



YOUTH GUARANTEE TAKE-UP AMONG ROMA IN BULGARIA

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The economic crisis of 2008 led to a drastic rise in youth unemployment throughout the European Union (EU), which continues to have effects a decade after the crisis. According to latest statistical data, by the second half of 2018 around 3.5 million people aged 15-24 within the Union have been unemployed.¹ In response to that, in 2013 the EU initiated the Youth Guarantee (YG). By doing so the EU mandated that each member state take measures guaranteeing that all individuals under the age of 25 within the country would acquire an adequate job offer, continued education, apprenticeship, or traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or of having left the formal education system.² The main target group of the YG are youth under 25 years of age (in some member states – under 30 years of age) who are not in employment, education or training (so-called NEETs). According to EU data, five years after the creation of the YG the number of unemployed youth within the EU has decreased by around 2 million. Youth unemployment has declined from 23.7% in 2013 to 18.7% in 2016.³ Although these numbers are potentially influ-

¹ M. Caliendo, J. Kluve, J. Stöterau and S. Tübbicke, 'The Youth Guarantee in light of changes in the world of work,' European Commission, 2018, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=9295&furtherNews=yes> (last available 13 February 2019).

² European Commission, Youth Guarantee, [online] <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1079&langId=bg> (last available 9 May 2018).

³ European Commission, *Youth Guarantee*.

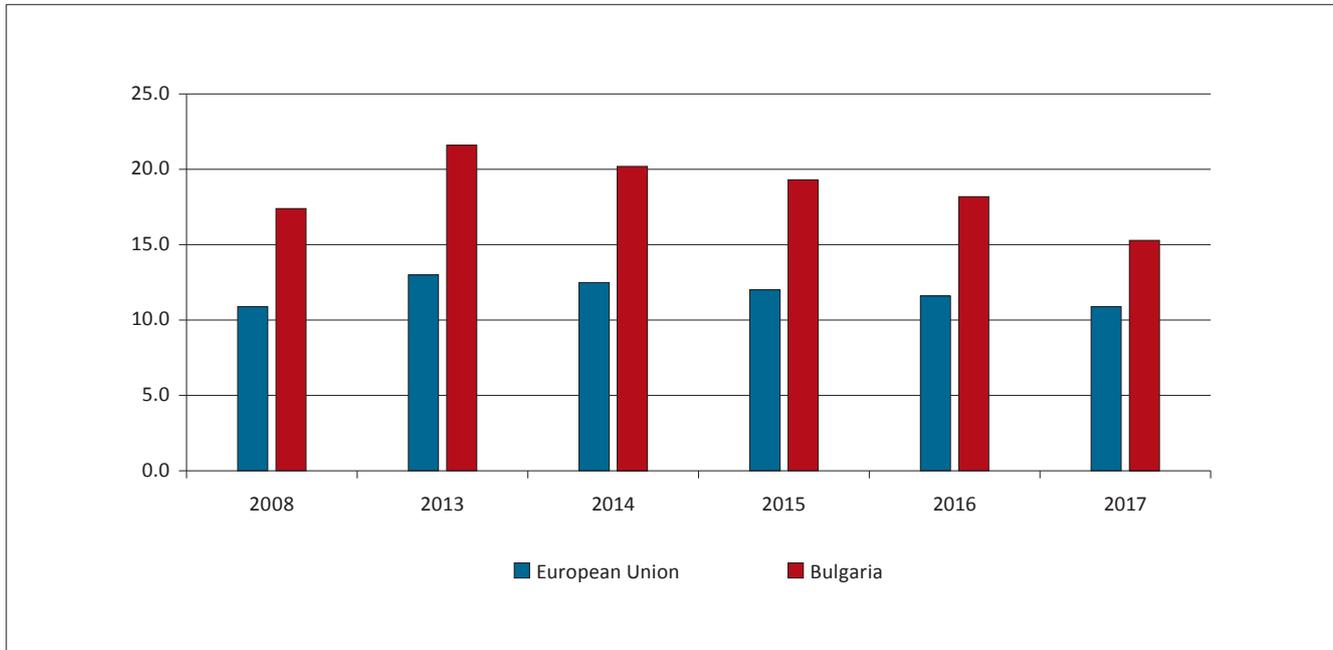
KEY POINTS

- As of 2017, detailed monitoring data on the take-up and impacts of the Youth Guarantee (YG) among Roma youth in Bulgaria are needed.
- According to a study by the Center for the Study of Democracy and World Without Borders, carried out in 2018 and 2019, the YG has low outreach among Roma youth in Bulgaria.
- Roma youth in Bulgaria have a low level of awareness about the measures of the YG, and use them rarely.
- Good practices have been identified such as an informal approach towards the target group and strong partnerships among the implementing institutions.
- Main challenges for the more effective take-up of the YG by Roma youth are: insufficient motivation for and interest in participation of business in the YG, the lack of sustainability of the YG, as well as the inability of the YG to meet the needs and the occasionally unrealistic expectations of Roma youth.
- A comprehensive and regular assessment/analysis of the effects of the YG specifically on Roma youth is needed.

