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From: Secretary-General of the European Commission,
signed by Mr Jordi AYET PUIGARNAU, Director

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To: Mr Jeppe TRANHOLM-MIKKELSEN, Secretary-General of the Council of
the European Union

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Committee of the Regions Youth Employment Support: a Bridge to Jobs for
the Next Generation

Delegations will find attached document COM(2020) 276 final.

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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

Youth Employment Support: a Bridge to Jobs for the Next Generation

“No Member State should have to choose between responding to the crisis or investing in our people. Therefore, Next Generation EU increases [...] youth employment support. It makes sure that people get the skills and the training and the education they need to adapt to this rapidly changing world¹.”

President Ursula von der Leyen

1. INTRODUCTION: INVESTING IN THE NEXT GENERATION

Guided by the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Commission laid out its programme for a Social Europe right at the beginning of its mandate², with people at its heart. Since then, the Commission has prioritised work to help young people and is delivering on its promise. It is strengthening education and training, fostering youth employment, ensuring fair working conditions and improving access to social protection for all, because young people are the next generation and deserve all the opportunities to develop their full potential to shape the future of our continent.

The COVID-19 pandemic emphasised the need to stay on this road and accelerate with speed. Though a health crisis first and foremost, the pandemic’s impact has spiralled the EU into a deep recession³. Rising claims for unemployment benefits foreshadow new challenges. Unemployment will rise among all age groups, but youth have already been struck disproportionately⁴. Over one in six young people have stopped working since the onset of the crisis⁵. Many were working in hard-hit sectors such as accommodation, food, arts, entertainment, wholesale and retail⁶. Others are now trying to enter the labour market when such sectors are no longer hiring.

Now is the time for both Member States and the European Institutions to direct their attention towards the next generation. We know from the global financial and economic crisis that we should not delay our response. Early signals of trouble that are ignored today can snowball into irreparable damage within just a few years’ time. With the flexibility offered by the Commission’s Coronavirus Response Investment Initiatives, many Member States mobilised temporary anti-crisis measures quickly. With the help of the European Social Fund (ESF), they maintain jobs and compensate for the disruptions in education and training during the pandemic. Moreover, the new instrument for temporary Support to

¹ Speech by President von der Leyen at the European Parliament, 27 May 2020.

² Communication on “A Strong Social Europe for Just Transitions”, COM(2020) 14 final.

³ European Commission (2020), European Economic Forecast Spring 2020.

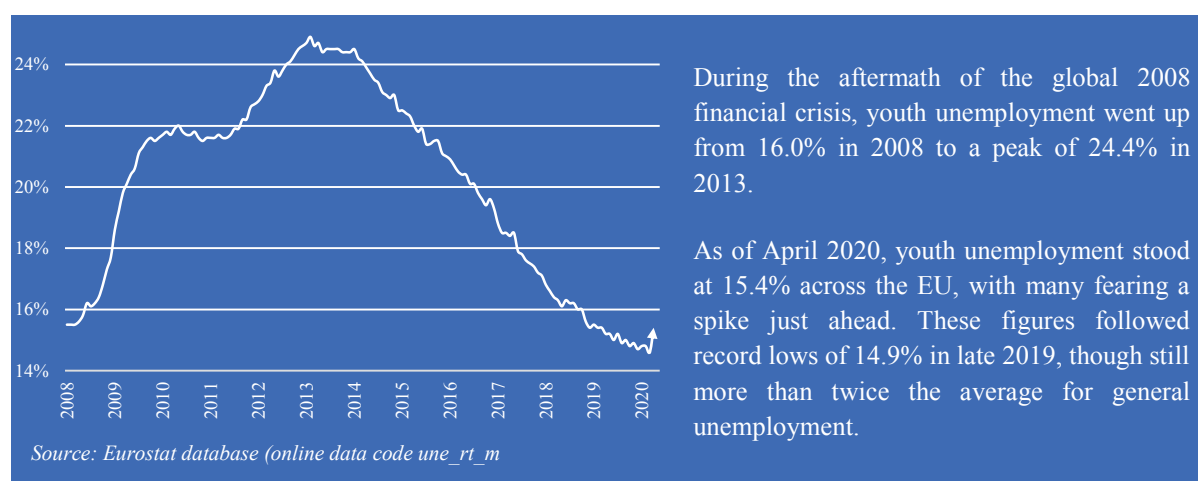
⁴ ILO (2020), Preventing exclusion from the labour market: Tackling the COVID-19 youth employment crisis.

