

YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP, NEET EMPLOYABILITY, AND YOUTH CAREER MANAGEMENT SKILLS IN SERBIA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The research Youth entrepreneurship, NEET employability, and youth career management skills in Serbia provides the analysis of key issues related to strengthening youth employability and youth policy institutional framework with regard to introduction of the Youth Guarantee piloting in Serbia. It covers three main policies aiming both to prevent youth entering the NEET status and strengthen employability skills of the youth already considered NEET - career management skills, employability and youth entrepreneurship.

The research is based on the desk analysis covering current position of youth in the Serbian labour market, existing strategic and institutional framework shaping youth employment policies at the national and local level, as well as relevant reports on youth employment in the EU, Western Balkans and Serbia. Situation analysis is followed by empirical research including focus groups with key stakeholders, semi-structured interviews with representatives of the Local Youth Offices and civil society organisations, and questionnaire filled out by the local youth office representatives. Three focus groups were organized gathering key stakeholders in the youth employment field. A total of 15 in-depth interviews were carried out (10 with civil society representatives and 5 with local youth office coordinators). A total of 48 questionnaires were filled out by local youth office coordinators (34.2% response rate) providing self-assessment of their needs and capacities with a particular focus on their potential contribution to strengthening employability skills of youth in NEET status.

The analysis highlighted important challenges youth policy stakeholders face aiming to improve position of youth in the labour market, such as limited capacities of the local youth offices, underdeveloped and insufficiently used resources of the civil society organisations, as well as lack of collaboration among different stakeholders engaged in dealing with youth in NEET status, including still low participation of youth representatives in decision-making processes. The obtained findings indicated that the quality and access to career guidance support, active labour market policies and entrepreneurship education should be significantly improved.

Local youth offices are particularly neglected youth policy stakeholders as their potential is not sufficiently recognized by the local decision makers. With the existing capacities they can hardly provide significant contribution to achieving local youth policy objectives. Moreover, in addition to capacity building, local youth offices should extend their scope of work since dealing with vulnerable youth is hardly placed at the top of their policy priorities. In the context of the Youth Guarantee implementation, most of the local youth offices (around 85% of them) do not have minimum data on the structure and characteristics of the youth in NEET status in their municipalities, and they do not even maintain contacts with this population (only around 40% do). However, it should be noted that there have been some examples of good practice which could be replicated aiming to increase effectiveness of the local youth employment policies.

The research indicated a room for greater involvement of the civil society organisations which could play more important role, particularly with regard to effective outreach to NEETs as well as developing soft skills of the vulnerable youth. There have been some interventions initiated by the civil society organizations (mostly based on one-stop-shop model concept) that resulted in favourable outcomes reflected in the established links between youth organisations, private sector and local administration, including National Employment Service (Djukic and Pavlovic, 2020). Therefore, further efforts with regard to development of the civil sector capacities, particularly in less developed and rural areas, are highly desirable.

As per European Training Foundation (ETF) study results (2021), the average school-to-work transition in Serbia lasts more than two years, being the highest among women and youth living in rural areas. Youth with the lowest level of education spend 19.4 months more to find their first job as compared to those with high-level education. As per focus group results, the main determinants of such a long school-to-work transition refer to outdated education system including entrepreneurship education curricula, coupled with low quality of the career management and counselling activities.

This research contains recommendations for the policy makers focusing particularly on the youth policy stakeholders. Effective youth policy including provision of the complementary support to Youth Guarantee implementation requires smooth translation of the national youth policy objectives to the local level, respecting specific local circumstances as well. Therefore, one of the most important recommendations refer to intensifying joint institutional efforts on building capacities of the local youth policy stakeholders. It is necessary to reposition local youth offices within the local administration, to strengthen their human capacities and extend their scope of work, as well as to respect evidence-based policy making principles when developing Local Action Plans for Youth that already are established within the Law on Planning System. Considering youth employment policy as a cross-cutting issue, multi-stakeholder interventions including one-stop-shop models and active role of the civil society should be further encouraged. National level consultations including National Employment Service, Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs, Ministry of Youth and Sports, and youth umbrella associations are required to discuss more flexible approaches with regard to cooperation between local National Employment Service branches and local youth policy actors. Calls for local youth offices, youth and civil society organisations launched by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, should envisage involvement of at least two relevant stakeholders as a mandatory criterion. Active labour employment measures targeting youth offered by the NES should include positive discrimination with regard to youth in the NEET status. Finally, strengthening employability skills and preventing youth to enter the NEET situation through market-based career counselling and entrepreneurship development should not be neglected.

INTRODUCTION

In January 2020, **Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)** started the implementation of the regional EU-funded **Western Balkans Youth Lab Project (WYBL)**, which seeks to provide opportunities for youth to participate in decision making. The main components of the project include:

- Mapping of youth policies and identification of existing support gaps in financing of youth actions in the Western Balkans;
- Western Balkans Youth Policy Labs;
- Strengthening National Youth Councils in the Western Balkans;
- Participation of the Western Balkans youth in regional and international events.

Aiming at strengthening policy and administrative capacities in different stages and processes of youth policy development and implementation including participation of youth in decision making, WYBL also envisaged providing technical assistance to the main stakeholders. The research entitled **Youth entrepreneurship, NEET employability, and youth career management skills in Serbia** provides support to the work of the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Serbia on improving policies covering youth entrepreneurship, NEET employability, and youth career management skills. A special focus of the research refers to the needs and capacity assessment of the local youth offices to contribute to the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Serbia.

The research structure is organized into six chapters. Within the first chapter, a desk research was conducted on the position and needs of young people in the context of their smooth transition to labour market. This chapter provides brief analysis of the labour market secondary data and position of youth, analysis of the existing institutional framework and policy instruments targeting unemployed/inactive youth, as well as current youth needs with regard to entrepreneurship development. This chapter also includes the analysis of the Youth Guarantee experiences of the EU member states, which could be relevant for the envisaged piloting of the Youth Guarantee intervention in Serbia. The second chapter outlines the applied methodology and describes specific research instruments used within the research. The third chapter provides the assessment of capacities and needs of the local youth offices being also the main youth policy stakeholders at the local level. The presented results include quantitative analysis obtained through questionnaires filled out by local youth office representatives and the results of five semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with local youth office coordinators. An important factor of success of the Youth Guarantee implementation in Serbia refers to the developed and proactive civil society organisations building bridges between youth and formal institutions. Chapter 4 provides views of the civil society representatives including best practice and experiences related to successful approaches to vulnerable youth. The analysis presented within Chapter 5 provides main conclusions and recommendations extracted from the discussions

conducted within three focus groups organized with an aim to provide discussion amongst youth policy stakeholders at both national and local level. Focus group discussions covered three topics relevant for understanding the youth employability issues in Serbia - career management skills, employability and entrepreneurship; employability of NEET population; and local youth institutions. Finally, the last chapter provides main findings and recommendations for the policy makers, with particular focus on the youth policy actors and their collaboration with other stakeholders that will be directly or indirectly engaged in the Youth Guarantee implementation in Serbia.

1. DESK RESEARCH

1.1. Youth in the Serbian Labor Market

The Republic of Serbia (RS) is faced with numerous challenges, such as the graying of its population, shifting to a market-driven economy and shifting to a more open society. Among these many challenges is also its high unemployment rate which inordinately affects youth and NEET youth (share of young people who are not in employment, education or training). Serbian youth face an unemployment rate threefold higher than that of the rest of the population, even despite a constant decline in the youth unemployment rate from 2015 (43.2%) to 2020 (26.6%) which has been coupled by a shrinking labor pool. However, the decline in the number of unemployed is consistent with the negative trend of demographic indicators in Serbia over the last decade. According to the estimates of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS) for 2020, Serbia had had a total population of 6,899,126 (women 51.3% and men 48.7%), of whom:

- **718,038 inhabitants were 15-24 years** of age (women 348,842 and men 369,196), which was 10.4% of total population,
- **1,132,902 were 15-29 years** of age (women 550,945 and men 581,957) or 16.4% of total population.

Compared to the data from the 2011 Census (SORS, 2011), the share of young people aged 15 to 29 in the total population has also declined. Most young people 15 to 29 years of age live in Sumadija and Western Serbia, followed by Vojvodina and Belgrade. The lowest number of youth 15 to 29 years of age lived in Southern and Eastern Serbia. The youth unemployment rate is not equal across regions as well. In 2020, the highest youth unemployment rate (33.4%) was registered in South and Eastern Serbia, while the lowest (22.8%) in Vojvodina.

Statistical data show that youth in Serbia remain longer in the education system, which also corresponds their later entry into the labor market as well as putting off children to a later date, which is reflected in the Republic of Serbia's Law on Youth (Official Gazette No 50/2011), placing them into a wider group 15 to 30 years of age. In comparison to their EU peers, the youth labor market in Serbia is accompanied by low employment and high inactivity, as well as weak progress. The share of inactive young people between 15 to 24 years of age has been almost unchanged in the last few years and amounts to approximately 70% (SORS, 2020).

The youth employment rate (15-24) in 2020 was 20.8%, which is an increase of 1 percentage point compared to 2016. Youth employment in 2020 did not change significantly compared to the previous year, when the employment rate was 21.5%. The inactivity rate of youth is almost unchanged 2019 and in 2020 was 71.7%. Male youth are more active in

the labor market in comparison with female youth. The activity rate of men aged 15 to 24 was 35.1%, which is 14% higher compared to the activity rate of women of the same age (SORS, 2020).

The NEET rate, more precisely the share of young people who are not employed and are not in the process of education or training, was 15.9% in 2020, which is 1.8 percentage points lower than in 2016. NEET youth rate increases with the rise of the age group of young people observed. Previous statistics show the NEET rate to be higher in rural than urban areas (Ognjenović, Kuzmanov, Pavlović, 2021). Observed by gender, the NEET rate in Serbia is roughly higher among women.

The study conducted by Foundation of Ana and Vlade Divac (2020) identified seven categories of NEET youth in Serbia, such as:

- 1) Those who are entering the labor market or starting the next level of their education or training and will soon be leaving this group – 7.8%
- 2) Short-term unemployed – 29.8%
- 3) Long-term unemployed – 22%
- 4) Persons with a disability – 6.8%
- 5) Persons taking care of their family members – almost 90% of them are women – 15.4%
- 6) Discouraged – 5.8%
- 7) Others – 2.5%

According to the Eurostat data (2020), NEETs may be classified as unemployed (around 42% of the total number of NEET 15 to 24 age old population) or inactive (58%). There are 11.5% of the NEET youth (15 to 24) who would like to work (72% of the total NEET population) and 4.4% those who chose not to (28% of the total). The share of unemployed has decreased from 2016 to 2020 by 2.6 percentage points, while NEET who chose not to work as well as number of inactive NEET have increased.

From 2016 to 2020, the NEET rate for those 15 to 29 years of age lowered from 22.3% to 20%. In addition, the share of inactive youth has changed sluggishly when examining recent data. Unlike unemployment, which has been gradually decreasing, the share of those inactive in the labor market 15 to 29 years of age has lowered by only 1.6 percentage point since 2016 – 11.6 % at the end of 2020 (Table 1).

Table 1. NEET statistics, 2020, Serbia

	Youth 15 to 24				
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
NEET rate	17.7	17.2	16.5	15.3	15.9
Unemployed persons	9.3	8.7	8.1	7.5	6.7
Persons outside the labor force (former name: inactive persons)	8.4	8.5	8.4	7.8	9.2
Persons would like to work (seeking employment or not)	14.4	13.6	12.5	11.2	11.5
Persons do not want to work	3.3	3.6	4.0	4.1	4.4

	Youth 15 to 29				
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
NEET rate	22.3	21.7	20.1	19.0	20.0
Unemployed persons	12.3	11.2	10.6	9.2	8.4
Persons outside the labor force (former name: inactive persons)	10.0	10.5	9.5	9.7	11.6
Persons would like to work (seeking employment or not)	19.7	18.1	16.4	14.5	14.7
Persons do not want to work	3.8	4.3	4.5	4.8	5.3

Source: Eurostat, 2020.

More alarmingly, although the NEET rate in Serbia has also been declining gradually over the past 5 years, the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) is still inordinately high. Although still significantly higher than the EU average, where NEET rate for youth aged 15 to 24 was 11.1% and 13.7% for youth aged 15 to 29. The share of NEETs in the total youth population in Serbia is generally somewhat lower than in the economies of the region, with the exception of Croatia (12.2% for youth aged 15 to 24; 14.6% for youth aged 15 to 29). In Europe (Table 2), Turkey has the highest NEET rate (32% youth aged 15 to 29), while the Netherlands has the lowest (5.7% for youth aged 15 to 29).

Table 2. NEET rate, the youth aged 15-24 and 15-29, 2020.

NEET RATE	15-24	15-29
European Union - 27 Member States (from 2020)	11.1	13.7
Belgium	9.2	12.0
Bulgaria	14.4	18.1
Czechia	6.6	11.0
Denmark	7.4	10.2
Germany (until 1990 former territory of the FRG)	7.3	8.6
Estonia	8.9	11.2
Ireland	12.0	14.2
Greece	13.2	18.7
Spain	13.9	17.3
France	11.4	14.0
Croatia	12.2	14.6
Italy	19.0	23.3
Cyprus	14.4	15.3
Latvia	7.1	11.9
Lithuania	10.8	13.0
Luxembourg	6.6	7.7
Hungary	11.7	14.7
Malta	9.2	9.4
Netherlands	4.5	5.7
Austria	8.0	9.5
Poland	8.6	12.9

NEET RATE	15-24	15-29
Portugal	9.1	11.0
Romania	14.8	16.6
Slovenia	7.7	9.2
Slovakia	10.7	15.2
Finland	9.3	10.3
Sweden	6.5	7.2
Iceland	6.1	7.1
Norway	4.9	6.6
Switzerland	6.4	6.3
Montenegro	21.1	26.6
North Macedonia	19.6	26.2
Serbia	15.9	20.0
Turkey	28.3	32.0

Source: Eurostat, 2020.

1.2. Institutional Framework and Youth Employment Policies in Serbia

Institutions in the Republic of Serbia in charge of tackling youth unemployment include the Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs (MoLEVSA), the Ministry of Youth and Sport (MoYS) and the National Employment Service (NES).

The MoYS provides measures to support youth employment and employability as laid out within National Youth Strategy 2015-2025 (NYS) and its related Action Plan (2021-2023). Youth employment issues have been particularly targeted by programmes, projects and measures defined within Strategic Goal 1 – Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship; and Strategic Goal 2 - the Education, Pedagogical Work and Training of Youth. Moreover, in accordance with the mandate to deal with additional aspects of youth development such as social inclusion, health and safety, development of the individual and soft skills including strengthening employability, as well as through the implementation and coordination of other youth issues, MoYS indirectly contributed to the overall well-being of youth. In the context of developing effective employment interventions, MoYS plays a key role through its active support to the three main youth associations in Serbia- the National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS) (established in 2009), the National Association of Youth Workers (NA-POR) (established in 2011) and the National Association of Youth Offices (NALYO) (established in 2014). In regard to policies targeting NEET youth, MoYS' coordination with local youth offices and local youth associations are designed to enforce outreach mechanisms and provide indirect support to the MoLEVSA and NES, which might prove essential for the implementation of the Youth Guarantee. Apart from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (MoESTD), policies implemented by the MoYS are important factors assisting youth so that they do not become NEET.

