions with high unemployment. Over 400,000 young people have benefited.
	Digital Platforms	Tools like "Zielona Linia" and "Public Employment Services" help youth access job offers, training, and career advice.
Investments	Youth Employment Initiative (YEI)	€550 million from the EU, plus nearly €2 billion from the European Social Fund (ESF), invested in youth employment programmes.
	ESF+ 2021–2027	Funds projects that support youth skills development, employment, and social inclusion, especially in disadvantaged regions.
	Employer Incentives	Financial support for companies hiring young workers, including wage subsidies and training reimbursements.
	Urban Inclusion Projects	Investments in youth employment and education in urban areas to address regional disparities and promote equal opportunities.

Sources: European Commission (2025); Madoń, et al. (2021); Baran et al. (2022); Bal-Domańska, et al. (2025).

Table 12: Portugal, policy, practice and investments

Type	Name	Description
Policies	Youth Guarantee (Garantia Jovem)	Offers young people under 30 a quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship, or traineeship within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed.
	National Youth Plan (Plano Nacional da Juventude)	A cross-sectoral strategy promoting youth participation, education, and employment. It includes measures for career guidance, entrepreneurship, and digital inclusion.
	Education and Training Reform	Strengthens vocational education and training (VET) pathways, promotes dual learning models, and aligns curricula with labour market needs.
	NEET Strategy	Targets young people not in education, employment, or training with outreach, mentoring, and activation programmes.
Practices	ATIVAR.PT Internship Programme	A flagship active labour market policy offering subsidised internships to young jobseekers. Evaluations show positive short-term impacts on employment and earnings.
	Vocational Education and Training (VET)	Includes work-based learning, apprenticeships, and partnerships with employers to improve job readiness.
	Career Guidance and Counselling	Delivered through schools, employment centres, and youth organisations to support informed career choices.
	Youth Employment Centres (Gabinetes de Inserção Profissional)	Local hubs offering job placement, training, and personalised support for young people.
	Non-Formal Education and Skills Development	Includes digital literacy, entrepreneurship training, and soft skills programmes supported by youth organisations.
Investments	European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)	Co-finances youth employment initiatives, especially in regions with high NEET rates and among vulnerable groups.
	Recovery and Resilience Plan (PRR)	Allocates funding to education reform, digital skills, and youth employment as part of Portugal's post-COVID recovery strategy.
	Employer Incentives	Financial support for companies hiring young workers, including wage subsidies and training reimbursements.
	Youth-Led Projects and Start-Up Support	Grants and mentoring for young entrepreneurs, often backed by EU and national funds.

Sources: European Commission (2025); O'Higgins and Brockie (2025); OECD (2024).

Table 13: United Kingdom, policy, practice and investments

Type	Name	Description
Policies	Youth Guarantee (England)	Offers guaranteed access to education, training, or employment for young people aged 16–24, especially those not achieving grade 4 in English and maths GCSEs.
	Curriculum Reform (2025)	A new national curriculum aims to equip students with core academic skills and practical knowledge for life and work, including digital literacy and financial education.
	SEND and Inclusion Strategy	Addresses barriers faced by young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), including tailored pathways into employment.
	Apprenticeship Levy and Reforms	Employers contribute to a levy that funds apprenticeships, with reforms to improve access for young people and small businesses.
Practices	T Levels and Vocational Pathways	Introduced as technical alternatives to A-levels, combining classroom learning with industry placements.
	Career Hubs and Guidance Services	Delivered through schools and local authorities, these offer personalised career advice and employer engagement.
	Youth Employment Programmes	Includes Kickstart (now closed), Restart, and local initiatives targeting NEETs and disadvantaged youth.
	One-Stop Youth Services	Integrated support for education, employment, mental health, and housing—especially for marginalised groups.
	Employer Partnerships	Collaboration with businesses to offer work experience, mentoring, and job placements.
Investments	Plan for Jobs (2020–2025)	Multi-billion-pound investment in youth employment, including training, apprenticeships, and wage subsidies.
	Skills Bootcamps	Funded short courses in high-demand sectors like digital, construction, and green technologies.
	Levelling Up Fund	Supports regional youth employment initiatives, especially in areas with high NEET rates.
	Youth Futures Foundation Funding	Invests in evidence-based programmes to improve outcomes for marginalised youth.
	Local Authority Grants	Funding for targeted outreach, mentoring, and wraparound services for vulnerable young people.