⁵ ILO (2020), ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work (Fourth edition).

⁶ McKinsey & Company (2020), Safeguarding Europe’s livelihoods: mitigating the employment impact of COVID-19.

mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE)⁷ will allow for up to EUR 100 billion in loans that support Member States' short-time work schemes and similar measures for the self-employed. Building on the Commission's proposal for Next Generation EU⁸, the next logical step is to help young people shape Europe's recovery.

These joint efforts should result in more opportunities for all young people alike. For youth in many Member States, this is the second economic recession in their young lives. Someone who turned 18 at the peak of the previous youth employment crisis is now barely 25. Challenges are likely to be worse for discriminated or vulnerable groups, as economic downturns tend to widen inequalities. Youth of vulnerable groups, such as youth of racial and ethnic minorities, young people with disabilities, or young people living in some rural, remote or disadvantaged urban areas, face additional barriers to labour market entry⁹. For example, young people with disabilities have considerably lower employment rates than those without disabilities,¹⁰ and migrant and refugees youth are a growing part of our youth and face specific obstacles and discrimination. Young women are also severely impacted by the crisis. Active and targeted policies will be necessary to ensure reaching out to all.



The initiatives presented in this Communication contribute to the Commission's recovery strategy from the COVID-19 pandemic. They make sure that the EU's digital and green transitions are ingrained in the DNA of our youth employment policies. They implement the European Pillar of Social Rights and support the New Industrial Strategy. Other Commission proposals, such as the European Skills Agenda for sustainable

⁷ OJ L 159, 20.5.2020, Proposed by the Commission on 2 April 2020.

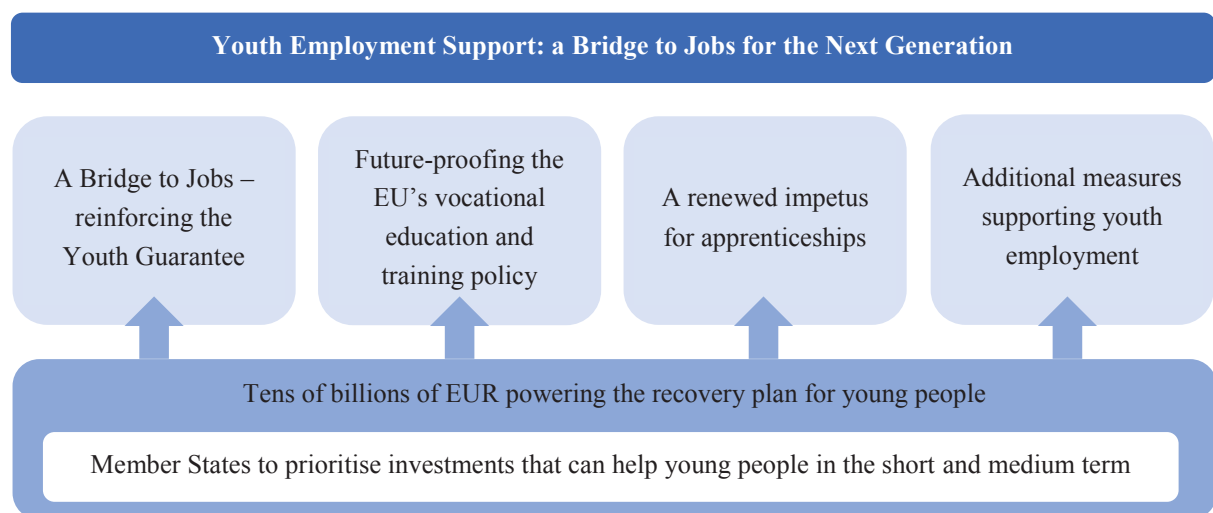
⁸ COM(2020)441 final/2.