¹ Development of the New Strategy for Youth (2022-2030) and related Action Plan (2022-2024) is under progress and will be adopted during the first half of 2022.

The MoLEVSA maintains a central role in tackling youth unemployment as it oversees the Active Employment Policy Department in charge of design, monitoring and evaluation of employment policies, the formulation and implementation monitoring of vocational rehabilitation policies targeting persons with disabilities as well as the alignment of Serbia's employment policy framework to EU requirements and Supervision. The MoLEVSA also oversees the Group for Normative Affairs which is responsible for the development of primary and secondary employment legislation as well as the supervision of activities of the NES and private employment agencies (ILO, 2021). The MoLEVSA is directly responsible for the implementation of the National Employment Strategy (2021-2026) and related Action Plan (2021-2023) which operationalizes strategic objectives. The NES implements the following active labour market policies (ALMPs) prioritising its young clients (ETF, 2021):

- An apprenticeship programme for youth who have completed their higher education (bachelor's degree or higher) and an apprenticeship programme for unemployed youth who have only completed their secondary education;
- An employer subsidy program for hard-to-employ candidates, including youth who possess little to no qualifications and youth housed in public care institutions and foster families;
- Subsidies for self-employment;
- Policies developed by the MoLEVSA represent a strategic basis for individual support measures tackling youth unemployment undertaken by the NES. Under the existing institutional framework, the MoLEVSA would have the mandate to implement a Youth Guarantee in Serbia.

Serbia's NES provides direct support to the unemployed through its broad network of local offices employing more than 1,600, although around 40 percent work as administrative support. The NES is directly supervised by the MoLEVSA. In addition to the implementation of active labour market measures, The NES also manages data as well as provides counseling and career guidance. With regard to youth unemployment, the NES implements diverse support measures that include strengthening youth employability skills (i.e., entrepreneurial and job search skills as well as labour market training, these also include measures to support disabled persons). The Youth Service Package (Table 3. below), which has been implemented since 2013, includes the following services (RCC, 2021):

- An employability assessment of the unemployed person;
- Determining an individual employment plan and what measures are best suited for youth activation and improving their employability;
- Job mediation or involvement in active labour market policy measures that may contribute to their employment.

Table 3. The youth service package of the National Employment Service

Title	Male Participants	Female Participants	Total Number of Participants
Job Search training	7,205	8,283	15,448

Title	Male Participants	Female Participants	Total Number of Participants
Self-efficacy training	398	410	608
Workshop on managing stress caused by a job loss	36	98	134
Job Search Club	974	1,589	2,563
Job Fairs	6997	7,589	14,586
Entrepreneurial skills training	1,532	1,299	2,831
Internship placement	1,215	2,508	3,723
Workplace training for youth who have achieved a tertiary level education or higher	33	92	128
Workplace training for youth who have achieved a secondary level education	115	140	255
Practical workplace skills and experience training	138	129	267
Labour-market training	109	153	262
Labour-market training	-	-	47
IT training	16	5	21
Government employment assistance provided to those who are categorized as long-term unemployed, minority groups, the elderly and the young or are otherwise long-term receivers of social assistance	567	515	1,082
Government employment assistance provided to those who are categorized as long-term unemployed, minority groups, the elderly and the young or are otherwise long-term receivers of social assistance (IPA)	64	79	143
Government assistance to the self-employed	521	506	1,027
Employed through public works	678	511	1,189
Wage subsidies to individuals who are disabled	69	37	96
(Other) support measures to the disabled	13	3	16

Source: NES annual reports for 2019.

The Youth Council (YC) was established by the Republic of Serbia through the Law on Youth adopted in 2011 (Article 16) as an advisory body in charge of coordinating and harmonizing youth policies conducted by multiple actors. The President of the YC is the Minister of Youth and Sports. Council members include representatives of the central government institutions, local youth offices, youth policy experts, representatives of the national minorities. Out of 38 members in total, at least one third are representatives of youth associations. Currently, there are 15 representatives of youth and for youth associations (KOMS, 2021).

“Umbrella organisations” create important institutional links ensuring effective policy coordination through the gathering of local youth organisations and facilitating dialogue on youth policy. National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS) is an advocacy platform which represents the interests of 104 youth and for youth organisations with a mission to ensure active participation and develops systemic solutions in order to improve the position of young people, through development of strategic partnerships, cooperation and strengthening institutional capacities (KOMS, 2021). It is estimated that 150,000 youth are reached indirectly through KOMS’ actions annually (ETF, 2021). NAPOR deals with quality assur-

ance and promotes active participation of youth workers. Its mission refers to creating and developing conditions for quality assurance and recognition youth work in order to develop the potential of youth. The results of the Youth Guarantee Feasibility Assessment indicate that the reduction of youth unemployment in Serbia has not resulted in a matched improvement in the overall quality of work youth are employed in. About 44% of young employees are temporary workers. Moreover, youth's share of low-wage earners amounts to 23.1%, which is considerably higher compared to the EU average (17.2%) (ILO, 2021). The role of NAPOR should prove to be essential in the coming years. NALYO works as an association of cities and municipalities which has established a local youth office. According to the NALYO Strategic plan for 2017-2020, NALYO objectives include networking, raising the capacity of local youth offices and initiating systemic changes that would result in more effective youth policies at the local level.

The transmission of the national strategic objectives to the local administrative or government bodies would be difficult to achieve without having efficient local institutions capable of implementing projects and policies as well as which are able to directly cooperate with youth. As such, in accordance with the Law on Youth, the MoYS has supported the establishment of Local Youth Offices institutionalized within municipalities and Self-Government units which perform activities related to:

- The planning, implementation and monitoring of local youth policy development;
- Initiating and monitoring the implementation of the Local Action Plan for Youth, which require the establishing of cooperation with partners, networking with them as well as maintaining communicating and mutual coordination;
- Informing young people.

The Local Report "The Mapping of Youth Policies and the Identification of Existing Support and Gaps in Financing Youth Actions in the Western Balkans" provides information on the current activities of local youth offices (RCC, 2021). Effective implementation of youth unemployment policies is shaped by the Local Youth Councils and Local Self-Government Youth Councils, which was introduced by the Law on Youth and established with the support of MoYS. The Youth Councils are advisory bodies of Municipal / City Assemblies that encourage, coordinate and monitor activities related to the local development, implementation and enforcement of youth policy and propose measures for its improvement. At least half the members of the local youth councils should include youth between 15 and 30 years of age. The Report "Mapping of Youth Policies and Identification of Existing Support and Gaps in Financing of Youth Actions in the Western Balkans" provides information on currently active local youth councils.

The following institutions also are important as concerns youth employment policies and provide complementary support:

- Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (MoESTD) implements policies aimed at reducing school drop-out rates, as well as which provide adequate education and skills through updated and innovative formal education programmes. MoESTD also provides further VET and additional support as needed.

- The Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit – SIPRU is directly responsible to the office of the Prime Minister. SIPRU is in charge of providing evidence-based support for the development and implementation of social inclusion policies. The activities of SIPRU provide important policy inputs that contribute to the improvement of the position of vulnerable youth which may also represent a significant share of NEET youth.

Youth employment policies are therefore implemented by numerous actors operating nationally, regionally and locally. The main strategic pillars for the implementation of youth employment policies are Serbia's National Youth Strategy and National Employment Strategy accompanied by their respective Action Plans which have a three-year implementation horizon. Apart from the public budget, funds provided to meet these strategic objectives are provided from local governments and the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) funds and other international donors. As the number of implemented projects target not only youth but other target groups as well, an exact amount of the funds allocated to youth programmes is problematic to estimate. Despite an increasing amount of funds allocated to youth over the last decade, it should be noted that the internal budget allocation within the budget of the MoYS is still 1:5 in favor of Sports. The share of the public budget for 2019 allocated to youth policy implementation through the MoYS amounts to a mere 0.09% including social protection payments paid from the Fund for Young Talents (KOMS, 2020). As per MoYS' own data, the total funds the Ministry spent from 2007 to 2019 on projects implemented by the civil sector exceeds 16 EUR mln (RCC, 2021). The overall amount of funds allocated to the implementation of youth policy is however considerably higher as it also includes funds allocated to implement active employment measures (including other target groups) and programmes aimed at strengthening youth employability implemented by other institutions. Table 4. below outlines the programmes targeting youth unemployment over the last ten years completely funded by international donors (EU, EBRD, SDC, GIZ and BMZ) or co-funded by international donors and the Government of the Republic Serbia, as well as funds provided through either state institutions or non-governmental organisations. In addition to the measures provided through the service package implemented by the NES, the programmes listed here provide the most important support to improve youth in the labour market.

Table 4. Externally financed and co-financed programmes referring to labour market position and social inclusion of young people

	Title	Donors	Main executing agencies/organisations, project partners and beneficiaries
1	EU Support to Employment programmes of NES IPA 2013	EU and Government of Serbia	Ministry of Finance's Department for Contracting and Financing of EU Funded Programmes (CFCU), MoLEVSA and NES
2	Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) project/E2E programme (evaluations and analyses of ALMPs for youths)	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation	SIPRU
3	Education to Employment (E2E) programme	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation	SIPRU and NIRAS IP Consult

	Title	Donors	Main executing agencies/organisations, project partners and beneficiaries
4	EU Support to Active Youth Inclusion	EU and Government of Serbia	Contracting authority: CFCU Main beneficiaries: MoLEVSA, MoYS Other beneficiaries: MoESTD, NES, SIPRU, public and private institutions contributing to effective youth employment and employability
5	Programmes of the EBRD	EBRD	MoLEVSA
6	Programme for Sustainable Growth and Employment in Serbia: Reforming Vocational Education (VET project) and Youth Employment Promotion (YEP)	Government of Germany	MoESTD (VET) MoYS (YEP)
7	UNICEF UPSHIFT and U-Report	International donors	UNICEF
8	Web4Jobs Project	EU	Belgrade Open School
9	Western Balkans and Turkey (WB&T) for EmploYouth	EU	Ana and Vlade Divac Foundation
10	Promoting Youth Employment through Social Partnerships and Cooperation	EU	Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence

Source: Report "Youth situation in Serbia" (ETF, 2021)

In 2020, both MoYS and NES carried out programs as per the Action Plans. MoYS 4 public calls for financing different programmes - "Youth are the Law" aimed implementation of the NYS objectives, programmes supporting employment, self-employment and promoting youth entrepreneurship and implementation of youth policy. The overall value of the allocated funds for the calls exceeds 1.8 mln EUR.

Internship programmes also provide important support to unexperienced youth searching for the first job. For that purpose, NES conducts two internship programmes – Internship Programme for Youth with Higher Education and Internship Programme for Unemployed Persons with Secondary Education).

Finally, it should be mentioned Programme My First Salary as an additional measure to support youth employment introduced by the MoLEVSA and implemented by the NES starting from August 2020. My First Salary is complementary to the standard NES service package. It provides direct support (20,000 ths RSD for at least 9 months period) to the youth below 30 years with a high school/university degree and without work experience. The programme provided overall subsidies in the amount of 2 bln RSD.

According to the findings obtained within the latest research studies assessing existing institutional framework there are several policy recommendations to deal with critical youth unemployment issues and improve effectiveness of the youth unemployment policy in Serbia:

- Improvement of the coordination among institutions in charge of youth policy;
- Strengthening monitoring and evaluation system in order to improve effectiveness of the existing programmes;

- Strengthening capacity of the institutions (NES, local youth offices, etc.) to deal with unemployed youth and NEETs;
- Insufficient budgetary allocations to the ALMP measures;
- Improvement of the Youth Service Package to achieve better targeting of the vulnerable youth;
- Tackling the existing horizontal and vertical skills mismatches which result from the low job creation for specific groups of youth and the lack knowledge and skills required by employers;
- Developing mechanisms of reaching out inactive NEET youth;
- Improving the education system to reduce the gap in the rate of enrollment and completion of pre-university education between the general population and vulnerable groups of children/young people;
- Increasing support to self-employment and youth entrepreneurship.

In addition to the aforementioned local stakeholders, some of them being funded by the international sources, it should be also noted regional mechanisms aimed at strengthening capacities of the local institutions and regional cooperation. One of the particularly important refers to Regional Youth Cooperation (RYCO), established in 2016 by the WB 6 Prime Ministers on WB Summit held in Paris. RYCO supports the regional exchange of young people and their ideas, as a basis for future perspectives for cooperation in the region. Over the period 2018-2020, RYCO supported 35 projects of youth associations and secondary schools from Serbia, being one of the most important actors in the field of youth policy and promoting the relevant youth issues on the regional policy agendas (Youth Partnership, 2020).

1.3. Youth Entrepreneurship and career management support

In 2015, the average school-to-work transition in Serbia took more than two years, being the highest among women and youth living in rural areas. This was much longer than the EU average of 6.5 months (ETF, 2021). Additionally, youth with the lowest level of education spend 19.4 months more to find a first job if compared to those with high-level education. Such a long “school to work” transition indicate the importance of further improvements of the education system and development of the adequate programmes for the low-educated youth to prevent the high outflow from unemployment to inactivity. Apart from prevention, specific measures are required to deal with the currently inactive youth population stimulating their transition to active population and (re)integration into the labour market.

One of the particularly important factors of strengthening youth position in the labour market refers to increasing their motivation and removing barriers to start their own business.

The estimated number of young entrepreneurs in Serbia is about 28,000². Subventions are received by around 900 young people a year, with a 40% share of women (KOMS, 2021). In that context, strengthening (digital) skills through both informal and formal education system, as well as enhancing concrete financial and non-financial support for self-employment are particularly relevant. The Alternative report about the position and needs of the youth in Republic of Serbia (KOMS, 2020) suggest that majority of youth in Serbia do not have plans to start own business. Results of the conducted focus groups refer to inherited perceptions and political barriers as the main reasons behind these attitudes. In addition, youth in Serbia are still considered to have high aversion to risk. IT industry potentials may be the main factor that initiated change in the existing perceptions.

Lack of experience entering the labour market could be reduced through dual education programmes and increase of the number of youths attending internships. Although dual education programmes in general enjoy support of the youth, they are perceived as still insufficiently developed and poorly implemented. Additionally, the number of youths which completed internships during the education process is still low amounting to less than 40% (KOMS, 2021). The participation rate of adults in Serbia in some form of formal or informal education or training (Adult Education Survey from 2016) is 19.8%, which is slightly more than in 2011 (16.5%), but significantly below the average of EU member states (45.1%) (Klasnja, 2020). Research on the Situation and Needs of Young People in the Republic of Serbia shows that in 2019, 27% of young people aged 15-30 participated in non-formal education. The number of youths being supported through NES internships programmes in 2020 is 530 and 590 youth with higher and secondary education respectively (RCC, 2021). However, not only youth but also employers have certain expectations from the policy makers advocating for the greater governmental support in terms subsidies for training of youths, stronger efforts in promoting entrepreneurship among youth and reform of the education system to match the labour market requirements (ETF, 2021).

Strengthening youth entrepreneurship represents an imperative for the future policy interventions. Digital economy sector development should be particularly taken into account when reforming not only general education system but also in the context of developing up-skilling and re-skilling interventions. This could be particularly visible during the COVID-19 crisis and its impact to the labour market which showed solid resilience of this sector.