Sources: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) (2024); Newton (2025); Gov.UK (2025); Urwin (2025); Hofman et al., (2024).

Appendix 2: EEA - policy, practice and investment focus

Table 14: EEA countries and their policy practice and investment focus

Country (and source)	Main Policies & Re-forms	Practices Supporting Transition	Investment Focus
Austria (O'Reilly et al. 2017)	Youth Guarantee, extended ALMPs	Intensive placement, apprenticeship expansion	Early education intervention, VET
Belgium (O'Reilly et al. 2017)	Youth Guarantee, regionalized efforts	Intensive guidance, school-work links	Education inclusion, regional VET
Bulgaria (ETUC, 2014)	ALMPs, VET modernization	School-based career guidance, NEET reduction	Youth programs, skills training
Croatia (ETUC, 2014)	Youth Guarantee expansion, NEET reduction	Regional targeting, school reforms	Skills training, transition programs
Cyprus (ETUC, 2014)	ALMPs, targeted NEET outreach	Crisis-response, vocational expansion	Youth employment funds, VET
Czech Republic (Cedefop, 2019b)	Youth Guarantee, reformed VET	Enhancing school-to-work transition, early placement	Modern VET, ALMPs
Denmark (O'Reilly et al. 2017)	Youth Guarantee, ALMPs, VET	Strong school-work integration, proactive job search	Early intervention, vocational pathways
Estonia (Cost, 2023)	Youth Guarantee Support System, NEET outreach	Cross-sectoral youth-labour collaboration	NEET identification, vocational training
Finland (O'Reilly et al. 2017)	Education reform, Youth Guarantee	Early identification of at-risk youth, guidance	VET investment, apprenticeship support
France (O'Reilly et al. 2017)	Subsidies, VET reform, Youth Guarantee	Lowering youth labour costs, diverse transition routes	Vocational pathway investment, ALMPs
Germany (O'Reilly et al. 2017)	Dual VET, Youth Guarantee	Robust school-work fusion, social partnership	Employer-led VET, strong investment
Greece ETUC (2014)	ALMPs, recent VET and employment reforms	Youth Guarantee focus, targeting high youth unemployment	Employment support, new VET programs
Hungary (O'Reilly et al. 2017)	Labour market reforms, VET expansion	NEET reduction, youth guidance programs	VET modernization, employment programs
Ireland ETUC (2014)	Youth Guarantee, targeted VET	Regional equity, effective school-work programs	Investment in re-engagement, ALMPs
Italy (ETUC (2014})	VET expansion, ALMPs	Regional disparities, early guidance	Youth employment incentives, ALMPs
Latvia (O'Reilly et al. 2017)	Youth Guarantee, VET modernization	Active job-matching, NEET interventions	Skills alignment, regional outreach
Lithuania (O'Reilly et al. 2017)	VET and Youth Guarantee initiatives	Mix of school-based and work-based VET	Active labour programs, modern VET