⁹ This requires providing equal treatment for all people regardless of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, and people with a migrant background. Moreover, this is connected to the ongoing reflection on demographic change, which addresses brain drain and increased population decline in regions particularly affected by this phenomenon (COM (2020) 241 final).

¹⁰ According to ANED using Silc Data from 2016, the employment rate of young people with disabilities between 20 and 29 years of age was just below 45% and the employment gap in relation to young people without disabilities increased between 2008 and 2016.

competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, adopted on the same day, contribute to boosting youth employment¹¹.

This Communication details how the proposals for Council Recommendations on “a Bridge to Jobs – reinforcing the Youth Guarantee” (Section 2) and on “Vocational Education and Training for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience” (Section 3), together with a renewed impetus for apprenticeships (Section 4) contribute to creating youth employment. The Communication also presents a number of additional measures to pursue this objective (Section 5). **The Commission’s proposals for Next Generation EU and the future EU budget will allow for significant EU financing for youth employment (Section 6). It is now for Member States to prioritise investments, as youth employment is primarily their responsibility.**



2. A BRIDGE TO JOBS - REINFORCING THE YOUTH GUARANTEE

Over the last years, the Commission has supported Member States in offering young people stepping stones to enter the labour market. Launched at the peak of the previous youth employment crisis, the 2013 Youth Guarantee has had a significant transformative effect across many Member States. It has created opportunities for young people, driven structural reforms and innovation, and strengthened public employment services. It has

¹¹ COM(2020) 274 final. This Communication is complemented by the Commission’s upcoming proposals on the Digital Education Action Plan and the European Education Area, these initiatives will form a holistic answer to the challenges faced by our next generation.

helped over 24 million young people across the EU in entering the labour market since its first implementation¹².

The proposal for a Council Recommendation for “a Bridge to Jobs - reinforcing the Youth Guarantee” builds on this important work. As school-to-work transitions and a sustainable market integration are taking longer because of a changing nature of work and the skills in demand, it broadens the target group from all unemployed or inactive young people under 25 to all under 30. It supports job creation measures, as well as various activation measures such as counselling, career advice and advocacy. Today’s proposal steps up prevention of unemployment and inactivity of young people through better tracking and early warning systems and improves the quality of offers by linking them to recently created quality frameworks.

The proposal actively tackles gender, racial and ethnic stereotypes, while supporting diversity and inclusiveness, including for young people with disabilities. Fortunately, many young people are only out of employment, education and training for a short time. Without underlying disadvantages holding them back individually, they may overcome setbacks due to lockdowns or economic cycles relatively quickly. But the crisis should not make us lose sight of those hardest-to-reach, who will need intensive, often one-to-one support. Indeed, some young people risk being out of employment, education or training for a longer term, especially those belonging to the more vulnerable groups of our societies with major barriers to labour market integration even in the best of times. Today’s proposal caters for all, making sure that no one is out of employment, education or training for longer than four months by proposing more individualised and targeted approaches. It also underlines the importance of partnerships with, for instance, employers to advice on the changing nature of work, or with supporting social services to help disadvantaged young people get back on track in various other ways.

Today’s proposal also helps accelerating the much-needed digital and green transitions, acknowledging both the opportunities and uncertainties that come with them. It does so also by assessing and improving the skills and competences needed to find a job on an ever-changing labour market. No young person should enter the labour market without at least basic digital skills, and the proposal foresees short and hands-on preparatory trainings, related to specific skill needs of a young person. Crash courses, open online courses or boot camps can improve, in particular, young people’s digital skills and those needed for the green transition, but also entrepreneurial and career management skills. This is further supported by the European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience.