Another important policy measure refers to career guidance and counseling that include providing career education, information and counselling activities. Development of the career management skills should support youth to determine career pathways and successfully manage transition to the labour market. The Strategy of Career Guidance and Counselling in the Republic of Serbia and related the Action Plan (2010-2014) were adopted in 2010. Institutional framework for providing adequate career guidance support is relatively well developed, particularly if compared to other WB economies (Djurovic, 2019). Besides the MoESTD, monitoring and support of the career guidance activities are provided by the Euroguidance³, Centre for Vocational and Adult Education and Institute for Advancement

² A revision of the National Youth Strategy is planned, and one of the priorities in the work will be aimed at improving youth entrepreneurship and simplifying the business operations of young entrepreneurs, from the [Keynote address of Serbian Prime Minister Designate Ana Brnabic](#) (October 28, 2020), Accessed on 6th January 2021

³ Euroguidance is a European network for support to career guidance and counselling. Activities of the network are provided by the National centers that implement their activities in 36 European countries. More details: <https://euroguidance.rs/about-euroguidance-eng/> Accessed on 12th January 2021

of Education in Serbia. In 2019, there have been developed Quality Standards of Career Guidance Services as an important step towards achieving a system of continuous career support to individuals from the early ages. From the local perspective it should be noted a recent practice of developing local councils for career guidance and counselling that is supposed to yield a positive result in the following years. Developing adequate guidance policies are also shaped by international donors' activities which supported greater involvement of the civil society organisations.

Critical issue in providing effective career management support refer to continuous development of capacities of guidance practitioners in order to catch up with evolving and complex market and social needs. In one hand, a rapidly changing area needs constant attention within continuing professional development. On the other, core concepts needs to be also established (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 2009). Established in 2013 as a part of the Tempus Foundation, Euroguidance provides vital contribution to career guidance and counselling activities through support to the development of European agenda of lifelong guidance and development of local competences. Important contribution of the Euroguidance is reflected through organization of seminars and trainings for career practitioners and cooperation among different stakeholders.

Despite of notable efforts made over the last decade, existing career guidance system face numerous difficulties, particularly in terms of skills assessment and anticipation as well as transforming labour market data into user-friendly career development information (Djurovic, 2019). It should be noted platform "BOS karijera"⁴ developed by the Belgrade Open School aimed at providing comprehensive support to the secondary school students. Further efforts in providing career-related and user-friendly information for vulnerable youth groups should be encouraged. Research on the position and needs of young people in the Republic of Serbia (Ninamedia, 2020) shows that less than half of the youth participated in the career management support activities. Direct meetings with people employed in the area of their interest, as a specific form of career counselling, were held by only 3.2% of youth, while only 5.4% of them participated in the individual (one-to-one) career counseling activities. Lack of information being provided from the real market world limits effectiveness of the provided support. Comparing to 2016, there is a rising share of youth stating that there was no internship available in the area of their interest (from 9.0% to 16% respectively). Therefore, additional activities are also required to improve not only the quality, but also the access to career management support.

1.4. Youth Guarantee – Experiences and Possibilities for Serbia

Youth, especially NEET youth within the labor market, still pose a vulnerable group falling outside the radar of government institutions. While the existing National Youth Strategy (2015-2025) recognizes the concept of NEET from the existing strategic documents and laws, there are policies which could be implemented aiming to improve active employment support measures and increase the employability of young people and other vulnerable

4 <https://karijera.bos.rs/>

groups. One such is the Youth Guarantee in Serbia, by which Serbia is legally obliged as a member to provide quality employment, continuing education or internships to youth who are unemployed (including those not registered with the NES) and inactive (not in education or training) in the labor market within four months of unemployment or leaving formal education. The Youth Guarantee includes campaigns to inform youth about available services, involves interventions to identify, contact and involve inactive youth as well as implies individual services and programs.

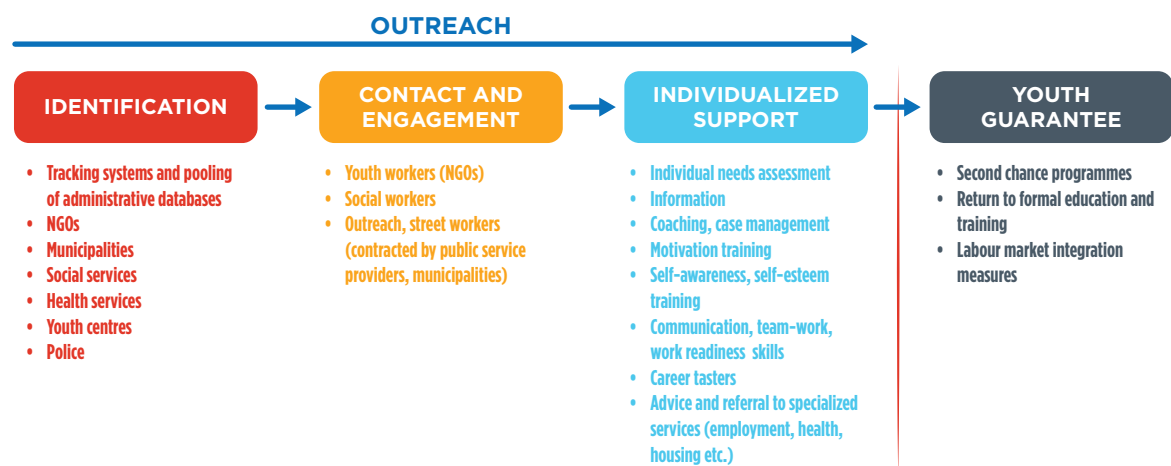
The Youth Employment Package, that was introduced by the European Commission in December 2012, suggested the establishment of innovative practices as means for smoother transition from education to the labour market (European Commission, 2012). According to the Youth Employment Package, in March 2013 was established the Youth Employment Initiative/YEI. Consequently, following the YEI framework, the introduction of the European Youth Guarantee Initiative has been introduced in April 2013 (Council of the European Union, 2013). European Commission later proposed extending the program to the Western Balkans within An Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans (European Commission, 2020). In the first 12 months, pilot projects of the Youth Guarantee were implemented in several Member States (Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Spain), targeting two groups: 1) young people in transition from school to work and 2) NEET youth. The implementation of the Youth Guarantee program in some EU Member States does indicate that youth employment is not an issue that may be handled by only one department, agency or organization. The issue of youth employment is that it falls to local authorities, national employment services and youth organizations as well as (multiple) National Ministries (Eurofound, 2014). Most ministries of the respective member states of the EU are in charge of implementing such a program. However, practices at national levels may vary. To illustrate, in the Republic of Serbia, similar to Spain, the coordinator for program implementation is Serbia's MoLEVSA, while Serbia's NES promotes measures. France has been one of the first EU Member States to implement the Youth Guarantee, with the program being coordinated by France's respective Employment Ministry, namely the Directorate for Vocational Training and Employment, while its National Employment Service, together with local youth offices, is in charge of promoting measures. In some Member States, such as Belgium and Greece where their respective Ministries are not involved in the implementation of the Youth Guarantee, their coordinators are their National Employment Services (Eurofound, 2012; Eurofound, 2014).

In order to best implement the Guarantee, it is distinctly necessary to harmonize approaches between local youth offices in Serbia, their capacities and the possibility to contribute through a smaller study by which it may be applied on national level. This is the recommendation of the international labor organization, which was concluded from their research conducted in their study "Introducing a Youth Guarantee in Serbia: A Feasibility Assessment" (ILO, 2021), is that the implementation of the Youth Guarantee requires a local pilot program reflecting the aims and objective of the Youth Guarantee on a national level. Their conclusion was that the pilot study should be carried out in three separate cities in the RS. Commitment to youth employment includes the adoption of adequate measures that include the coordination of several sectors (public policies) as well as significant investment to create preconditions for the implementation of a Youth Guarantee. These preconditions include reforming employee structuring in the public sector. Such restructuring may involve

reorganizing the NES and creating funding for the hiring a higher number of employment counselors as well as reducing the number of redundant administrative staff (Ognjenović, Kuzmanov, & Pavlović, 2021). Currently, there are no specific agreements between NES and the civil society organizations or youth centres for providing assistance to detached young people (ILO, 2021). One of the positive examples was then pilot project implemented in three cities in Great Britain, in which 257 young people (15 to 16 years of age) participated. These participants were recognized as being at the highest risk of dropping out of school and were provided with 30 hours of mentoring and career support. The results of the project showed the participants to have gained the trust of their teachers, thereby enabling them to focus on continuing their education and career development.

Evaluation of the YG implementation in the EU Member States (2013-2020) could provide important policy inputs for the policy makers in Serbia. It showed key challenges that occurred in most of the EU Member States. One of the most important findings refer to difficulties related to reaching out and activating the most vulnerable groups – disabled and youth with low skills. Identification stage is also perceived critical considerably differing from country to country as per ILO (2021) findings (Figure 1 below).

Figure 1. Outreach delivery system in the Youth Guarantee



Source: ILO (2021). *Introducing a Youth Guarantee in Serbia: A feasibility assessment*

With regard to findings of the previously analyzed studies, this could be also relevant for Serbia. EU Country reports on YG implementation indicated regional disparities as one of the main factors correlating with disparities in education as well as quality and availability of integrated services. School drop-out in Serbia did not prove to be particularly high if compared to the EU members. Primary school completion rate was 97.1%, while the primary school dropout rate was 0.6%. The coverage with secondary education was 87.4%, the completion rate of secondary education was 87%, the dropout rate in secondary education was 1.1% (Klasnja, 2020). However, the quality of education including VET and the lack of digital skills are considered to be important challenges in the school-to-work transition (EC, 2020). For Serbia, particularly relevant would be to tackle disparities between the general population and vulnerable groups of children (Roma, youth with disabilities, etc.).

Lack of flexibility and partnerships at the local level may result in adverse outcomes. In case local institutions do not have autonomy to adjust programmes and measures with

regard to local circumstances, chances for success will be reduced. In general, EU experience confirms difficulties in involving local youth offices. The case of Denmark on the other hand, provides good example of youth guidance centres working in close cooperation with local NES offices (OECD, 2015).

Adaptation of the institutional frameworks for the YG implementation proved to be very effective with regards to improving efficiency of the NES. However, financial resources required for the effective implementation should not be neglected as 60% of the EU member states underestimated financial commitments. Lack of resources may postpone interventions which has detrimental effects on providing youth in NEET status to attend trainings or find job in the period within 4 months. Extension of unemployed status may reduce the effectiveness of all activation policies (Escudero & Lopez Mourelo, 2017).

Achievement of early intervention also proved to be a challenge. Many EU members states experienced challenges with regards to outreach to NEETs, not only those with limited NES capacities as it is the case with Serbia, but also those with a higher share of hardest-to-reach NEETS. This subgroup requires complex interventions before being able to take up an offer provided within YG (European Commission, 2020).

2. METHODOLOGY

The research aims to conduct a thorough analysis of the position and needs of youth in Serbia and conduct assessment capacities of civil-society organizations and local youth offices in Serbia. Research has been structured respecting the main objective – to provide **evidence** on the **existing practice related to youth entrepreneurship, NEET employability and youth career management skills**, as well as to extract **policy recommendations** for improvement of the existing policy approaches. In order to do so, its methodology is based on both desk and empirical research.

The findings of the **desk research** are further discussed with policy makers in order to discover areas in which there may be potential improvement. Desk research is compiled into two units. The desk research firstly covers an analysis of the current state of the labor market, where special attention is dedicated to young people who are not employed and not in the education process (NEET youth). Data from the Labor Force Survey (LFS) for 2019⁵ and 2020, as well as Eurostat statistical data will be used. An LFS analysis will determine primary socio-demographic characteristics of youth (15-29 years of age) including the structure of labor market indicators according to gender, education, age and economic activity and characteristics specific to NEET youth.

In order to establish the current state of directive policies shaping youth employment policy today, the desk research has also focused on the existing legal and strategic framework for conducting youth employment policies in Serbia. Desk research activities will help to identify youth employment programs as well as evaluate applied youth employment policy measures. To this aim, policy evaluations and assessments conducted by independent researchers commissioned by government institutions and international donors (RCC, EU, UNICEF, GIZ, SDC) have been analyzed. As to extract policy recommendations useful for Serbian policy makers, an assessment of the Youth Guarantee implementation in the EU was also consulted.

Second part of methodology refers to **empirical research**. The empirical part of the research incorporates both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative research analyzes the micro-data obtained from the Statistical Office of the RS (Labor Force Survey 2019). The results of the analysis will better indicate what sections of youth are most likely to be placed within NEET according to the following criteria: gender, area of residence (urban/rural), region, education-level achieved and material situation of the household.

The qualitative research shall consist of data obtained through:

1. Three focus groups of (sample total - 30) stakeholders

In order to better gauge the activities of stakeholders as well as to obtain an accurate picture of youth policy concerning crucial challenges faced and potential factors of success,

⁵ Statistical data from 2019 should provide a more realistic picture of the position of NEET youth than for 2020, due to the corona pandemic and its subsequent labor-market obstruction.

three focus groups of stakeholders of youth employment policy. Focus groups are planned to be held in order composed of 30 participants. These are to be selected in cooperation with the MoYS (10 per focus group) representing youth-policy stakeholders (based on power/interest criteria). Selection of the participants shall respect geographical distribution criteria to enable participation of the policy makers from lower-developed regions and regions facing higher youth unemployment and NEET rates. The focus groups topics will be defined following the main objectives of the research:

- 1) Career management skills, strengthening entrepreneurship and other early intervention measures
- 2) NEET employability and outreach mechanisms
- 3) Strengthening capacity of the institutions dealing with youth with a particular focus on the youth policy actors at the local level

2. 10 in-depth interviews with representatives from civil-society organizations that have experience in providing direct support and developing research skills of NEET youth.

The interviews will provide a more detailed picture on how to detect and approach the NEET youth so that their needs may be assessed, their skills and preferences be better understood and practices that have proven to be effective in developing their skills may be better indicated.

3. An online questionnaire assessing performances of the local youth offices throughout Serbia

An online questionnaire to assess the capacities of the local youth offices in Serbia shall also be developed and distributed to all local youth offices (a sample size of at least 30 offices is projected) that focuses on the following issues:

- Size and human capacities;
- Technical equipment;
- Project management capacities and experience;
- Experience in dealing with NEET;
- Needs for capacity development;
- Quality of cooperation with local authorities and other stakeholders.

4. In-depth interviews with 5 local youth office representatives

With regard to obtained results, it will be developed a set of open-ended questions to be discussed with representatives of the five local youth offices within direct interviewing process. Interviewing local youth office representatives will enable us obtaining a more detailed qualitative insight into the main problems they experience when conducting daily activities and challenges dealing with NEET population, career management, youth and

women entrepreneurship, etc. In addition, the aim of the interviews will be to analyse possibilities and capacities related to the potential role of the local youth offices and other local subjects of youth policy with regard to YG implementation.