Country (and source)	Main Policies & Reforms	Practices Supporting Transition	Investment Focus
Luxembourg (Eurostats, 2025)	Youth Guarantee, VET focus	VET-modernization, early job placement	Strong VET support, ALMPs
Malta (Eurostats, 2025)	Low NEET rates, Youth Guarantee	Traineeship offers, education-to-work support	Early intervention, career services
Netherlands (O'Reilly et al. 2017)	Dual system, well-integrated VET	Effective NEET outreach, youth career services	High institutional investment, VET
Poland (O'Reilly et al. 2017)	Youth Guarantee, NEET initiatives	Regional outreach, improved guidance	VET, youth employment support
Portugal (Eurostats, 2025)	ALMP reforms, VET expansion	Intensive school-work links, addressing NEETs	Vocational investment, regional outreach
Romania	Targeted ALMPs, VET improvement	NEET outreach, career services	Youth employment investment, VET
Slovakia	Youth Guarantee, VET system reform	Focus on work-based learning, career guidance	Transition support, vocational pathways
Slovenia (Eurostats (2025)	Youth Guarantee, strong VET	Early intervention, inclusive vocational practices	VET expansion, youth employment
Spain (ETUC, 2014)	Youth Guarantee, ALMPs	Subsidized employment, crisis-response	Vocational training, inclusion focus
Sweden (O'Reilly et al. 2017)	Dual system, Youth Guarantee	Employer-involved VET, work-based learning	Social partner investment, ALMPs

Table 15: Investment in youth transitions in the EEA, 2020–25.

Country	Amount of investment (indicative, youth/skills relevant)	Description of investment growth (2020–2025)	Gap analysis: investment vs. priorities
Austria	€393m ESF+ (2021–2027)	Shift from 2014–20 ESF to ESF+ with stronger focus on social innovation, gender equality and school-to-work transition (steady growth vs. prior period).	ESF+ envelope adequate but regional co-financing and capacity constrain scale; childcare and PES reforms still catching up with targets.
Belgium	€1.3bn ESF+	New ESF+ programmes (5) expand up/reskilling and youth measures compared to 2014–20, with larger allocations to inclusion.	Multi-level governance is strong, but fragmentation across regions risks uneven outcomes; limited national coordination for ALMA scaling.
Bulgaria	€2.6bn ESF+	Marked increase (>60% vs 2014–20) with strong youth, inclusion and education modernisation thrust.	Scale is significant but teacher supply, rural access and long-term care workforce capacity remain bottlenecks.
Croatia	€1.93bn ESF+ (of €2.3bn programme)	Post-accession growth: ESF+ prioritises all-level education and activation; complements RRF.	Implementation capacity improving, but employer engagement in VET and adult learning participation still lag targets.
Cyprus	€222m ESF+	ESF+ expands youth employability, VET and child guarantee vs. earlier period; part of THALIA multi-fund.	Good strategic clarity; delivery hinges on scaling ECEC and PES reforms and co-ordinating measures across ministries.
Czech Republic	€2.4bn ESF+	Two national programmes (Employment+ and Comenius) deepen early support, inclusion and skills compared to 2014–20.	Strong programme design; gaps in regional service capacity and employer uptake for apprenticeships remain.
Denmark	€120m ESF+	Focus shifts to inclusive labour market & skills; complements ERDF innovation; steady growth in VET completion.	Scale is modest vs. needs in homelessness and skills shortages; coordination with municipalities is critical.
Estonia	€534m ESF+	Lifelong skills measures across life stages; strong alignment to JTF in Ida-Viru and to green/digital transition.	Strong digital base; gaps in long-term care workforce and rural coverage of services.
Finland	€605m ESF+ (within €1.4bn Innovation & Skills programme)	ESF+ focuses on cohesion & skills; adult learning and poverty reduction strengthened vs. prior period.	High-quality systems; participation rates need boosting among low-qualified adults; regional delivery remains challenging.
France	€6.7bn ESF+ (national programmes €7.4bn incl. food aid)	Post-PIC, ESF+ ramps youth & inclusion with ALMA and food aid; sustained investment into VET and social economy.	Strong envelopes; gaps persist in regional inequality and apprenticeship uptake; food aid needs sustainable exit strategies.
Germany	€6.5bn ESF+ (total €6.56bn)	Continuous investment in inclusion, VET and upskilling; emphasis on migrants/refugees and child poverty.	Envelopes solid; bottlenecks in apprenticeship placements and regional disparities in services.
Greece	>€5.3bn ESF+	Expanded ESF+ for labour-market institutions, VET relevance and social services vs. prior cycle.	Administrative complexity can slow delivery; school-to-work transition needs stronger employer links.
Hungary	€5.3bn ESF+	Large ESF+ envelope; recent focus on teacher pay, disadvantaged districts and Roma inclusion.	Scale significant; governance and conditionality issues may affect disbursement; disadvantaged areas need multi-sector delivery.
Ireland	€508m ESF+	ESF+ centres on disadvantaged learners, inclusive HE/schools and youth transitions; complements national co-financing.	Envelopes adequate; challenge remains reaching low-literacy adults and rural areas.