¹² Local contact points for enrolling in the Youth Guarantee can be found on Europa: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1218&langId=en>.

The proposal provides a framework for action.

Best practices exist all across Europe. Youth employment has become a key priority in the EU budget. Now is the time for Member States to step up their efforts, integrate lessons learnt and mobilise EU funding (Section 6).

Priority operations for which the EU budget can be mobilised include training sessions of short duration, reinforced mapping systems, early warning systems and tracking capabilities (see Section 6).

A Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on a Bridge to Jobs - reinforcing the Youth Guarantee¹³ accompanies this Communication.

3. FUTURE-PROOFING THE EU'S VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING POLICY

The economic recovery ahead is an opportunity to accelerate reforms in vocational education and training (VET) to contribute to the EU's sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience. While vocational education and training increasingly caters for the upskilling and reskilling needs of our adult population, it plays a key role in supporting youth employment too, in particular through apprenticeships, sometimes referred to as dual learning¹⁴. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has had an enormous impact on vocational education and training, with work-based learning and apprenticeships perhaps most gravely affected, due to their focus on practical training and direct links to the workplace¹⁵. With schools and training centres physically closed and learning taking place remotely, education and training – normally the “great equaliser” of our societies – struggled to tackle youth poverty and social exclusion.

Future-proofing vocational education and training systems means synchronising them with the green and digital transitions, and making them adaptable to any future challenge. It means investing in their digital readiness and ensuring access to the necessary tools and technologies for every learner, teacher and trainer. It also means fostering the development of a strong set of skills to empower people to design, produce and manage products and services in an environmentally sustainable way and to provide employers with the skilled workforce they need.

A modernised, more agile vocational education and training policy will enable a smoother transition from the world of education to the world of work. It will contribute

¹³ COM(2020) 277 final.

¹⁴ During the economic recession brought about by the global financial and economic crisis, VET proved to be an essential part of the efforts to support youth employment. Particularly apprenticeships and short-term VET programmes targeting the unemployed managed to increase employability.

¹⁵ Cedefop (2020), How are European countries managing apprenticeships to respond to the COVID19 crisis? Synthesis report based on information provided by Cedefop community of apprenticeship experts.

to decreasing the number of young people out of employment, education and training across the EU. It sets ambitious objectives for VET learners' employability (82%), exposure to work-based learning (60%) and international mobility (8%). It will also improve the quality of the continued education and apprenticeship offers as part of the reinforced Youth Guarantee, helping young people who have already embarked on the school-to-work and early job-to-job transitions. At the same time, it will promote better quality assurance of vocational education and training programmes and recognition of qualifications.

Future-proofing vocational education and training requires embracing both excellence and equity. Vocational education and training institutions should become centres of vocational excellence, which provide innovative training solutions, facilitate access to state-of-the-art technology and act as business incubators. At the same time, it means actively tackling gender bias and other forms of discrimination, promoting equality of opportunity through measures promoting, for instance, gender balance in traditionally “male” or “female” professions. It also implies removing barriers that impede the participation of racial and ethnic minorities, including Roma, people with a migrant background and people with disabilities – for whom accessibility needs to be ensured.

A Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on vocational education and training for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience¹⁶, part of the European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, is adopted today.

4. A RENEWED IMPETUS FOR APPRENTICESHIPS

Apprentices we train now will be highly skilled workers in a few years' time. Apprenticeships lead to the skills that employers actually need, while an apprentice gains the insights, practical abilities and networks for a smooth labour market entry and active participation in society. Apprenticeships also contribute to a speedy labour market recovery. They add a skilled labour force to a wide range of sectors, enhancing the productivity and competitiveness of companies big and small across the EU. Apprenticeships should be encouraged and supported, as spearheaded by the Commission's proposal for a future-proof vocational education and training.