The research methodology also includes a detailed account of the focus-group participants and interviewees as well as a brief justification for their selection. The outputs of the desk and empirical research study will be **research study** and **policy brief** including specific policy recommendations on how to improve the existing youth policy measures. Policy brief structure will be as follows:

- Youth unemployment issues in Serbia – main results;
- Challenges in tackling issues of the NEET population of youth;
- Specific areas for future targeted interventions – career management skills, support for young people, women entrepreneurship;
- Recommendations for implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Serbia.

3. LOCAL YOUTH OFFICES - ASSESSMENT OF NEEDS AND CAPACITIES TO SUPPORT YG IMPLEMENTATION IN SERBIA

3.1. Questionnaire analysis

Carrying out the Youth Guarantee is crucial for Serbia, not merely as a signatory, but in order to establish a more stable labour environment in which youth may not only better develop but prosper. Nonetheless, it is first essential that a clearer picture be obtained of the overall scope of local youth organizations as they are key in carrying out sections of the Youth Guarantee in Serbia. Unfortunately, while there are numerous local youth offices (about 140), it is hard to determine what capabilities, skills, competencies and resources they have available to them as well as how they would be applicable in executing new projects and taking on new tasks in the field of NEET. Therefore, as its main goal, the questionnaire seeks to better determine the scope of the capabilities, potential and resources that local youth offices possess as well as what stakeholders they work closely with in order to carry out their activities. The results of this questionnaire then aim to help better carry out the activities within the framework of the Youth Guarantee.

The questionnaire consisted of 32 questions divided into six separate sections by topic:

- Size and capacity of human resources;
- Available technical equipment and facilities;
- Project management capacities and experience;
- Experience in dealing with NEET;
- Needed areas for capacity development;
- Work with and coordination with local authorities and other stakeholders.

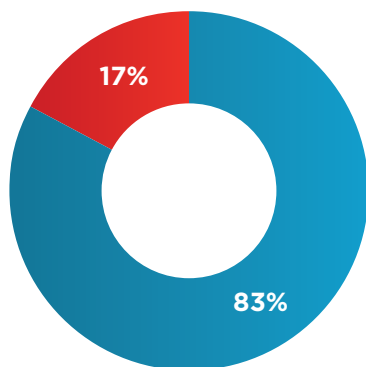
These questions were then analyzed individually by topic as related to each question, weighted based on the overall average score given. While some questions were one answer only (such as “Do you have a youth club?”) others were given as “check all that apply” (such as “With what areas does your youth office work?”) or qualitative in description when asked to elaborate.

Out of a total of 140 Offices contacted, 48 representatives or employees of local youth offices answered the questionnaire. 40 respondents of the questionnaire are coordinators, while the remaining 8 are advisors or other employees in the Office. Of the total number of respondents, 29 (60%) are male and 19 (40%) are female.

The questionnaire divides respondents into age categories instead of specific age. The respondents are heavily weighted to favor younger respondents, whereby 40 are younger than the age of 40: 30-40 years of age (50%), 18 to 29 (33%), 41 to 50 (7%) and 50 (10%). Divided by education, respondents also tend to have a higher education: 33.3% hold a master degree or higher, 43.8% hold a bachelors, 10.4% hold a technical degree and 12.5% a secondary school degree (Figure 2).

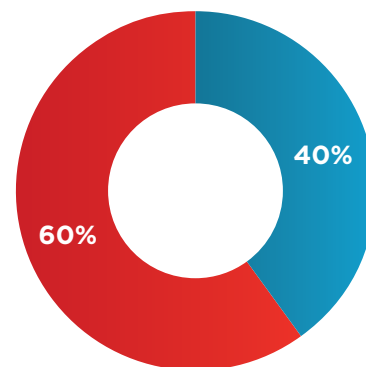
Figure 2. Descriptive statistics

Position in the Local Youth Office



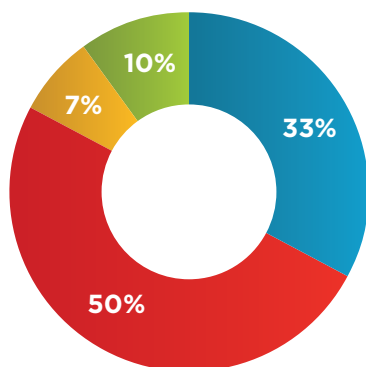
■ Coordinator ■ Employee, Advisor, Volunteer etc.

Gender



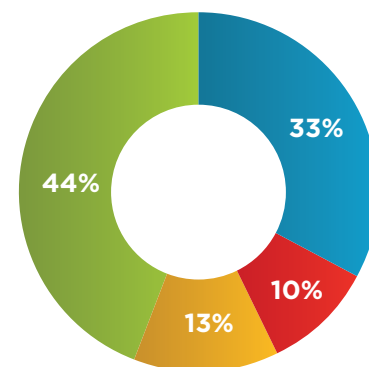
■ Female ■ Male

Ages



■ 18-29 ■ 30-40 ■ 41-50 ■ 51+

Educational level

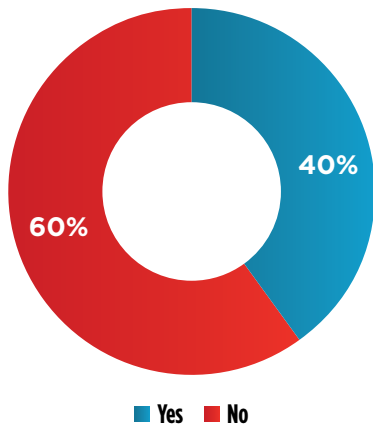


■ Master degree or higher ■ Bachelor degree
■ Secondary school degree ■ Technical degree

Source: Author's

All the youth offices participating in the questionnaire were only established within the last 12 years. Of the Offices surveyed, 29 report having a youth club (60%) have a physical office in which they may meet with youth and where youth may gather socially. It should here be noted that it is important for local youth offices to have such spaces as there needs to be a general gathering point for local youth culture that may or may not otherwise be available locally as well as to have a place where outreach may occur.

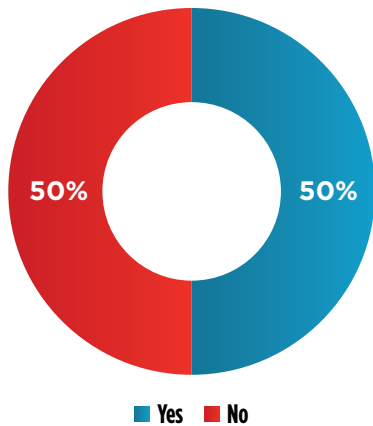
Figure 3. Answer to the question “Do your municipality have a youth club?”



Source: Author's

According to the results of survey, split evenly, half of the respondents answered that there is no position of coordinator within their system, while the other half report that they do. It means that half of the coordinators/local administrative officers in charge of youth issues have been engaged either on a temporary basis or as volunteers. Not having a systematic work placement coordinator results in knock-on effects that negatively impact the youth office's sustainability, independence and access to resources.

Figure 4. Is there a job plan (position of coordinator) within Youth Office system?

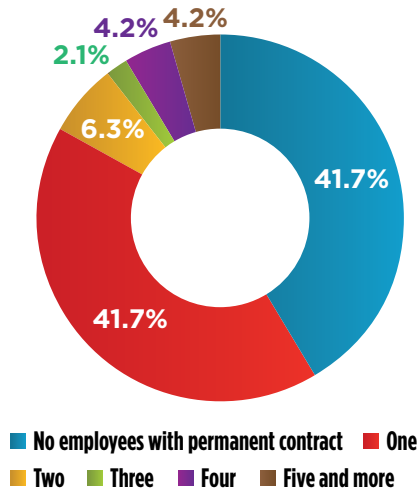


Source: Author's

Most offices have no full-time employees. While 20 of the offices responded that they only have 1 full-time employee on permanent contract and 19 responded that they have no permanent, full-time employees at all, only the remaining employ 2-5 full time permanent employees. Most of the offices base their employment on temporary, part-time contracts which are primarily intended for external associates or volunteers. On average, there are more than 20 volunteers; however, this may vary wildly as some offices report having 70 volunteers and less than 5 in others. Having a

quite solid volunteer network for some of the observed offices represent a strong opportunity in establishing proactive cooperation with local youth in the years to come.

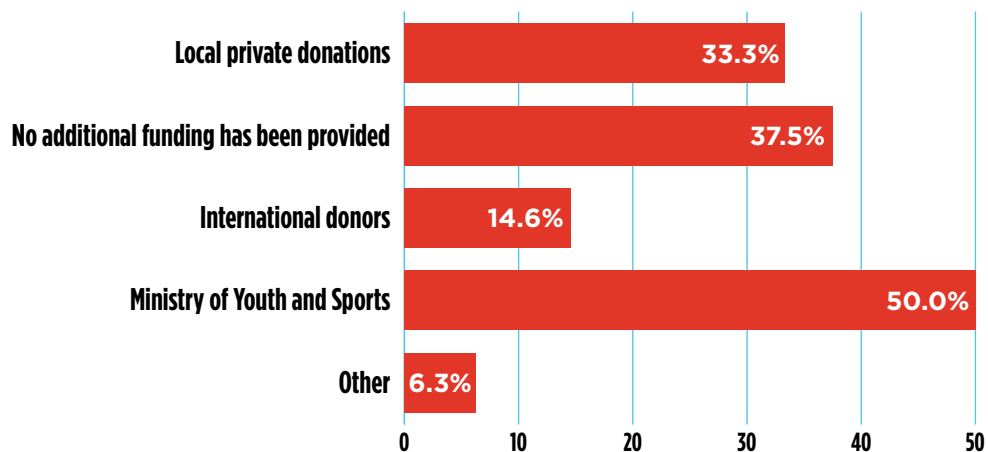
Figure 5. "The number of full-time employees on permanent contract in the Youth Office"



Source: Author's

When asked to explicate additional funding sources of the youth policy activities, only 7 offices (14.6%) stated international donations. According to the results of the questionnaire: 24 (50%) finance themselves based on donations from the Ministries of Youth and Sports; 16 offices (33.3%) were financed exclusively from funds received by domestic (local) donors; and 18 offices (37.5%) do not have any kind of funds.

Figure 6. Answers given to the multiple choice question "Excluding all local (city or municipal) government funds, what are the additional sources of funds to finance your youth office activities for 2021?"



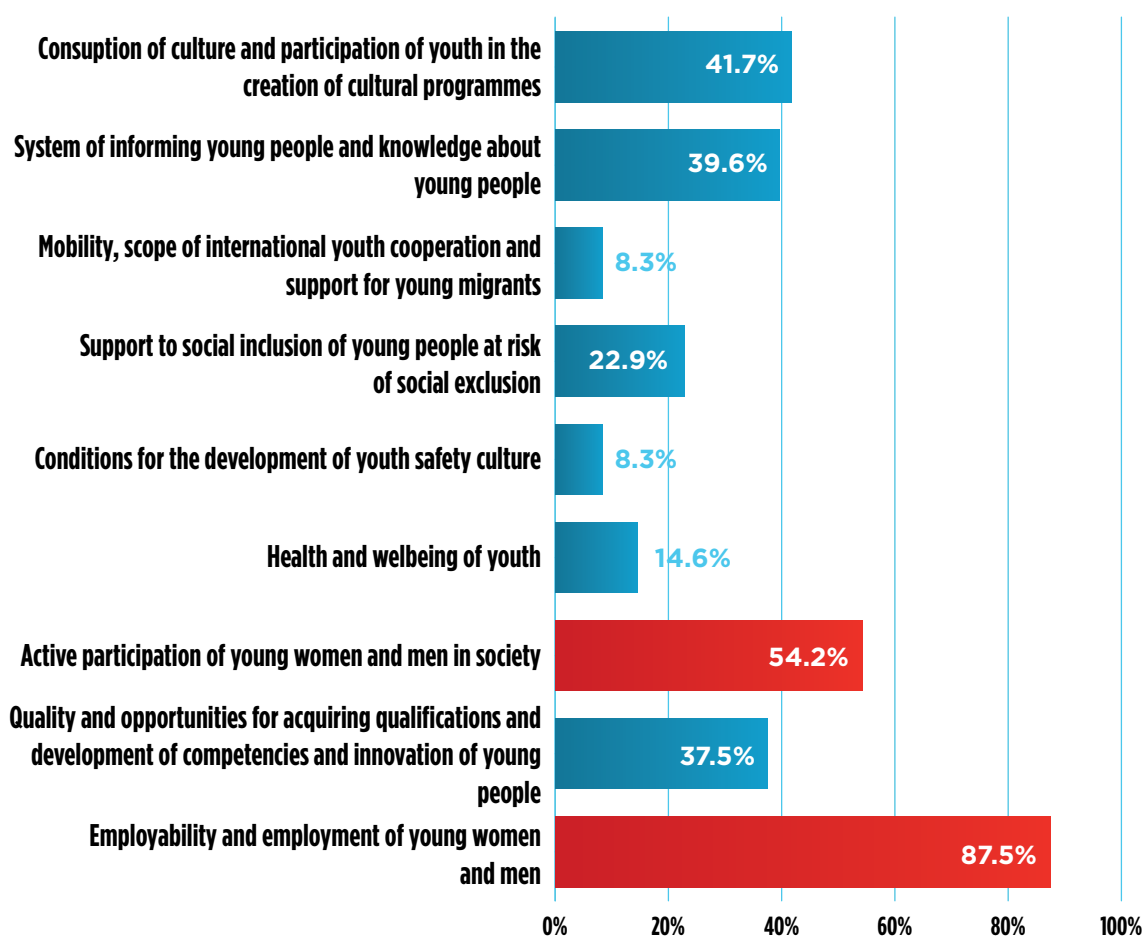
Source: Author's

The main funding entity for most youth offices, according to their self-reporting, is the MoYS (50% of the inquired offices), but local private donations do make up a significant portion of funding as well. Worryingly, 18 youth offices (37.5%) receive no funding outside of city or municipal funding. Few receive additional funding internationally (14.6%) and even fewer receive any from other sources (eg. Provincial Secretary for Youth and Sport).

The average budget of each office for 2021 (i.e, excluding salaries) was around 1.4 million RSD. However, this average is skewed based on the wide range of budgets reported: 21 offices (43.7%) carried out activities under a budget of 1 Million RSD, 1 reported having a budget of 6 Million RSD and 1 activity budget was reported to be only 30,000 RSD for 2021.

