

# EDULAB

European Youth in Transition to  
Education and Labour



## Discussion note: Policies, Programmes and Investments for Youth Transitions

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## Executive summary

*Introduction and Purpose*

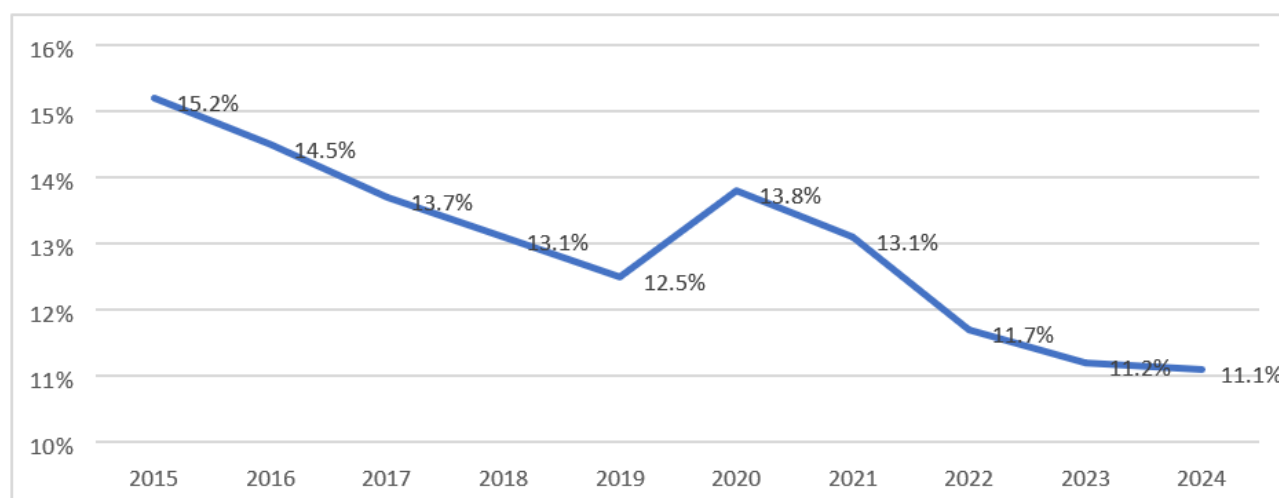
This discussion note is drawn from the findings of Deliverable 2.1 of the EDU-LAB project. The Deliverable reviews policies, programmes and investments designed to support youth transitions from education to training and into the labour force. The findings matter because youth transitions underpin social inclusion, equity and economic growth.

*Key Insights*

Four main findings were reported in Deliverable 2.1:

1. The most effective policies are those that emphasise integrated support structures and strong vocational pathways.
2. Efficiency depends on early investment, cost-benefit alignment and coordination between government departments and ground-level organisations and institutions.
3. Funding tends to come from major supra-national sources such as ESF+ and Erasmus+ but gaps remain in guidance and outreach.
4. Rates of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) across the EU declined from 15.2% in 2015 to 11.1% in 2024. However, regional disparities persist.

**Figure 1: NEET rates, EEA, 2015-24**

*Critical Reflections*

Strengths, weaknesses and gaps were identified in Deliverable 2.1:

- The main strengths of current policy and programmes in improving youth transitions are comprehensive frameworks like the (reinforced) Youth Guarantee and dual VET systems.
- The main weaknesses of current policy and programmes appear to be persistent structural barriers, fragmented governance, and output-focused evaluation.
- The principal gaps currently appear to be underinvestment in guidance, a weak youth voice and a misalignment between EU ambitions and local implementation.

These issues raise questions about sustainability and inclusiveness of current strategies.

### Unintended effects

Deliverable 2.1 highlighted several unintended effects of current policy that have been identified in existing evaluations. As can be seen in Table 1 below, most of these are the result not of weaknesses in purpose but of deeper structural issues that are not addressed by the policies and programmes. Hence, the most disadvantaged are least likely to have the resources to apply for and access funding from schemes ('stratification') and the most difficult to reach individuals are those who are not in the system ('focus on registered NEETs'). Policies and programmes tend to lead to 'projectification' which can lead to short-term outcomes ('short-term activation') and the focus on employability of individual young people can distract from labour market issues. Schemes such as Erasmus+ can, in some cases, delay individuals in making transitions as they spend time studying and living in other countries. Finally, supra-national directives are implemented at national and local level, so are inevitably influenced by local structures and traditions of governance.

**Table 1: Unintended Effects**

<i>Unintended Effect</i>	<i>Description</i>
Stratification	Better-resourced youth benefit most from mobility schemes
Focus on registered NEETs	Hard-to-reach youth underserved
Short-term activation	Precarious jobs, weak progression
Overemphasis on employability	Structural labour market issues under-addressed
Mobility delays	Erasmus+ can prolong transitions
Fragmented governance	Overlapping schemes, weak coordination

### Implications for Policy and Practice

This indicates, therefore, that future strategies should shift from short-term activation to long-term quality outcomes; enhance coordination between EU, national, and local actors; and address structural labour market issues alongside skills development.

However, it also indicates that data systems should be improved for longitudinal tracking. Most importantly, it indicates that one voice has been consistently absent in the design and development of policy and programmes: that of the youth themselves.

### Questions for Stakeholders

This, of course, leads to five main questions for stakeholders:

1. *How can funding be aligned with long-term outcomes rather than short-term outputs?*
2. *How can policies better integrate structural labour market reforms with skills development?*
3. *What role should employers play in improving transition quality?*
4. *What mechanisms can ensure meaningful youth participation in policy design?*
5. *How can data systems be improved to track progression and job quality over time?*