While quality and effective apprenticeships have a vital role to play in preserving and creating youth employment, they have been particularly impacted by the COVID-19 lockdowns. Many SMEs are no longer in a position to accept candidates due to a lack of resources and activity. In response,

Priority operations for which the EU budget can be mobilised include direct subsidies for apprentices in SMEs and bonuses for the placement of apprentices from insolvent companies into other companies or intra-company training centres (see Section 6).

¹⁶ COM(2020) 275 final.

some Member States have already called upon employers to step up efforts in preserving apprenticeship offers. EU funding can be mobilised to help ensure that apprenticeships keep playing their vital part in the labour market recovery (Section 6).

The **European Alliance for Apprenticeships** has been instrumental in mobilising over 900 000 opportunities for young people since its setup in 2013. **It will now be renewed to give a boost to apprenticeships across the EU, which will contribute to a stable supply of quality and effective placements for the young¹⁷.**

The renewed Alliance will call for new commitments for digital and green apprenticeships, focusing on the economic sectors¹⁸ that will be on the frontline of the transition to a climate neutral Europe. It will bring together governments, social partners, businesses, chambers, regions, youth organisations, vocational education and training providers and think tanks¹⁹. Concretely, the renewed Alliance will include:

committing to quality and effective apprenticeships, and encouraging Member States and companies to do so, by fostering national apprenticeships coalitions.

incentivising support to SMEs for providing a stable supply of quality and effective apprenticeships.

mobilising local and regional authorities as catalysts for apprenticeships within the local business environment.

strengthening social dialogue through a more active involvement of national social partner organisations.

engaging European sectoral social dialogue committees in apprenticeships proactively, with a view to agree on joint sectoral pledges.

supporting the representation of apprentices in the Member States by relaunching the European Apprentices Network.

¹⁷ The Alliance strengthens the quality, supply and overall image of apprenticeships across Europe, while also promoting the mobility of apprentices. These aims are promoted through national commitments and voluntary pledges from stakeholders.

¹⁸ Such as sectors contributing to a circular economy, blue economy, sustainable building construction and renovation, agriculture, smart mobility and energy.

¹⁹ The renewed Alliance will be embedded in the Pact for Skills as part of the European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience.

In addition to supporting Member States in using the EU funds for the benefit of apprenticeships and related reforms (see also Section 6), the Commission will give a new impetus to the European Alliance for Apprenticeships.

5. ADDITIONAL MEASURES SUPPORTING YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

All the initiatives presented in this Communication **aim to help the EU's youth, whether they are just to embark on the difficult shift from school to work, or struggling with the first job-to-job transitions.** Such support cannot be piecemeal, as the barriers experienced by young people and the underlying disadvantages are multifaceted and wide-ranging. To complement them, this section comprises a number of **concrete additional measures contributing to youth employment.**

Public employment services play a crucial role. They have long-standing experience in the fields of career transition management, placement, continuing professional development, upskilling and reskilling. Despite persistent budgetary constraints and the new rise in unemployment and short-time work schemes, public employment services have risen to the occasion with an invaluable exchange of first responses, pitfalls and success stories in the immediate aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic²⁰.

The Commission will support the European Network of Public Employment Services and step up its mutual learning capacity. The Europe-wide network will be tasked to consider comprehensive mutual learning and exchange of innovative practices in order to strengthen public employment services' capacities for youth employment support. This will include the strengthening of partnerships with other stakeholders and intensifying outreach to vulnerable youth.

Supporting self-employment is another important means of speeding up labour market recovery. However, young people largely lack the networks to give them access to, for instance, business finance and entrepreneurial skills. Through meaningful exchanges of best practices, existing networks for aspiring young entrepreneurs at national and local level will be strengthened. Such networks bring nascent entrepreneurs into contact with businesses, role models, incubators and other local start-up support services.