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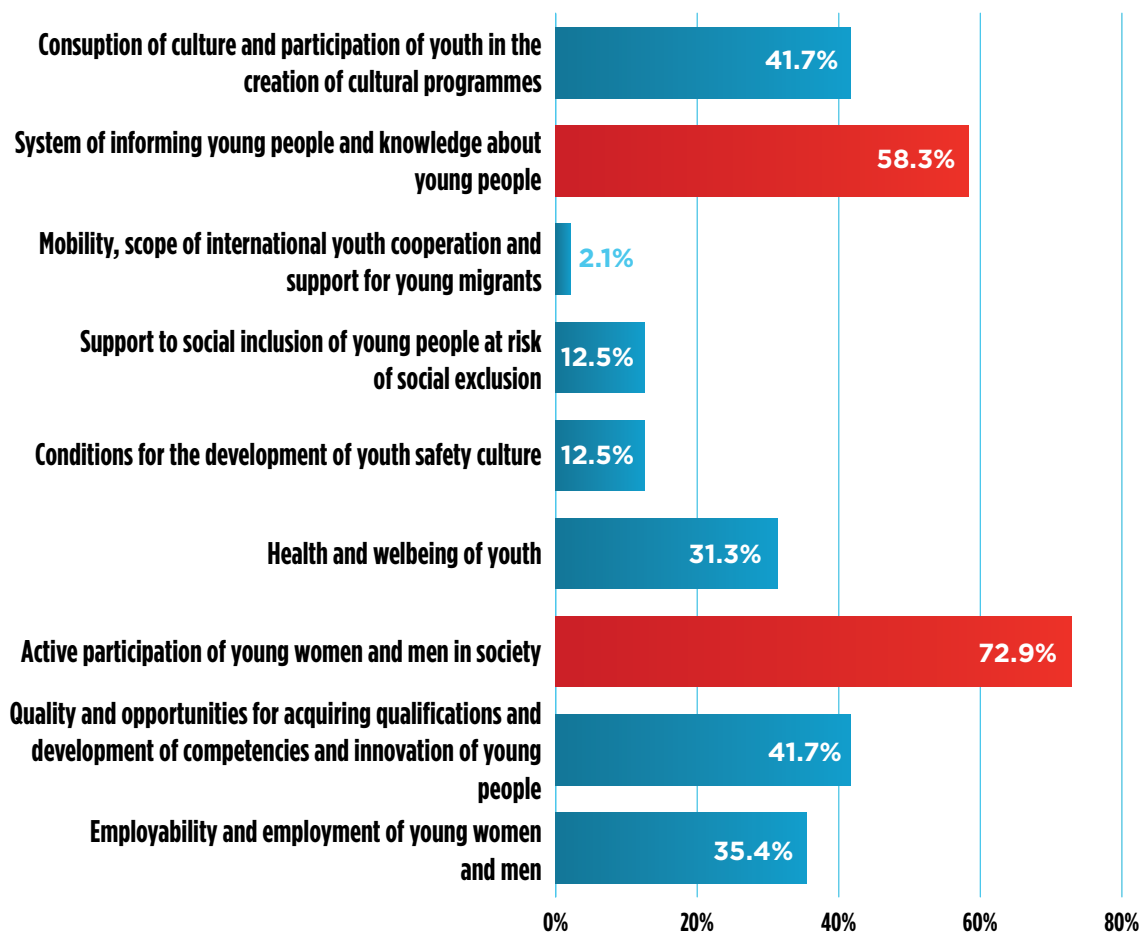
Figure 7. Answers given to the multiple choice question “In your opinion, what are the key problems youth face in your particular city and/or region?”



Source: Author's

When asked to pick from a multiple choice list and select as many areas as they find appropriate as to what are the major issues facing youth in their community, it would seem that the main concern of many youth offices is the employability and employment of youth (42 out of 48 or around 87.5%). However, more than half also report youth actively participating in society to be an important issue (54.2%) as well as slightly less than half reporting involvement in cultural development (41.7%). Education and qualifications of youth as well as their ability to obtain them also is the reported chief concern of slightly less than half of all responding youth organizations. Surprisingly, of little concern was social inclusion of at-risk youth (22.9%) and youth's health and wellbeing, where only 7 organizations (14.6%) claimed it as a chief concern. Of least concern was developing a healthy youth culture and international youth cooperation.

Figure 8. Answers given to the multiple choice question “What are the key areas of work of your local youth office?”

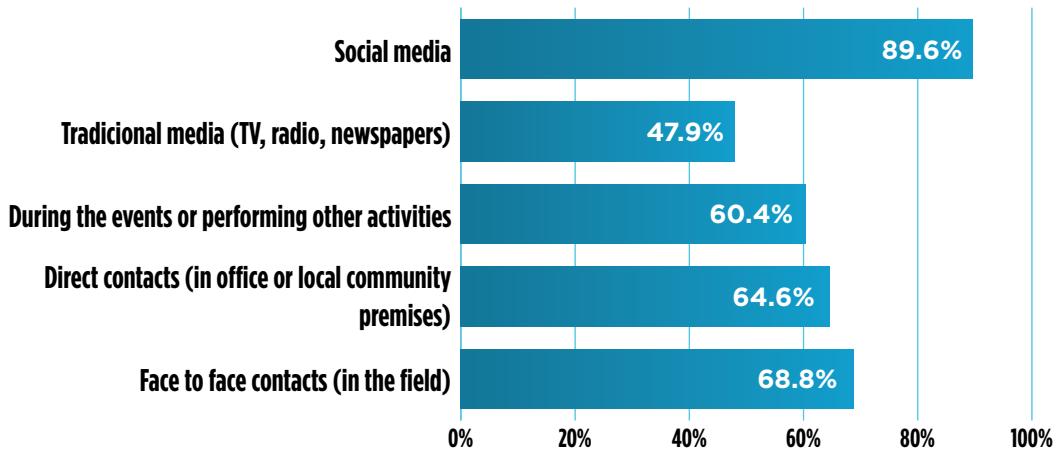


Source: Author's

When asked to select all key areas from a list that apply, the majority of youth organizations reported that promoting active participation in society to be the main area they work in (35 out of 48 or around 73%). Slightly more than half (58.3%) reported that information systems and education to be their area of work. Slightly less than half report working areas to help youth acquire or improve their competences (41.7%) or to promote cultural development. Only around a third report working in areas related to employment (35.4%) or youth health and wellbeing. One in eight reported operating in areas that develop youth culture or promote social inclusion. Only 1 organization reported working in international youth cooperation.

When asked if they have a local action plan (LAP) for youth, 27 offices (56.3%) answered that they have a LAP. 13 of the total number of respondents (27.1%) said that they did have a LAP that expired, while the new document is still under development. In 5 municipalities previous LAP has expired while the local authorities still did not set up development of the new document. Only 3 offices have never had a LAP. For the offices answering that they have LAP, 1 office answered that their plan was to 2027, 9 to 2025, 1 to 2024, 8 to 2022, and 7 to 2021. KOMS report indicate 106 of 145 municipalities (73.1%) do not have local action plans for youth (KOMs, 2021).

Figure 9. What channels of communication do you use to communicate with youth?

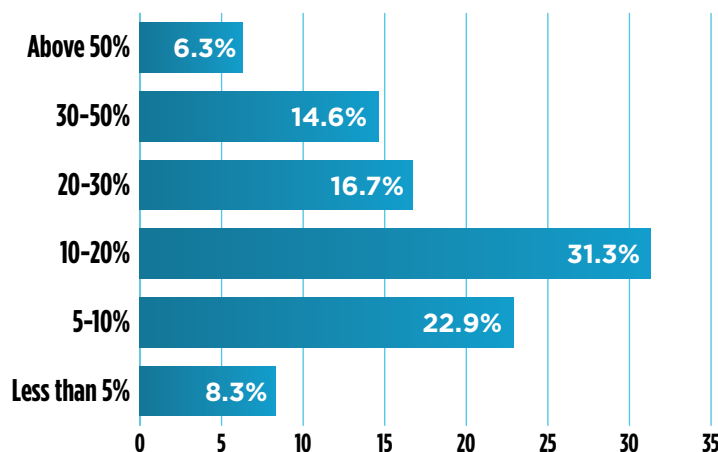


Source: Author's

When asked to select among a list of what channels of communication the local office uses to reach out to youth, social media was clearly reported to be the favorite means of communication for youth organizations, wherein almost all organizations report using it. Indeed, it is more surprising that 5 organizations responded that they did not use it as a means of communication given its prevalence among youth. However, 23 organizations report using traditional media as a channel of communication. It would also appear that youth organizations still base much of their work on face-to-face communication, either coming to where the youth are themselves (33 out of 48) or relying on youth coming to them in their office (31 out of 48), which is coupled to the importance of events or activities being held in order to reach out to youth (29 out of 48).

Responding to the question on the estimated coverage of youth being addressed by their activities, 31.3% of total local youth office representatives answered that around 10-20% of all youth in the municipality or city are covered by their activities. 4 out of 48 local youth office representatives stated that their activities reached out between 0 and 5% of the youth residing in their municipality (Figure 10).

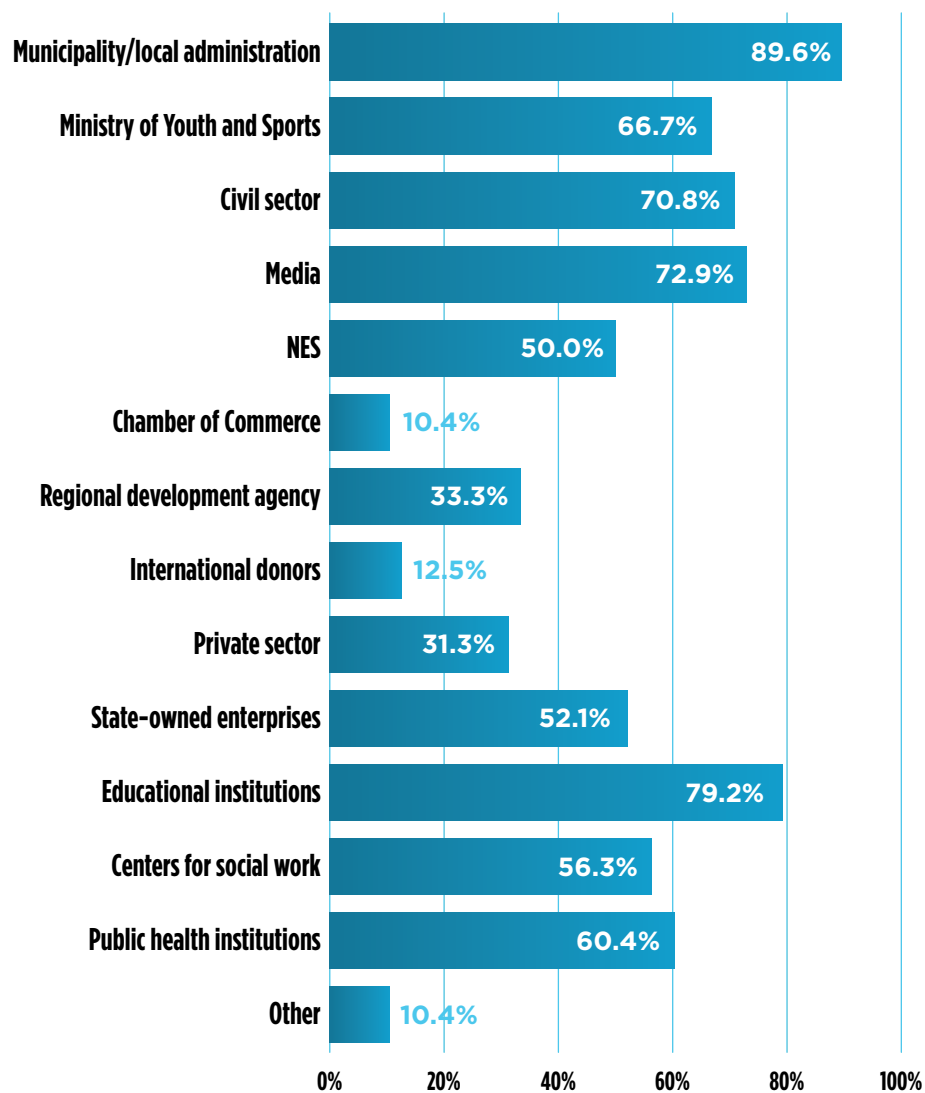
Figure 10. Estimated coverage of local youth (in %) being addressed by activities of the local youth offices (self-estimation)



Source: Author's

Apart from local youth councils, local administration and youth associations, local youth offices are supposed to actively collaborate with other local stakeholders interested in achieving local youth policy outcomes. The following graph provides data on institutional collaboration between local youth offices and relevant stakeholders. It should be noted that local youth offices have frequent collaboration with the MoYS as well as local administration. Among non-government actors, most of them cooperate with civil sector and media. In terms of strengthening employability of youth in their municipalities and particularly in the context of Youth Guarantee implementation, it would be important to initiate more intense cooperation with local NES branch and private sector as well. Collaboration with those institutions is currently very weak or even does not exist since only 50% of local youth offices established contacts with NES local branches, while less than one third local youth office representatives stated established contacts with private sector entities.

Figure 11. Please indicate institutions and organizations do you collaborate with during the implementation of your activities.

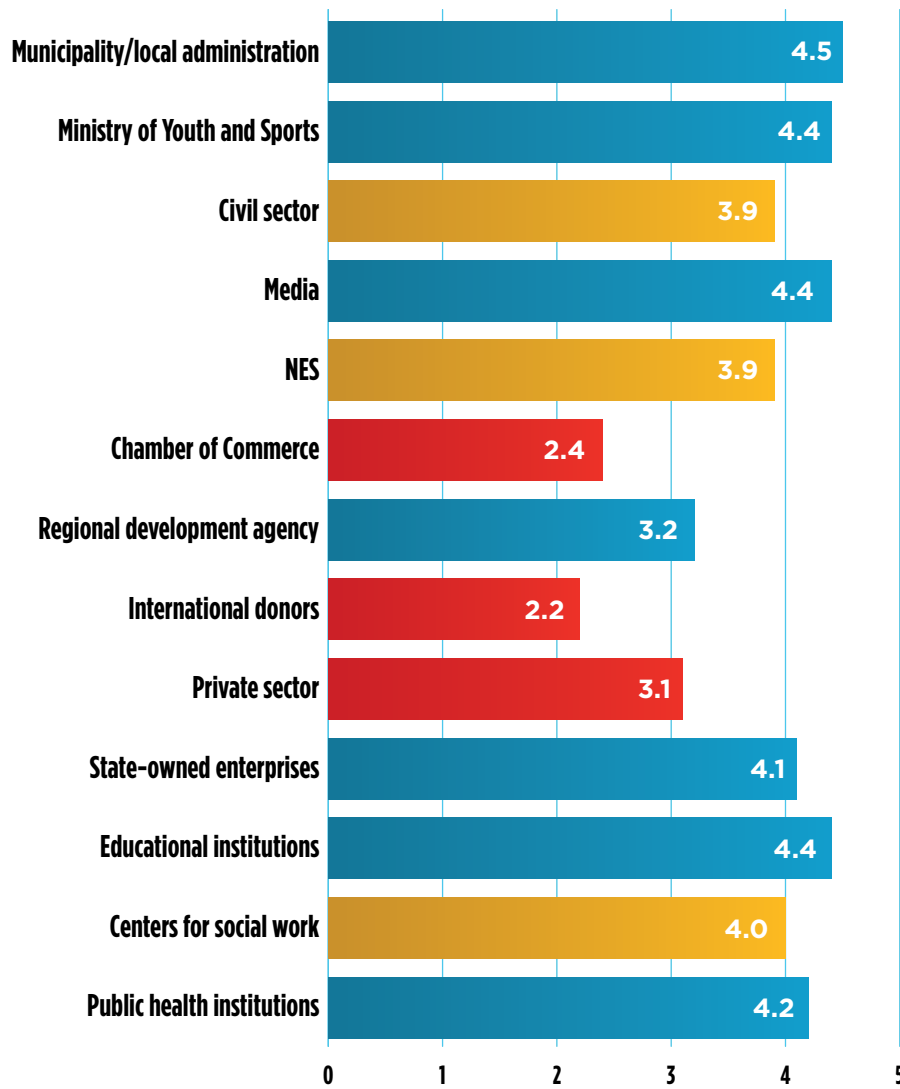


Source: Authors' calculation

When evaluating the quality of their cooperation with institutions on a scale of 1.0 to 5.0 and then calculated as an average, the government would appear to be one of the most

valuable counterparts youth offices work with as they graded their cooperation with local self-governments to be the highest followed by the MoYS. On the opposite end, youth offices rate the quality of their work with the Serbian Chamber of Commerce and international donors to be the lowest, at 2.4 and 2.2 respectively. No other stakeholders or entities besides these two were treated below three. Work with public sector institutions is also significantly higher rated than privately owned (4.1 vs 3.1, respectively). Overall, they rate their work highly with public institutions in general, such as educational institutions (4.4), public health institutions (4.2) and Centers for social work (4.0). These ratings would seem to point to the outlier of their average rating given to their work with the NES was only 3.9, which is lower compared to other public institutions. As even their satisfaction with working with the media is high at 4.4, this would point to the need for the overall cooperation between youth offices and the NES needing to be improved and perhaps their work with international donors and the Serbian Chamber of Commerce needs further analysis.