Country	Amount of investment (indicative, youth/skills relevant)	Description of investment growth (2020–2025)	Gap analysis: investment vs. priorities
Italy	€14.8bn ESF+ (plus RRF Mission 4 ~€30.88bn)	Very large ESF+ plus NRRP Mission 4 accelerates education & research; strong youth & child-poverty focus.	Strong funding; execution risk and administrative capacity in less-developed regions; need stronger employer engagement.
Latvia	€721m ESF+	ESF+ focuses on social services, healthcare, skills and material aid; strengthening VET and activation.	Delivery capacity and rural service availability remain gaps; participation in adult learning below targets.
Lithuania	€1.1bn ESF+	ESF+ tackles poverty/inequality and skills, aligned to EU Funds Investment Programme.	Policy reforms on benefits and services progressing; workforce and employer engagement in VET need scaling.
Luxembourg	€15.5m ESF+	Small ESF+ but targeted to digital skills, social economy and youth/migrants; complements ERDF/JTF.	Envelope limited relative to integration needs; relies on targeted, high-impact projects.
Malta	€124.4m ESF+	ESF+ prioritises reducing early school leaving, skills shortages and health workforce; ongoing approvals in 2025.	Scale modest; health specialisation training abroad helps capacity but domestic retention is a risk.
Netherlands	€414m ESF+	ESF+ targets vulnerable workers, social innovation and material aid; strong regional execution.	Good governance; gap remains in reaching most deprived children and sustaining transitions to stable jobs.
Poland	€12.9bn ESF+	Very large ESF+ envelope with national & regional programmes; focus on childcare, social & health services and skills.	Strong scale; adult learning participation target remains low and childcare expansion needs local capacity.
Portugal	€7.8bn ESF+ (PESSOAS 2030 ~€5.7bn)	Significant ESF+ for demography, qualifications & inclusion; strong VET reforms and digital transition.	Delivery progressing; NEET reduction and adult participation targets require sustained outreach and employer partnerships.
Romania	€7.3bn ESF+	Large ESF+ to modernise PES, education, social services and fight child poverty; focus on rural communities.	Scale significant; rural delivery and service quality remain implementation gaps.
Slovakia	€2.35bn ESF+	Single 'Programme Slovakia' centralises ESF+, focusing on inclusion, education and Roma communities.	Unified programme eases management; gaps in local capacity and Roma inclusion outcomes persist.
Slovenia	€665m ESF+	ESF+ invests in upskilling, long-term care and inclusion; strong material aid component.	Robust design; LTC implementation and workforce availability are key gaps; ensuring inclusive VET pathways for special-needs youth remains challenging.
Spain	€11.296bn ESF+ (national envelope)	ESF+ supports VET reform, digital education and youth employment; expanded loans/grants under amended RRP.	Ambitious VET reform needs employer buy-in and accreditation systems; regional execution varies.
Sweden	€707m ESF+	ESF+ focuses on lifelong learning, inclusion and northern sparsely populated area capacity.	Programme well-targeted; gaps in reaching long-term unemployed and in capacity of sparsely populated areas.
Kosovo	€13m IPA 2020 'EU4 Education & Employment' (within €602.1m 2014–2020 IPA)	Targeted IPA action to increase youth/women employment and improve HE quality; multi-year implementation (2020–2026).	Scale is modest; delivery capacity and systemic reforms (PES/Education) are long-term needs; NEET rate remains high.
United Kingdom	£820m Youth Guarantee (2025–2028) + £1.5bn FE capital (2020–2026)	New Youth Guarantee funding and apprenticeship levy reforms (2025) alongside multi-year FE capital upgrades.	Youth Guarantee scale is welcome but limited vs. NEET numbers; levy reforms may lower training standards if not well-designed; capital improves estates but not teaching capacity alone.