The Commission will support the strengthening of networks for aspiring young entrepreneurs. The support will pay attention in particular to young women, other

²⁰ European Commission (2020), European Network of Public Employment Services: PES measures and activities responding to Covid-19.

discriminated or vulnerable groups, while promoting self-employment opportunities in the digital and green economy.

Social entrepreneurship increases the attractiveness of self-employment for many young people inspired by entrepreneurial career paths that are linked to positive and meaningful societal impact. Moreover, social economy organisations such as cooperatives and social enterprises are often more resilient to economic cycles. They make the ecosystems in which they operate more adaptable through social innovation and social inclusion at local and regional levels, also benefitting those furthest from the labour market.

The Commission's Action Plan for the Social Economy, scheduled for 2021, will also focus on youth, including entrepreneurial opportunities yielded by the social economy, such as helping local communities, striking local green deals and activating vulnerable groups²¹.

Young people who have not yet entered the labour market or who have just made the jump into the world of work may not have access to social protection. Some Member States have already rolled out a series of emergency measures to support vulnerable groups not previously covered, to cushion the economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. But the world of work had become more precarious even before the crisis.

Non-standard forms of employment, such as platform work, have become increasingly prevalent among young people. They create new opportunities for young people to enter the labour market, including when they need flexibility to combine work with education or caring responsibilities. Building on last year's Council Recommendation on Access to Social Protection, the Directive on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions as well as the European Semester work, we need to address the gaps in access to social protection in new forms of work while further improving working conditions.

Firstly, the Commission is examining the challenges related to platform work, and will propose in 2021 measures to improve working conditions of people working through digital platforms.

Secondly, the forthcoming Monitoring Framework on Access to Social Protection will zoom in on access for people in different forms of employment, including non-standard contracts, which are of particular relevance for young people. This will help identify gaps and support actions to fill them.

²¹ In addition, the Action Plan will explore how to improve the entrepreneurial skills of young people in social economy organisations and social enterprises, also based on the experiences from the “Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs” programme and the actions supported by the ESF+.

Thirdly, the Commission will launch a study specifically on young people's access to social protection. The exercise will chart the qualifying conditions of various benefits across different forms of employment, enabling a much-needed exchange of good practice.

6. THE EU BUDGET POWERING THE RECOVERY PLAN FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The Commission's proposal for Next Generation EU and the long-term budget provides significant resources²² to support youth employment, as part of a major budgetary initiative to tackle the economic and social impact of the pandemic. In the short term, REACT-EU²³ will endow cohesion policy funding with EUR 55 billion for 2020-22. EUR 5 billion of this envelope is proposed to be available still this year. This additional funding will be allocated to Member States taking into account several criteria, one of which is the effect of the current crisis on youth unemployment. The top-up of the European Social Fund will be of particular relevance to address the challenges to young people already observed across the Member States.

Moreover, the newly proposed Recovery and Resilience Facility yields an unprecedented opportunity to speed up much-needed structural reforms for the medium-term. A proposed budget of EUR 560 billion will support investments and reforms essential to a lasting recovery and linked to the European Semester.

In order for Member States to receive support under the Recovery and Resilience Facility, they will have to draw up recovery and resilience plans. Such recovery and resilience plans should address the economic and social impacts of the crisis, the digital and green transitions, as well as the relevant priorities identified under the European Semester²⁴. Prioritising support to youth employment and related reforms has the potential of a lasting impact on the Member State concerned in terms of growth potential, job creation and social resilience.

These efforts will be complemented in the 2021-27 financing period by the European Social Fund Plus with a proposed budget of EUR 86 billion. The fund will support the full range of employment, education and training measures put forward by the proposal for "a Bridge to Jobs - reinforcing the Youth Guarantee" as well as vocational education and

²² All amounts are in 2018 prices, except for the EUR 5 billion of REACT-EU for 2020.

²³ Financed by the proceeds of Next Generation EU for post-2020 and by adapting the current financial framework for 2020.