Figure 12. Evaluating collaboration with other youth employment policy stakeholders

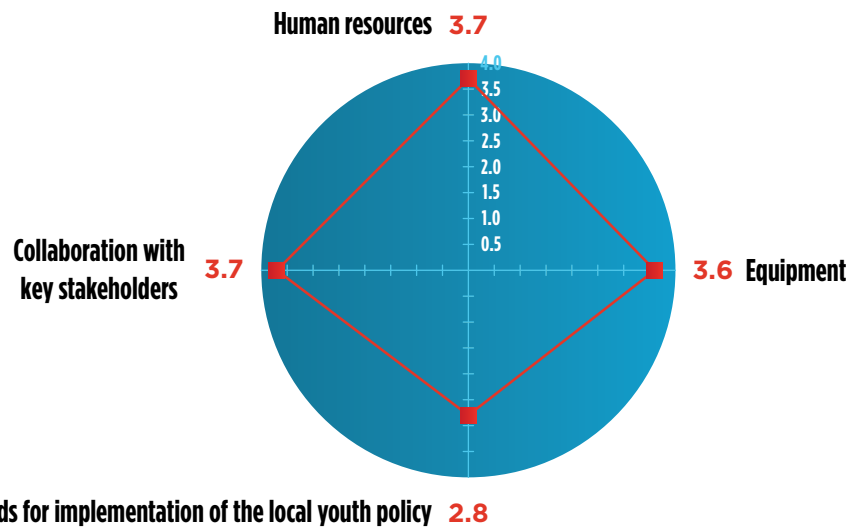


Source: Author's

Asking to rate (1-5) the capacity of youth offices in terms of 1. human resources, 2. equipment, 3. funds to implement activities and 4. their capacity to collaborate with key part-

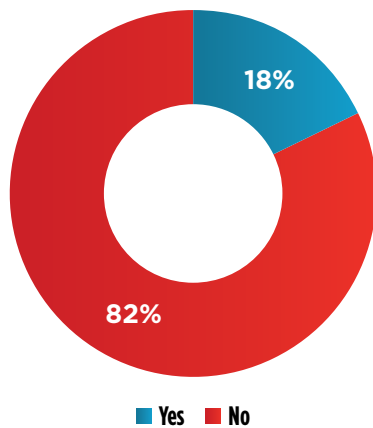
ner institutions, the average rating was lowest for funds to implement activities. However, youth offices rate their human resources to be much higher.

Figure 13. Self-assessment of the Local Youth Office capacities (1 to 5, 5 being the highest)



Source: Author's

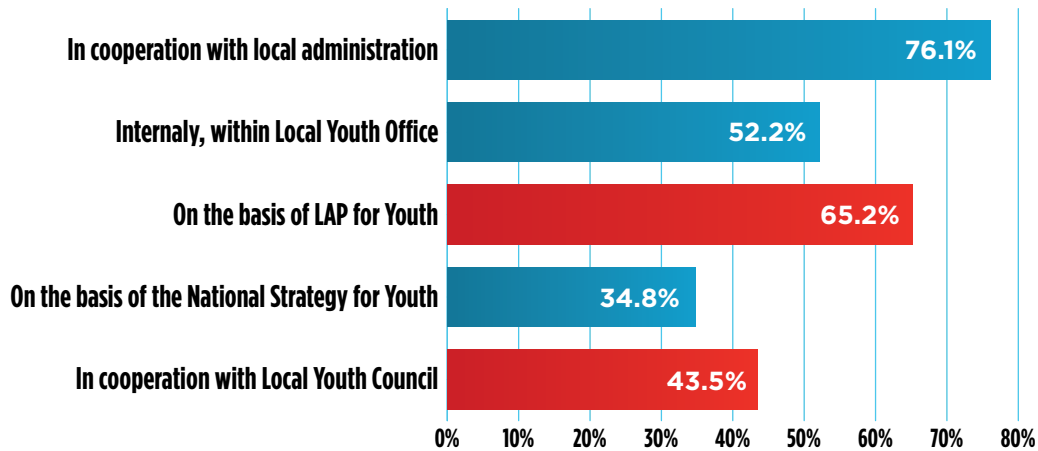
Figure 14. During the previous 5 years, has your Youth Office been involved in the implementation of any of the international projects dealing with young people in your area:



Source: Author's

According to the results of the survey, we found that the activities of the Youth Office are usually planned in agreement with the heads of the city administration and/or on the basis of the activities defined per LAP for Youth.

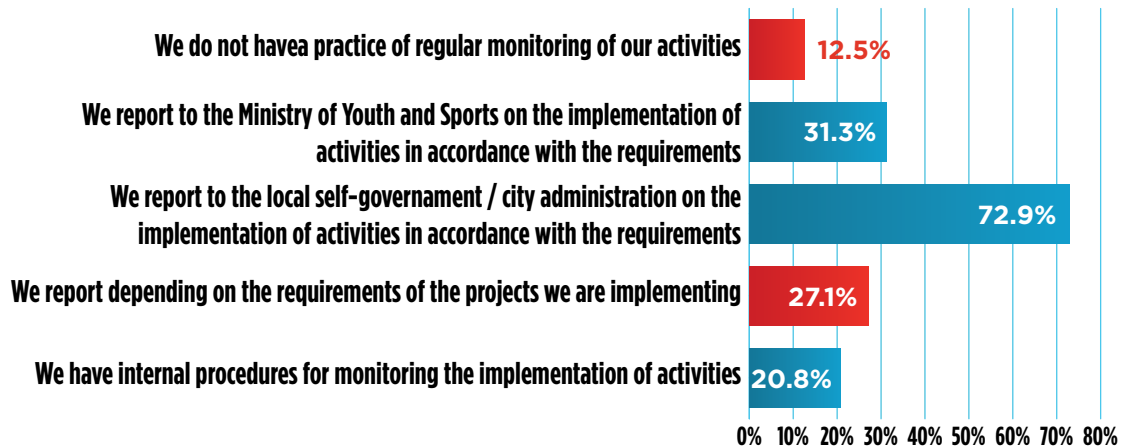
Figure 15. How do you plan the activities of your Local Youth office?



Source: Authors' calculation

It could be observed that local youth office management practices in general are very different. On the question "How do you monitor the implementation of the planned activities?" 35 representatives answered that they report to the local self-government or city administration about implementation of activities and 15 local youth offices declared that they report to MoYS about implementation of activities with regard to requirements. Around 20% of the respondents stated that their offices monitor the activities in accordance with the established internal monitoring procedures.

Figure 16. How does your Local Youth Office monitor implementation of the activities?



Source: Authors' calculation

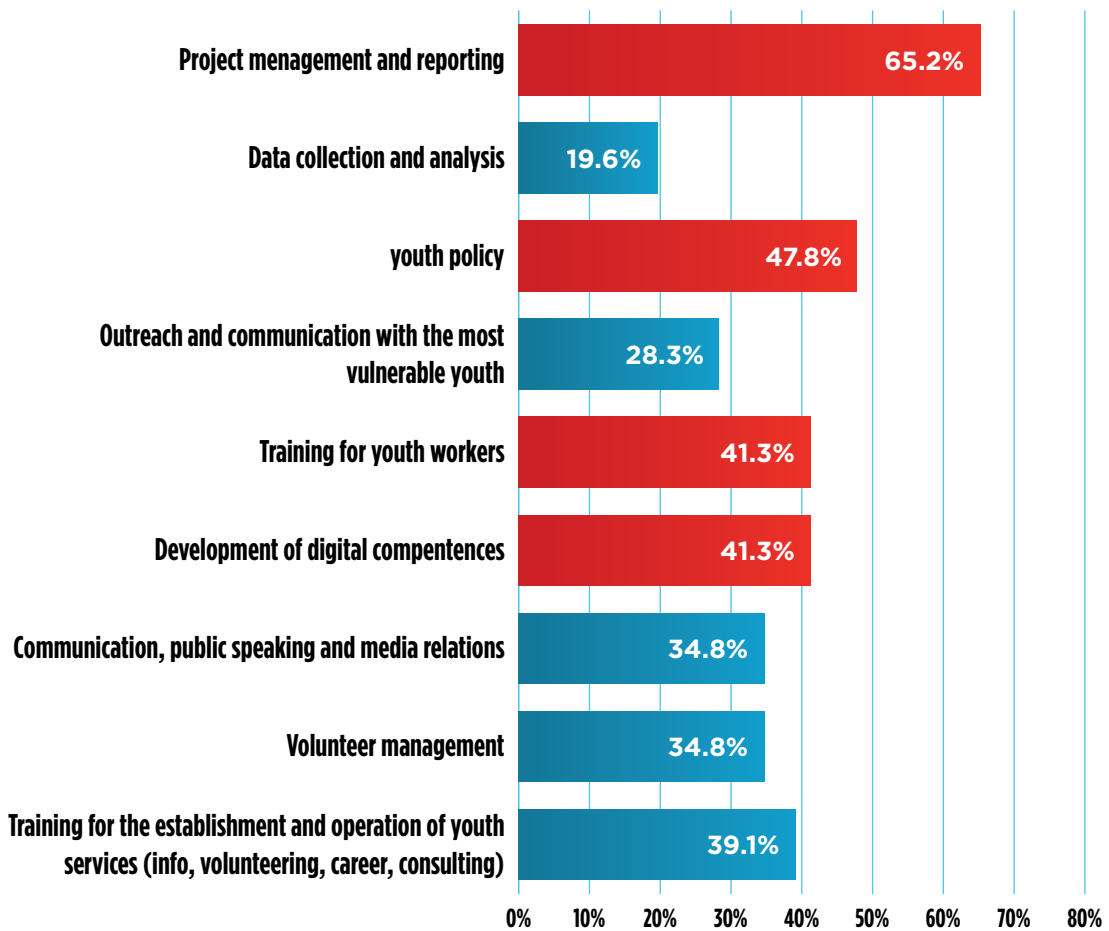
In general, local youth offices are not considered experienced in terms of realization of the project activities funded by international donors. When asked whether their youth office was involved in youth projects funded by international donors, 18% of the total number of offices answered "Yes" (i.e., 8 out of 48 youth offices).

Raising local youth office capacities is particularly important if aiming to provide greater contribution not only Youth Guarantee implementation, but the local youth policy in general. When asked to suggest the three most effective capacity building activities, local youth

office representatives indicated strengthening human resources through thematic trainings, workshops and seminars, providing more funding for their work and improvement of the local infrastructure including youth clubs and other premises for gathering youth.

The following graph depicts training topics that would be, according to the local youth office representatives, the most effective in terms of raising local youth office capacities.

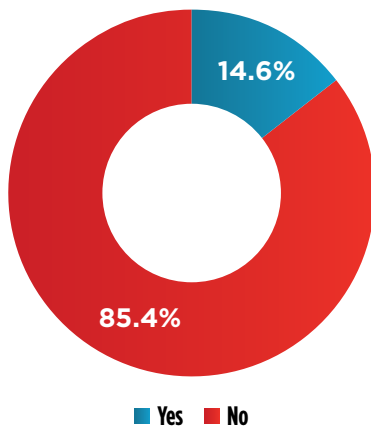
Figure 17. If you or your colleagues would have the opportunity to attend trainings as representatives of the local youth office, list 3 that in your opinion would have the greatest impact on developing the capacity of your Local youth office:



Source: Authors' calculation

Capacities of the local youth offices to support Youth Guarantee implementation are questionable for several reasons. Firstly, local youth offices do not have regular practice of obtaining data on vulnerable youth. Around 85% of the youth office representatives responded that they do not have data on the size, structure and characteristics of youth in NEET status in their municipality (Figure 18).

Figure 18. Do you have data on size, structure and characteristics of youth in NEET status in your municipality?



Source: Authors' calculation

Experience in conducting projects dealing with youth in NEET status is also considered rare. When asked if they have implemented projects for NEET youth, 85% (41 out of 48) of all youth offices answered that they did not have such experience, while only 15% did. Additionally, only 56% of offices answered that they communicate with inactive young people, while 44% maintain no contact or communication with those who are not active in the labour market. Since only around one in six offices report implementing such projects, being the sizable minority, it would

seem that youth offices could be more engaged in working with NEET youth as well as those who are inactive in the labour market.

General conclusions

1) Insufficient and diverse capacities of local youth offices

- ◆ One glaring area in which local youth offices clearly need to be improved is their **financing and budgets**. The majority report that their only source of financing, apart from often modest local budgets, is the MoYS and a small number state that they receive no funding whatsoever of any kind. This self-reporting is alarming as it shows that they do not possess the competencies to apply for further funding and are receiving no training to do so. More generous funding from the local budget sources is therefore needed in order to ensure sustainability of their work as well as to provide resources required for capacity building, extension of their scope of activities and supporting YG related efforts.
- ◆ Many local youth offices **do not have the facilities needed** to carry out their activities. Only 60% of local youth officers confirmed that there are active youth clubs established within their municipalities. This further complicates the establishment of direct communication with vulnerable youth. Analysis shows that, through implementation of their activities, 62.5% of the local youth offices cover less than 20% of the youth population in their area.
- ◆ **Data on youth in NEET status** are not regularly collected which represents a serious burden in terms of developing evidence-based local youth policies. Most of the offices develop annual plans on ad-hoc basis and in communication with local administration rather than on local action plans for youth. Monitoring and evaluation activities are far beyond the capacity of the most of local youth offices.
- ◆ There is an urgent need for **capacity building of the local staff** involved in youth policy issues. Although there are notable differences among different municipalities, most of the local offices need trainings in the field of project management (65.2%), development of digital competences (41.3%) and youth policy including youth workers education (47.8%)

- ◆ Results indicate **lack of experience in dealing with youth in NEET status**. Only 15% of the local youth offices did have experience in realizing this type of interventions, while slightly above half of the respondents confirmed maintaining communication with inactive youth.