Sources: European Union (2022).

Appendix 3: NEETS and associated policies

Table 16: NEET rates by country and key policy in response

Country	NEET Rate (15-29)	Youth Unemployment Rate (15-24)	Youth Inactivity Rate (15-29)	Met EU NEET Target (<9%)	Key Policy/Practice Feature
EU-27 avg	11.2	15.6	30	No	EU target <9% NEET by 2030; ESF+ focus on VET, PES, digital/green
Austria	9.9	11	27	No	VET/apprenticeships; PES modernisation; social innovation
Belgium	10.9	16.1	29	No	ALMA; dual learning; inclusion & up-/reskilling
Bulgaria	15.4	12.1	34	No	Education modernisation; Roma integration; Child Guarantee
Croatia	13	18.9	32	No	Active employment; VET & HE; PES modernisation
Cyprus	11	16.9	30	No	THALIA multi-fund; PES modernisation; ECEC scaling
Czech Republic	6	8.3	26	Yes	Inclusive education; apprenticeships; adult learning
Denmark	8.6	11.5	24	Yes	Inclusive labour market; VET completion; PES capacity
Estonia	8	17.2	27	Yes	Digital skills; lifelong learning; JTF alignment
Finland	7	16.1	26	Yes	Innovation & Skills; adult learning; poverty reduction
France	12.5	17.3	30	No	ALMA scaling; VET modernisation; food aid exit
Germany	8.8	6	25	Yes	Apprenticeships; migrant integration; PES services
Greece	14.2	26.6	38	No	Labour market modernisation; VET alignment; PES reform
Hungary	12	12.8	31	No	Teacher profession; Roma inclusion; youth employment
Ireland	8.5	10.6	27	Yes	Youthreach; inclusive HE/schools; PES capacity
Italy	15.2	22.7	40	No	Youth Guarantee; VET/apprenticeships; childcare expansion
Latvia	10	12.3	29	No	Social services & LTC; VET activation; PES capacity
Lithuania	9	13.7	28	Yes	Tax benefit & services; lifelong learning; VET relevance
Luxembourg	8.5	18.9	26	Yes	Digital skills; social economy; migrant integration
Malta	7.5	9.2	27	Yes	Reduce early school leaving; health workforce training
Netherlands	4.8	8.3	23	Yes	Vulnerable workers; social innovation; practical schools
Poland	8	11.2	27	Yes	Childcare & services; adult learning participation
Portugal	8.9	20.3	29	yes	NEET reduction; VET reform; digital skills
Romania	19.3	21.7	34	No	PES modernisation; rural integrated services; child guarantee

Country	NEET Rate (15-29)	Youth Unemployment Rate (15-24)	Youth Inactivity Rate (15-29)	Met EU NEET Target (<9%)	Key Policy/Practice Feature
Slovakia	11	19.4	31	No	Roma inclusion; PES reform; inclusive education
Slovenia	7.8	10	26	Yes	Upskilling; long-term care system; inclusion
Spain	12	28.8	33	No	Ambitious VET reform; digital education; PES capacity
Sweden	5.7	22	25	Yes	Lifelong learning; migrant inclusion; regional capacity
United Kingdom	12.1	12.4	29	No	Youth Guarantee (2025); Levy reforms; FE capital
Kosovo	31	47	42	No	IPA EU4 Education & Employment; PES capacity; VET quality

Sources: Eurostats (2025).