²⁴ Pending endorsement by the Council, the Commission's proposals for 2020 country-specific recommendations, in the context of the European Semester, put a strong focus on strengthening active labour market policies (ALMPs) and upskilling, notably for young people. The Commission has proposed 19 recommendations on ALMPs and employment services, as well as 22 recommendations on fostering skills development, equal access to quality education and training and digital learning. These country-specific recommendations will provide a crucial steer for relevant reforms.

training system and apprenticeship reforms. To this end, the Commission adopted an amended European Social Fund Plus legislative proposal on 28 May 2020. It proposes a strengthened commitment for those Member States where youth unemployment is particularly high to dedicate 15% of their allocation to youth employment measures. This fund is an important financing source for the proposal for “a Bridge to Jobs - reinforcing the Youth Guarantee”²⁵.

The initiatives presented in this Communication can also be supported through other EU instruments. The European Regional Development Fund and InvestEU, under its Social Investment and Skills window (with a proposed budget of EUR 3.6 billion) and its new Strategic Investment Facility (with a proposed budget of 31 billion), can provide important, future-proof investments in education and training infrastructure, modernising and adapting vocational education and training, and shifting to environmentally ambitious technologies. A dedicated SME window under InvestEU can help smaller businesses with their training needs and their capacities to recruit young people²⁶. The Technical Support Instrument²⁷ can support Member States in the preparation and implementation of reforms, notably in the field of education and training and labour market policies, by mobilising EU funds and technical expertise.

The Commission urges Member States to step up youth employment support, seize the unique opportunity to mobilise tens of billions of Euros of the future EU budget to this effect and prioritise some of the operations mentioned below. Member States should deploy those measures best suited to target the specific challenges they are facing.

*The overall EU ambition is **to increase the level of support dedicated to youth employment** compared to the 2014-2020 financing period, which is estimated to be **EUR 22 billion**²⁸. The proposed additional resources under Next Generation EU and the full range of instruments provided by the EU’s proposed long-term (2021-27) budget provide unprecedented opportunities to achieve that ambition.*

²⁵ The Commission proposed that Member States with a rate of young people out of employment, education and training above the EU average dedicate 15% (instead of the earlier proposed 10%) of European Social Fund Plus to youth employment measures. In the context of supporting offers of employment, continued education, apprenticeships and traineeships, it will be important to aim for a better balancing of the four available types.

²⁶ Furthermore, Erasmus+ will substantially increase opportunities for learning and training abroad for young people, teachers and trainers, including in vocational education and training. The Common Agricultural Policy will continue to support, with an enhanced set of instruments, young people that would like to engage in agriculture and young people living in rural areas. The Digital Europe Programme and the Single Market Programme will help finance the objective of fostering youth employment, notably through actions geared towards acquiring digital skills and promoting entrepreneurship for young people.

²⁷ COM(2020) 409 final.

²⁸ This comprises European Social Fund and Youth Employment Initiative investments, including national co-financing.

The Commission will actively engage with national authorities and prepare guidelines so as to ensure that adequate EU resources are allocated to youth employment support. In particular, The Commission will encourage and support Member States to prioritise investments for youth employment in the digital and green transitions and to harness the European Green Deal as the growth engine for jobs under the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

A non-exhaustive overview of operations that can be supported with the future EU budget with results to be expected in the *short term*, in particular by making use of the resources of Next Generation EU and the EU's long-term budget:

Short-time work schemes targeted at young employees and similar measures for young self-employed, to protect them in particular from the risk of unemployment, as well as from loss of income.

Social protection in the form of income replacement or income top-up such as unemployment benefits, lump sums or sick leave payments to young workers who were previously excluded and/or had limited access to social protection due to strict eligibility criteria or their labour market status (e.g. the self-employed).

Direct subsidies for apprentices in SMEs including remuneration, recruitment bonuses and temporary social contributions coverage, as well as trainers' wages and/or their social contributions to stabilise and increase the supply of quality and effective apprenticeships.