2) Position of the Local youth offices within the local administration

- ◆ As with many social issues, **NEET and youth unemployment is a national issue that needs to be solved on the local level**. According to the results, small number of youth are involved in activities of local youth offices, one of the reasons it could be no data about them. There seems to be insufficient concern over at-risk youth as well as vulnerable groups expressed by local youth offices and local municipalities in general. This area, given its importance in social equity, is essential but does not receive the attention it should deserve.
- ◆ Moreover, not being involved in these areas creates further gaps between youth and vulnerable youth. More precisely, not having youth or NEET youth as **a priority in local strategic documents** also points to the limited nature in which local governments approach the issue. Not having a systematic work placement of youth coordinator, no full-time employees in almost half of the analyzed offices provide additional argument that youth policy has not been set as local development priority.

3) Lack of cooperation between local youth policy stakeholders

- ◆ There is a general concern with **cross-channel communication among all stakeholders**, actors and parties. It could be noted that the most of local youth offices reported frequent and exceptional cooperation with MoYS, civil society and educational institution. Although assessed as satisfying, cooperation with other actors, particularly ones related to unemployment issues, is insufficient. Only about 50% of local youth offices collaborate with NES and Centers for Social Work, while one in three respondents confirmed collaboration with private sector or regional development agencies.

3.2. Youth offices – results of the semi-structured interviews

In order to obtain a more detailed picture on the capacities and needs of the Local Youth Offices concerning the potential implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Serbia, 5 in-depth semi-structured interviews with local youth office representatives were held. The results of the interviews conducted provided us with richer detail on the general principles of their work, common problems they face when coordinating youth policies locally, including when they deal with vulnerable youth. In addition, interviews were structured to provide self-assessment of the local youth office capacities and specific needs.

Local Youth Offices in Serbia - Problems and Needs

One issue is the **organizational structure** of local youth offices and its interaction with local administration. In order for their work to be able to achieve its aims, local youth offices must receive support from local government that buttresses the budgets the office's activ-

ities as well a local infrastructure support (in particular, facilities and premises in which local youth may gather, such as youth centers and youth clubs), as well as support to develop the human resource capacities of the local youth offices themselves.

Interviewee: "We were happy to enjoy support from the local government from the very beginning of our work. We did not have to pay administrative costs for our work. Local administration agreed to co-finance project activities related to building organizational infrastructure which is sometimes required in projects funded by international donors."

Since local youth offices are technically part of local government, local youth-office priorities are directly affected by those of the local government. Given the range of issues local communities face, youth offices conduct diverse activities in response to these issues which, itself, influence the number of employees of the local youth office, the competences required of local coordinators and the degree of freedom they have to carry out these activities. As a result, the **overall scope of the work of local youth offices** rarely deals directly with vulnerable youth. Sometimes, local youth office coordinators only perform activities delegated to them, leaving them unable to respond proactively to other challenges. Job insecurity and insufficient long-term planning partially contribute to frequent turnover in terms of personnel. Exacerbating the instability facing human resources in local youth offices is that any who do work proactively and achieve deliverables/results are targeted by other areas of administration to deal with "more urgent" social issues. Such cannibalization seriously hinders the work of both local youth offices and local governments.

Interviewee: "Having minimal standardization of our work in place would help us in providing systemic support to vulnerable youth as well as be able to conduct comparative analyses with other youth offices in Serbia. We could learn from each other, share experiences and benefit from each other's experiences."

Interviewee: "We mainly deal with successful and active youth, providing them information on scholarships and grants. We also assess their applications. When it comes to training or workshops for youth, we do not have any resources to directly promote the potential of inactive and uninformed youth."

As **Local youth offices mainly carry out their youth policies 'internally'**, coordinators rarely coordinate with other local-youth policy stakeholders, including the NES and private sector. The coordinators interviewed stated that they are unfamiliar with the work of similar offices across Serbia. More alarmingly, communication channels have been insufficiently developed, which may be shown by their lack of any presence on social media. Their abilities to reach out to a greater share of youth are thereby hindered.

Local youth offices do not carry out data collection as a regular practice, which severely limits the abilities of local youth office coordinators from obtaining an accurate picture on the needs local youth have. The interviewees concede that such basic research is rarely conducted due to operating under a limited budget. They also report that local communities are not open to responding to inquiries on associated issues or problems, such as domestic violence, drug abuse or sexual violence, which, in turn, worsens their abilities to create reliable databases as local communities feel they must shroud themselves in secrecy. Finally, local youth coordinators also do not always possess the tools, skills or training in order to collect and analyze research.

Interviewee: *“We often choose to outsource activities we are unable to carry out due to our limited expertise by hiring researchers or civil sector representatives. For instance, next week we will be holding a focus group with civil society organizations in order to analyze domestic violence.”*

Interviewee: *“We have no data on youth that are outside the NES register. Data on youth emigrating to Italy, Austria and Germany and returning to Serbia are not collected and we neither have any information on their characteristics.”*

Local Youth Office Capacities needed to support the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Serbia

There is a notable **insufficiency in developed human capacities**, especially among local youth coordinators who rarely attain the skills required for successful interaction with the most vulnerable youth. Local youth office coordinators from the focus groups cite workshops that would help develop institutional competences including the acquisition of skills to develop project applications, youth worker skills and data management analysis.

Interviewee: *“In order to acquire the funding needed to carry out projects and achieve their aims, we must also apply for projects but most of us are unable to do so since we do not have the skills or competences to do so. Conversely, we do not receive any support from other sectors of the local municipal government, particularly those in charge of developing project applications.”*

Another important barrier is **an inadequate understanding of youth policy in general**, its importance, objectives and the role it has in contributing to local development goals. Supporting the implementation of the Youth Guarantee locally requires that local youth offices be connected with all local stakeholders and maintain a central position in regard to establishing and facilitating institutional links between youth, youth organizations, civil society, the private sector and supporting institutions (such as development agencies and the Chamber of Commerce).

In order to provide sustainable and consistent support to local youth, local youth offices are required to conduct continuous and evidence-informed policies, primarily based on local strategic documents. Unfortunately, current practice indicates relatively low institutional memory. While the work of local youth offices is highly dependent on the capacity of coordinators, frequent and high turnover of coordinators sometimes results in the loss of institutional knowledge and experience. Constant replacement is also exacerbated by a lack of evaluation of local strategic documents.

Interviewee: *“We have no regular practice of evaluating local action plans for youth. Sometimes, we analyse the results achieved when required to do so.”*

Interviewee: *“I would like to contribute to achieving results in my community before I leave for another position.”*

Successful local youth offices – some insights into examples of good practice

Projects **gathering several youth policy stakeholders** and particularly those connecting stakeholders from other cities and partners from abroad serve as examples of effective local youth policies that have developed the capacities of the local youth offices.

Interviewee: “Our coordinator is quite proactive in applying for projects. Since he has been able to obtain several projects funded through international donors, his work has been recognized within local administration as he helped us attract the resources needed to complete crucial infrastructure projects. Among others, within such project initiatives, we have been able to work closely with partners from Italy which has given us better input on how to plan our work.”

Local municipalities that have a **systematized position of a local youth office coordinator as well as that have an additional two or three employees** in charge of conducting local youth policy are able to cover more youth issues, including addressing the needs of the most vulnerable youth. Unfortunately, this is very rarely the case in Serbia. Dealing with the vulnerable youth is often fragmented among multiple actors, which worsens the issues as no single actor in charge is able to comprehend the policies aimed at improving vulnerable youth.

Interviewee: “The Ministry of Youth and Sports [of the Republic of Serbia] is an essential actor due to its contribution to local actors involved in youth policy. Changes to youth policy the Ministry initiated in 2007 was a good step forward but requires further local institutional support. I believe that the Ministry needs to provide recommendations for local governments on standardizing Local Youth Office activities.”

Interviewee: “We have 4 employees in our local youth office which helps the office delegate tasks to the employee specialized in the area - such as in ecology, strengthening employability skills, culture or security.”

Interviewee: “We provide training workshops for local youth in order to strengthen their employability skills. These educate on digital skills and foreign languages, among other areas. We had around 100 applicants in the last round. We do not specifically promote our activities, instead youth themselves apply.”

As concerns data collection, **bottom-up practices** that obtaining field information from volunteers and youth that are well informed about local youth issues are essential. Local governments that have pursued data collection in this manner have been better able to detect local problems beyond those noted in local youth policy.

Interviewee: “Occasionally, we hold events with volunteers, representatives of youth associations and youth. These are based almost exclusively on the input we obtain from local youth.”

Formal support from national institutions is beneficial in terms of involving other local stakeholders and their readiness to respond to and participated in local initiatives. Working with and through the MoYS is particularly important in order to assure that projects meet their aims.

4. THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE CONTEXT OF YG IMPLEMENTATION

4.1. Results of the semi-structured interviews

Respecting the heterogeneity of the youth in NEET situation including determinants of their status and diverse set of challenges and barriers they are currently facing or could face when entering the labour market, interventions aimed at their activation requires custom-based, proactive and innovative solutions which often include direct approach. In order to capture best practice when dealing with youth in NEET status in Serbia 10 in-depth interviews with representatives of the civil society organizations were held. Selection criteria included experience in providing direct support and developing research skills of the NEET youth as well as geographical distribution of their residence taking into account that determinants of their status are usually different respecting specific local circumstances. Out of 10 interviewed CSO, 3 of them are operating in South and East Serbia, 3 from Sumadija and Western Serbia, while 3 and 1 being from Belgrade and Novi Sad respectively, but active throughout the whole Serbia.

Results of the conducted interviews provided us with more detailed picture on the approaches civil society organisations used to detect and initiate contact with NEET youth. Additionally, we have learnt about the practices that proved to be effective in terms of developing skills of the NEET youth and common pitfalls civil society representatives experienced in the field. Finally, dealing with youth unemployment issues requires strong capacities of the civil society organisations. For that reason, conducting interviews also aimed at assessing needs and capacities of the civil society to deal with youth unemployment including the most vulnerable youth subgroups.

Capturing CSO best practices aimed at outreach, activation and strengthening employability skills

Interviewees underlined as very important having custom-based approach when aiming to attract specific NEET youth subgroups. In general, **fieldwork** has been proved as the most effective approach if reaching the most vulnerable inactive youth is considered.

Interviewee: *"We approach them directly in places where they are spending their free time."*

At the same time, lack of fieldwork approach has been considered as one of the main reasons for failure of the well-designed interventions, since the target group of youth failed to capture the most vulnerable youth that were supposed to be addressed.

Interviewee: *"It is my impression that we do not even reach "a real NEETs". I think that most of civil society organisations deal with interested youth."*

One stop shop model proved to be very effective type of intervention for certain youth subgroups, especially those residing in rural areas. However, one stop shop models require preparatory activities since some of the youth in NEET situation do not have basic digital skills, do not know a word of English, etc.

Interviewee: *"I have experienced a situation where 20 youth faced serious difficulties connecting to ZOOM platform. Then I have realized that one girl for example do not know a word of English, even the simple words such as download or OK."*

The greatest benefit of one stop shop models refers to involvement of different local actors including local municipality which enable design of the integrated service including social service support, health support, etc.

Youth in rural areas are particularly vulnerable, especially women. Several CSO representatives stated **local community officers** as particularly important outreach tool.

Interviewee: *"Officers employed in local economic development office provided us with contact of the local community officers that are familiar with youth in NEET status in their neighborhood. Otherwise, we would not be able to detect them through traditional outreach mechanisms. Therefore, we organized meetings with 20-30 of the youth in NEET status. There were some drop-outs, but we succeeded in conducting soft skills training and helped them enroll internship in local companies. Some of them found a job, whereas other established contact with NES branch in their town."*

Developing soft skills is particularly important since youth in NEET status often lack self-confidence and/or are afraid getting out of the comfort zone. This could be the case due to their long-term NEET status or some form of violence they experienced in family or local environment. Therefore, one stop shop model should combine preparatory activities in terms of developing soft skills followed by specific job skills, strengthening entrepreneurship skills or technical skills related to job search.

Student companies are good examples to stimulate exchange of experience and knowledge sharing between former and current NEETs. Former NEETs provide mentoring support and share their experience of successful transition to the labour market.

In some local communities, CSO used to experiment with other outreach mechanisms such as billboards. They proved to be particularly effective in small rural communities where there are 2 or billboards and changing the billboard content intrigue local citizens.

Specific characteristics of the local economic development and comparative advantages of the local economy should be considered when designing outreach and activation measures.

Interviewee: *“Since our local economy have comparative advantages in food processing (eg. fruits) and metal industry, we have established contacts with local companies to obtain knowledge about required job profiles and possibilities to develop specific prequalification programmes. As for the self-employment measures in the field of agriculture, we needed external support from the local authorities or companies (eg. arable land) to set up the capacity building activities, trainings, etc.”*

Seasonal jobs are very important tool to motivate inactive youth to activate since they could provide solid incentives helping youth to understand benefits of entering the labour market. Therefore, they should be considered as steppingstone towards sustainable activation of the youth in NEET status.

Successful interventions often followed **multisector approach** and **collaboration of local stakeholders** combining strengthening employability skills with removing other barriers preventing youth to enter the labour market. Different barriers include, but are not limited to lack of the self-esteem, security issues, etc. Such interventions require previously agreed participation of the local municipality (eg. local youth office, youth council, local economic development office, center for social support, etc.), NES local branch, regional development agency/chamber of commerce and local association of entrepreneurs.

Interviewee: *“Our intervention aimed at development of curriculum for outreach, activation and youth employment was a good example of mechanism to support local youth employment. It was particularly effective in the context of active participation of NES branch in the project activities recognizing the benefits of the intervention. CSO links with NES are particularly important to ensure effectiveness of the youth employability interventions, but often missing.”*

Interviewee: *„Activities of strengthening employability of youth in NEET status in rural areas should be developed taking into account both specific characteristics of the NEET subgroup as well as characteristics of the local economy. Programmes that combined inputs on jobs in deficit in the local labour market obtained from the local institutions, particularly local companies and the NES local branch and prequalification trainings, courses and internships proved to be very effective. Such programmes need to be carefully designed in cooperation with local companies and require systemic support of the local municipality.”*

Capacities of the CSO to deal with youth unemployment issues

Key problem of civil society organisations dealing with youth in NEET status refers to **lack of funding** which further brings **sustainability issues**. Successful interventions are those being implemented in the long-term. However, long-term approach requires experienced team of local CSO and sustainable funding.

Interviewee: *“We need programme financing of the activities aimed at strengthening youth skills that market demands.”*

Another issue refers to non-transparent and unclear procedures of granting, particularly at the local level. CSO representatives argued that granting procedures are strongly influenced by political affiliation as the main criteria.

Interviewee: *“There is a common situation that well known and experienced organisations receive small grants amounting to 30 to 50 ths RSD, whereas some recently established institutions receive large grants even not being member of youth associations such as KOMS or NAPOR.”*

Interviewees shared impression that there is a lack of CSO dealing with NEET in youth status over the long-term period. It is a “circulus vicious” issue since local CSO need sustainable funding for capacity development, whereas receiving grants sometimes depends on the already established capacities. As a result, there is a small number of CSO having adequate human and technical capacities in the field.

Interviewee: *“Out 109 members of KOMS, only about 10% of them are providing contribution to its work.”*

Insufficient capacities of the local CSO, absence of the support from the local institutions and limited sources of funding require alternative capacity building approaches. As per CSO interviewees, **strengthening of the networking practice and learning from experienced CSO** may be one of the potential solutions. Some of the CSO already follow approach and measures implemented through Youth Guarantee Programme across the EU and they could be used as a role model for further capacity building activities.