enced by the existence of the YG, the YG is not necessarily the main reason for such a change.⁴

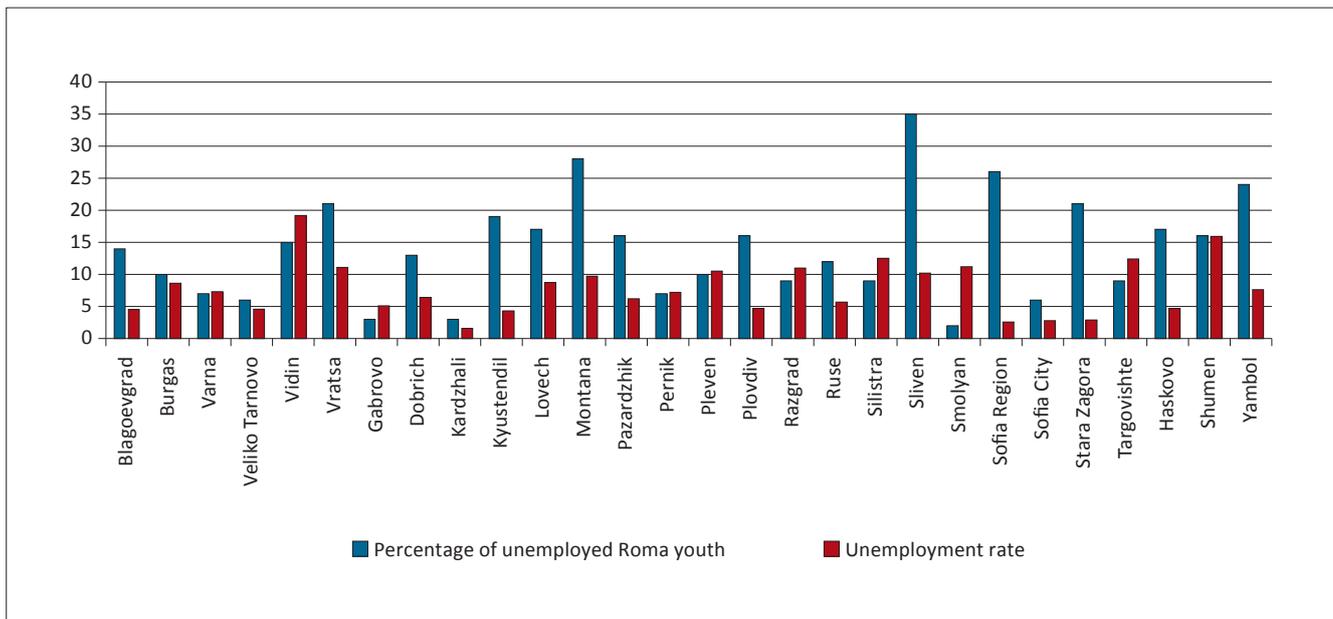
The YG was implemented in Bulgaria in 2014, yet to date it fails to reach around 80% of the young indi-

Figure 1. Level of NEET Youth, EU and Bulgaria, 2017 (% of population, 15-24 y.o.)



Source: Eurostat, 2018.

Figure 2. Unemployment amongst Roma Youth in % (15-32 y.o.), 2017



Sources: Labour market statistics, National Statistical Institute, 2017 & National Employment Agency 2014 – 2017.

⁴ M. Barslund and D. Gross, ‘Declining Youth Unemployment in Europe: The Effect of the Business Cycle or the European Youth Guarantee?’ Centre for European Policy Studies, 2017, <https://www.ceps.eu/publications/declining-youth-unemployment-europe-effect-business-cycle-or-european-youth-guarantee> (last available 5 March 2019).

viduals in its target group.⁵ Although the level of NEETs among youth has declined in 2015 and 2016, at 15.3% in 2017 this level is still higher than the EU average.⁶ Particularly alarming is the share of NEETs among Roma youth, which stands at around 65%⁷ for 2017, in comparison to 61% for 2014. Such high levels correspond to the ongoing tendency within this target group of prematurely leaving the formal education system. Latest EU data point out that the level of Roma youth who leave formal education prematurely is 13.4%.⁸

Despite such alarming data, systematic information and in-depth analysis on the take-up of the YG by Roma youth in the country is necessary.