Direct hiring subsidies including wage subsidies, recruitment bonuses for new hires and temporary contributions to social protection coverage to facilitate the acquisition of work experience and/or entry into first, quality jobs for young people. These are particularly efficient if well targeted and combined with training measures.

Financial aid for students, whether pursuing campus-blended, blended or online programmes, in the form of grants or loans with favourable interest rates and state guarantees, to enable young people to prolong their studies or to re-enter education or training.

Training sessions of short duration (such as short learning courses, boot camps or workshops) to upskill unemployed or inactive young people for their immediate labour market integration, focussing on e.g. digital skills, green skills, entrepreneurial skills and career management skills.

Pathways for reintegration into education and training, including second chance education programmes, in particular for early leavers from education and training, and low-skilled young people.

Placement of apprentices from insolvent companies into other companies or intra-company training centres.

Start-up grants and loans for young entrepreneurs to set up new businesses and create jobs.

A non-exhaustive overview of priority operations to avert a new youth employment crisis, with results to be expected in the *medium term*, in particular by making use of the resources of Next Generation EU and the long-term budget:

Capacity building of public employment services to e.g. reach out to greater numbers of young people (including vulnerable groups), provide more individualised support (in terms of counselling, guidance and mentoring) and strengthen integrated service provision.

Reinforced mapping systems, early warning systems and tracking capabilities to identify young people who are (at risk of becoming) unemployed or inactive, as well as implementation measures aimed at tackling early leaving from education and training, so as to contribute to a better prevention strategy.

Young entrepreneur networks, mentoring schemes and business incubators to help aspiring entrepreneurs, especially young women and discriminated or marginalised groups, enter the labour market and build up the skills needed for various business models, including social entrepreneurship.

Career management trainings in formal education and training to prepare young people for a volatile, precarious world of work and to explain possible steps in finding a job or receiving support.

Implementing VET and apprenticeships reforms, which may include investments in curricula reforms for increased labour market relevance, flexibility and modularisation, expansion of higher VET programmes²⁹, setting up quality assurance and graduate tracking systems, training of teachers and trainers in VET, supporting mobility of VET learners, teachers and trainers.

Investments in digital learning infrastructure and technology, state of the art industry equipment and technologies for VET schools and VET training centres, (including for Centres of Vocational Excellence), to equip VET for the digital and green transitions.

Investments in inter-company training centres (whether setting up new ones, reinforcing existing ones or embedding them in Centres of Vocational Excellence), to

²⁹ Programmes at European Qualifications Framework (EQF) levels 5 to 8.

help SMEs provide state-of-the-art VET and apprenticeships.

Investments in increasing the labour market relevance of education and training, including in the higher education sector, by supporting business-education partnerships supporting key industrial ecosystems and SME networks, as well as by increasing the prevalence of work-based learning within existing programmes.

7. CONCLUSION

The Commission calls on Member States to mobilise the EU’s strong intergenerational solidarity to support young people as part of the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. We owe it to the millions of graduates, labour market entrants and those in their early job-to-job transitions to mobilise all the support we can so that they can develop their full potential. Now it is time to invest in our next generation, helping young people become the driving force for a digital and green economy.

The proposals for Council Recommendations on “a Bridge to Jobs - reinforcing the Youth Guarantee” and on “Vocational Education and Training for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience” provide the frameworks. The Commission also proposed instruments to give the necessary funding. The Commission calls on the Member States to approve both proposals quickly and to harness the full potential of the EU budget when stepping up their youth employment support.

Working together will be paramount. Promoting youth employment requires strong cooperation among all actors (notably social partners, the education sector and civil society organisations), as well as among authorities at regional and local level. At EU level, the Commission will give a renewed impetus for the **European Alliance for Apprenticeships** to ensure that apprenticeships play their part in the labour market recovery. The Commission counts on the continued efforts of the European Parliament and Council, and proposes to discuss strengthened youth employment support with both. This is a joint effort – for the benefit of the next generation.