YG Take-up by Roma Youth in Bulgaria⁹

Main observations

Lack of knowledge of the YG and the services of the Public Employment Service (PES). The young Roma NEETs have limited or absent awareness of the YG and the services offered by PES with regard to finding employment. Such youth recognise PES primarily as an institution that facilitates the acquisition of social benefits and, to a lesser extent that offers support in finding employment.

Insufficient knowledge of the YG by the non-governmental sector. With few exceptions, Roma non-governmental organisations that work on Roma problematics have insufficient knowledge of the YG.

This directly defines their inability to facilitate the information transfer about the YG to Roma youth NEETs.

Local branches of PES define the YG as *a valuable resource* through which assistance can be granted to Roma youth in their search for employment. It is observed that PES has an interest and active involvement in the reach of the programme to the target group. The implementation of the prescribed programme measures, however, seems not always effective in reaching the target group of Roma youth.

According to Roma youth NEETs, *the YG does not meet their expectations*. For this target group the most important motivator for participation in the YG and, generally the labour market, is high remuneration, which the YG fails to provide. Due to the stagnant youth labour market in Bulgaria, there is a deficit of workplaces and employers (incl. per the YG) that can meet the expectations of this target group.

The low take-up of the YG among Roma youth is influenced by other important factors such as: (1) low educational level among a vast segment of the Roma youth, which tends to decrease the motivation to seek employment within the YG framework; (2) the increased migration of young Roma to Western European countries with the goal to secure employment outside Bulgaria.

Good practices

Informal individual approach. The individual approach to each young person registered with PES is an effective practice. This approach entails informal initial

⁵ European Commission, 'Youth Guarantee country by country, Bulgaria 2018', 2018, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=13631&langId=en> (last available 13 February 2018).

⁶ Council of the European Union, 'Investing in Youth Employment: Implementation of the Youth Guarantee', *Consilium Europe*, 2018, <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-6149-2018-ADD-4/en/pdf> (last available 10 May 2018).

⁷ European Commission, 'Youth Guarantee country by country, Bulgaria 2018'.

⁸ European Commission, 'Youth Guarantee country by country, Bulgaria 2018'.

⁹ The policy brief at hand references results from desk and field research in 10 locations in Bulgaria, carried out by the Center for the Study of Democracy and World Without Borders on the topic: "Facilitating Access to and Take-Up of Youth Guarantee Measures by Roma Youth in Bulgaria". The field study was carried out in the period of June-August 2018 in the following locations: City of Vidin (Vidin region), City of Lom (Montana region), City of Stara Zagora (Stara Zagora region), Town of Nikolaevo (Stara Zagora region), City of Kyustendil (Kyustendil region), City of Smolyan (Smolyan region), City of Yambol (Yambol region), City of Sliven (Sliven region).

contact with the person realised by Roma labour mediators or youth labour mediators directly in the field. This individual approach continues after registering with PES through which each registrant is served by a specialised team.

Institutional partnerships are an effective approach for the realisation of the YG amongst Roma youth. The following partnerships are the most common and effective: between local PES branches and the corresponding municipalities, as well as between PES, the Agency for Social Assistance, and non-governmental organisations in some places.

Challenges

Negative expectations or mistrust towards PES exist among Roma youth despite the resources that local PES branches provide in relation to the YG. Due to this, some youth do not use PES services and the YG, preferring instead to work on the black market or search for employment individually or through personal connections. In this regard, there is a tendency among Roma youth to view PES primarily as an institution that facilitates the acquisition of social benefits and not as an institution which offers employment seeking support.

The presence of Roma labour mediators plays a key role for the promotion of the programme and the PES potentials. *Such presence, however, is not always guaranteed.* In some PES branches the Roma labour mediator is absent as a position, or, if such is employed, he/she may only occasionally do fieldwork (in some cases due to lack of resources available to the specific PES branch, and the need to carry out activities other than fieldwork in the Roma community).

Insufficient motivation, mistrust and low interest in participation in the YG exist within the business sector as well. Employers often encounter bureaucratic difficulties when they participate in the programme. Some employers have expectations of the youth whom they hire through the YG which contradict the expectations of these youth in terms of remuneration, working environment and employer ethics.

Structural challenges exist in the efficient take-up of the YG by Roma youth, including: (1) the limited role of PES in addressing dynamics related to employment among the Roma community, such as lower motivation for education and employment, family dynamics restricting women's access to employment, migration dynamics; (2) the restricted role of PES in addressing the existing dynamics of the youth labour market (such as the lack of diversification of work places); as well as (3) the current discriminatory environment against the Roma community, which creates reluctance and unwillingness among the Roma youth to search for employment, even under the YG.

The lack of sustainability of the YG is another challenge. The YG is a temporary mechanism for the provision of employment and education which does not fully address the issue of the lack of sustainable employment among Roma youth in Bulgaria.

There is a need for systematic detailed assessment of the qualitative effects of the YG on the young Roma individuals who took part in it. As a result, institutions working with this target group encounter difficulties in obtaining clear feedback from the participants in the programme that could then be used for the formulation and application of suitable alternative approaches to work with these youths. The absence of data on the effects of the YG is accompanied by the lack of systematic and detailed data on the quality of take-up of the programme by Roma youth.

Recommendations

- Establish procedures and mechanisms for obtaining systematic feedback from young Roma who take advantage of the YG, with the objective of more in-depth monitoring of the programme take-up and impacts among this target group.
- Establish a practice of regular publication of monitoring data on the progress and scope of the YG among Roma youth.

- Expand the network of Roma labour mediators by providing additional resources and stimuli (incl. financial) for the retention of such employees.
- Improve/strengthen cooperation between the YG implementing institutions and the business sector. Design instruments for addressing existing bureaucratic challenges for participation of business in the YG. It is also necessary that the business sector be open to closer public-private partnerships in the context of the YG.
- Establishment of a closer relationship between the institutions that formulate and implement the YG and educational institutions by emphasising more the opportunities that dual education can bring to a wide spectrum of youth (including youth of Roma ethnicity).
- Develop more successful information strategies to inform young Roma about the YG and PES services, as well as address Roma youth's mistrust of PES by means of the following:
 - PES and municipal institutions to promote more actively the positions of Roma labour mediators among Roma youth. One possible strategy could rest on stronger cooperation with awareness volunteers in the Roma communities (incl. Roma health mediators), who have already gained the trust of the community.
 - Create positions of Roma labour mediators in places where such are absent so as to secure adequate outreach to these young Roma and their communities. This also entails the provision of resources that will enable the mediators to carry out field work more regularly.
 - Promote good practices and success stories related to the benefits of the YG among Roma youth.
 - To take advantage of existing contacts with Roma communities that non-governmental organisations dealing with Roma have as a means of informing Roma youth about the YG.
- Establish closer cooperation between PES/similar institutions and local Roma non-governmental organisations, so that the latter serve as a bridge between the institutions and young Roma.
- Regularly include representatives of Roma non-governmental organisations or non-governmental organisations targeting Roma people in the Coordinating Council for the Implementation and Monitoring of the National Plan for the Implementation of the Youth Guarantee, 2014-2020.
- Modify the plan for the implementation of the YG in Bulgaria by considering possibilities for optimising and increasing of remuneration of YG employment with the objective of attracting a larger number of interested young individuals of Roma ethnicity.
- Increase the awareness of employers with regard to the needs and expectations of Roma youth NEETs in relation to remuneration and working conditions.
- Create concrete strategies and measures to facilitate employment for women with young children impeded from starting work due to their childcare responsibilities. Such measures can be realised through partnership approaches so that institutions offering childcare cooperate with business representatives interested in employing such workforce.
- Incorporate additional measures within the YG which more actively support young Roma's job search abroad, so that the YG measures can correspond better to the current migration dynamics within this target group, as well as to the interest of the target group in employment abroad.

Publications by the Center for the Study of Democracy

Diversity Management in Bulgaria: Politico-Legal Prerequisites and Self-Regulation, Sofia, 2019.
ISBN: 978-954-477-368-7

Diversity Management in Bulgaria: Perceptions, Practices and Expectations, Sofia, 2019.
ISBN: 978-954-477-372-4

Risk of Islamist Radicalisation in Bulgaria: A Case Study in the Iztok Neighborhood of the City of Pazardzhik, Sofia, 2017.

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ISBN: 978-954-9945-33-1

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