Interviewee: *“Programmes such as “Education to Employment” that involve collaboration of several CSOs are particularly important since they combine knowledge and resources and enable knowledge sharing practices. This also helps avoiding losing resources related to “stop and go” costs.”*

Interviewee: *“We launched a call for CSO to propose youth employment interventions. I am completely assured in developed capacities of the CSO dealing youth unemployment that applied to the grant. However, there is a notable differences between experienced CSO and those being active for only couple of years in terms of the quality of application and envisaged approach.”*

Interviewee: *“It could be noticed rising trend of civil society organisations interested in dealing with youth employment issues in general. Unlike formal institutions, due to their flexibility and adaptability, civil society organisations are capable of reaching the most vulnerable youth subgroups.”*

Deficit of youth workers is also considered important area for improvement of the local CSO capacities influencing quality of the realized interventions.

Interviewee: *“Currently, there are two trainings offered for certification of the youth workers and development of their skills, provided by NAPOR and Center for Youth Work. Further expansion of such trainings is critical in terms of developing CSO capacities in the long term.”*

Critical success factors and barriers when dealing with youth in NEET status from the CSO perspective

Among the main issues affecting success of the youth employment interventions, CSO representatives underlined insufficient collaboration with local stakeholders, poorly designed

calls for projects, lack of available data on NEET in youth status, undeveloped practice of monitoring and evaluation of youth policy.

Success of the Civil society organisations directly depends on the **quality of their collaboration with stakeholders at the local level**, including Councils for career management and counselling, regional development agencies, NES, etc. Relationship between CSOs and policy makers is often characterized by the **lack of trust**. CSO representatives argued that their potentials are not sufficiently recognized. When invited to participate in policy making processes through public discussions and working group memberships, they often participate formally without possibility to provide substantial impact on policy development. Local authorities need to be more involved in supporting local initiatives led by the civil society and local youth institutions, not only by providing financial support, but facilitating the process and connecting local actors.

Interviewee: "Although our intervention has been approved by the local parliament and supported by the local municipality, we face difficulties with regard to implementation. The main problem refers to possibility of interviewing unemployed youth since this activity is under exclusive mandate of the NES. Depending of the local NES branch approval and their decision to delegate some of the activities under their portfolio to the CSO sector."

At the local level, municipalities often provide public works measure to support unemployed vulnerable population. Although public works are perceived by vulnerable population as important measure, these measures deal with consequences rather than aiming to tackle the cause of the problem. Additionally, civil society representatives assessed this type of measures as a tool used to promote political attitudes or even put vulnerable population under control.

Interviewee: "We have detected several examples that political party membership was mandatory informal criteria to qualify for public works."

Interviewee: "Some of the NEET youth subgroups require specifically targeted support. Youth with disabilities as a particularly vulnerable group should be positively discriminated as stipulated by the Law on Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities. According to the Law, employers that employ 20 and more persons have obligation to employ at least one person with disabilities or to pay penalties amounting to half of the average salary. It is my impression that law enforcement is low."

With regard to **project calls for CSO and projects aimed at strengthening NEET employability**, CSO representatives stated two important issues. First refers to the NES measures which do not envisage positive discrimination of the youth in NEET status. Additionally, NES does not provide measures particularly targeting NEET youth but only youth in general as vulnerable group. Secondly, some of the interviewees shared their impression with regard to the calls provided by the MoYS stating that the Ministry favours project that directly employ youth which should not be their job.

Interviewee: "MoYS provides adverse incentive to the civil society and youth organisations as it should put accent on strengthening skills rather than finding jobs. I think that this should not be their job. There should be developed calls that positively discriminate

youth in NEET status and their preparation to participate in the measures provided by the NES.”

Practice of monitoring and evaluation of youth policies in Serbia is not developed. Conducting impact evaluations may contribute to better understanding of the most important determinants and policies that were particularly effective in terms of strengthening youth employability resulting in finding “good-quality” jobs.

Interviewee: “If we are experiencing reduction of the NEET youth we don’t have clue about the specific reasons. Whether some programmes and specific measures contributed to that or it was due to emigration.”

Interviewee: “Job quality is equally important as finding job. Dealing with NEETs is an “expensive sport”. We need to reduce the amount of youth entering the NEET status, to be proactive. Meanwhile, we need to know which measures are particularly effective, since we want to avoid situation that our support help youth to find low-quality job as an outcome”.

Directly related to monitoring and evaluation, and particularly important for conducting monitoring and evaluation of NEET youth interventions is obtaining **comparative data on the size of the youth in NEET status** and their characteristics including specific NEET youth subgroups. Data on youth presented within Eurostat or UN database webpage could be used as an example of good practice in that context.

One of the insufficiently used measures refers to establishment of the social enterprises. Social entrepreneurship practice is perceived as very important in terms of developing soft skills and steppingstone for further development of employability skills.

Interviewee: “The environment for the establishment of social enterprises is not encouraging and CSOs rarely engage in such types of ventures because they are too risky or do not have the capacity to implement such ideas aimed at improving the position of vulnerable youth.”

Interviewee: “Certain groups of young people isolate themselves from the labor market because they are afraid that they will be exposed to violence, discrimination, etc. (LGBT population, Roma, former prisoners, etc.). A certificate of no criminal record is required very often and for types of work whose performance should not be conditioned by that certificate. Social enterprise could be solution to solve this type of barriers.”

5. POSITION AND NEEDS OF YOUTH IN SERBIA IN THE CONTEXT OF YG IMPLEMENTATION

5.1. Analysis of secondary data Labor Force Survey (LFS)

From 1995, while in 2015 survey switches to a continuous periodicity, Labor Force Survey (LFS) provides an overview of the Republic of Serbia's labor market as well as any changes it may have undergone, detailing the sociodemographic characteristics of those who are employed, unemployed or are not active, which is implemented in accordance with the standards and recommendations of the International Labor Organization (ILO), as well as with the regulations of the European Bureau of Statistics (Eurostat). The LFS' compliance with these methodologies, definitions and classifications following international standards therefore allows for the data obtained to be analyzed in comparison to similar data obtained within Member States of the EU. Since 2014, the LFS of the Republic of Serbia has gathered data on those who are either unemployed or not undergoing education or training, placing them into sets of 15 to 24 years of age as well as expanded sets of 15 to 29. "Unemployed", under this data, includes youth who are not employed, whether they are officially registered unemployed persons or their answers mark the respondent as being "economically inactive". According to the criteria of the Survey, youth who fall into the NEET category have neither worked, nor sought employment or have been undergoing any form of formal or informal education in the last four weeks. According to the Eurostat, the NEET rate is calculated as follows:

$$\text{NEET rate} = \frac{(\text{Total number of youth} - \text{number of employed youth} - \text{number of unemployed youth who are in education and training})}{\text{Total number of youth}} \times 100$$

The probability and risks of becoming NEET have been mainly methodologically investigated using statistical data of the LFS to take into account varied socio-economic individual characteristics (such as gender, age, level of education, urban/rural origin). In order to analyze NEET characteristics to define a youth profile, secondary data for 2019 and 2020 were used from the LFS provided by the Statistical Office of the RS.

Descriptive statistics of the LFS yield clearer definitions of NEET youth in the Republic of Serbia in regards to:

- 1) who they are
- 2) their educational background
- 3) where they live
- 4) the makeup of their gender

According to the 2019 LFS report, the total number of NEET youth (15-24 years of age) in 2019 was 109,000, or 15.3% of the total youth population. Of the total number of NEET youth in 2019, 53,600 were unemployed. Males were more likely to be unemployed (32,200) NEET compared to females (21,400). In 2019, NEET females were more likely to be inactive in the labor market than NEET males (33,000 vs 22,600, respectively).

In 2020, as in the rest of the world, the coronavirus pandemic caused large-scale disruptions across society, heavily impacting education and employment. As a predictable result, there was a consequent increase in the number of NEET youth. In 2019, NEET 15 to 24 years of age were calculated to be 109,000 which grew to 112,000 or 15.9% of the age group in 2020. Comparably, the number of NEET youth of the same age who were actively seeking employment fell from 53,600 in 2019 to 47,000 in 2020. In 2020, male NEET rate (15-24) was higher than females.

The NEET rate increased from 19% to 20% in 2020 for youth 15 to 29 years of age. Also, the female NEET rate is higher than that for males, for youth 15-29 years of age. According to the data from 2020, increase of the NEET rate is recorded among both gender groups. Among males 15 to 29, the NEET rate increased from 17.1% to 18.4% or 1.3 percentage points, while females NEET rate increased from 20.9% (2019) to 21.6% (2020).

Inactivity in the labor market was also more likely among women (in 2020 was 14.4% for youth age from 15 to 29, and 9.6%, for youth age from 15 to 24) than men (in 2020 was 8.9% for youth age 15 to 29, and 8.8%, for youth age from 15 to 24). In contrast, there are more unemployed men (9.5%) who fall into the category of NEET higher than for women (7.3%).

In 2020, inactive young women and men grew while a simultaneous decrease was seen in unemployed young NEET women and men. Whereas the share of inactive young women 15 to 29 years of age jumped from 12.9% (2019) to 14.4% (2020), the share of unemployed young women who are NEET fell from 8% (2019) to 7.3% (2020). This decrease matches unemployed men (15 -29) who fell from 10.4% (2019) to 9.5% (2020).

Table 5. NEET by age and gender

	Total				Male				Female			
	2019		2020		2019		2020		2019		2020	
	15-24	15-29	15-24	15-29	15-24	15-29	15-24	15-29	15-24	15-29	15-24	15-29
Unemployed	7.5%	9.2%	6.7%	8.4%	8.7%	10.4%	8.1%	9.5%	6.2%	8%	5.2%	7.3%
Person outside of labor force (inactive persons)	7.8%	9.7%	9.2%	11.6%	6.1%	6.7%	8.8%	8.9%	9.6%	12.9%	9.6%	14.4%
NEET rate	15.3%	19%	15.9%	20%	14.9%	17.1%	17%	18.4%	15.8%	20.9%	14.8%	21.6%

Source: Author's calculation based on LFS, Eurostat, 2020.

A peculiarity of NEET, according to the data, is that a higher education results in an equally higher likelihood of being categorized as NEET. The highest percentage of NEET youth was recorded among those who possessed a tertiary education. Among those 15 to 24 years of age, it was 26.1% (2020) while for those 15 to 29 years of age it was 23.8% (2020). For those who have obtained only an upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education (Levels 3-4) in 2020 the percentage was 21.8% but 20% for those 15 to 24 years of age. NEET youth 15 to 29 years of age who have obtained the lowest level of education (less than primary, primary and lower secondary education - levels 0-2) make up 14.5% (2020) of all NEET youth but only 9.3% (2020) among those 15 to 24 years of age.

Table 6. NEET by age and education level, 2019 and 2020

NEET by age and educational attainment level		SERBIA	
		15-24	15-29
NEET RATE (All levels)	2019	15.3%	19%
	2020	15.9%	20%
Less than primary, primary and lower secondary education (Levels 0-2)	2019	10.5%	15.1%
	2020	9.3%	14.5%
Upper Secondary and Post-Secondary Non-Tertiary and Tertiary Education (Levels 3-8)	2019	18.6%	20.5%
	2020	20.4%	22.2%
Upper Secondary and Post-Secondary Non-Tertiary Education (Levels 3-4)	2019	18.2%	19.7%
	2020	20%	21.8%
Tertiary Education (Levels 5-8)	2019	25.2%	23.7%
	2020	26.1%	23.8%

Source: Author's calculation based on LFS, Eurostat, 2020.

When analyzed on the basis of urbanization, in 2020 NEET youth living in rural areas is higher (from 19% for those 15 to 24 years of age and 23.3% for those 15 to 29). Urban NEET youth is the lowest (11.2% for 15 to 24 in 2020; 15.5% for 15 to 29 in 2020). According to the data across all categories, it must be noted that Rural NEET is sharply on the rise, while for urban NEET it has remained relatively unchanged.

In 2019, NEET 15 to 24 years of age living in rural areas was higher for women (20.7%) than for men (17%). Yet, this same ratio narrowed in 2020, whereby both NEET males and females grew (19.4% and 18.6%, respectively). Expanding on the age group for those 15-29, rural female NEET youth barrel saw a change from 2019 to 2020 (26.5 to 26.7%, respectively) while the percentage for rural male NEET grew from 18.2% in 2019 to 20.3% in 2020.

There is a higher share of NEET male urban youth 15 to 24 years of age than for female urban youth of the same age, even being equal for men and women from 15 to 29.

Table 7. NEET by age and degree of urbanization, 2019 and 2020

		SERBIA					
		15-24			15-29		
		Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Cities	2019	11.2%	11.9%	10.5%	15.5%	15.2%	15.8%
	2020	11.2%	13%	9.4%	15.5%	15.2%	15.7%
Towns and suburbs	2019	15.7%	15.4%	16.1%	19.1%	17.9%	20.4%
	2020	17.4%	18.2%	16.5%	20.1%	19.6%	22.4%
Rural Areas	2019	18.7%	17%	20.7%	22.1%	18.2%	26.5%
	2020	19%	19.4%	18.6%	23.3%	20.3%	26.7%

Source: Author's calculation based on LFS, Eurostat, 2020.

Few surveys exist in the RS that analyze secondary NEET data as well as their characteristics. Despite many negative trends affecting NEET youth, most employment data tend to indicate that the NEET youth rate has been gradually declining over the last few years. Although it is certainly a good sign, it should also be borne in mind that this may merely be a sign of limitations being reached by first tackling so-called "low-hanging fruit" of NEET youth which had been spurred on by positive economic growth in general. However, research that analyzes the socio-economic characteristics of NEET youth may be important for decision makers when drafting and implementing active employment policy measures.

Our research, focused on Serbia separated into sets of youth both 15 to 24 and 15 to 29 years of age, came to significant conclusions, also mirrored in our results of the ARS 2019 and 2020 secondary data:

Rural youth are at a higher risk of being NEET compared to urban youth. There is a significantly larger share of female NEET from rural areas than for males, but only for those 15 to 29. According to the results of research by Stanojevic & Pavlovic (2021) who applied logistic regression analysis for youth 15 to 29, there is a much higher likelihood that a rural female youth will become NEET (1.5 times higher) in comparison to an urban male. Furthermore, the number of NEET youth living in the regions of Šumadija and Western Serbia, as well as from Southern and Eastern Serbia, is higher in comparison to those from Belgrade and Vojvodina (Ognjenovic, Kuzmanov, Pavlovic, 2021). **Rural females (15 to 29) who only possess a primary education are the most likely to be NEET.** For the same age group, the share of urban male NEET and female NEET are the same. According to a survey analyzing urban and rural regions, NEET in Serbia are 3.7% larger than the EU average for urban areas, specifically cities, yet it is 6.9% larger for towns and suburbs as well as 7.2%

for rural areas. This is further evidence that the rural regions in Serbia are largely underdeveloped compared to the EU average (Rural NEETs in Serbia, COST Action, 2019).

Young females are more likely to be NEET than young males. Young women are at a 2.5 higher risk compared to young men. O'Reilly et al. (2018) point out that the probability of being NEET is greater for females, as well as for those who have assessed their health as "poor", immigrants/internally displaced persons and those whose parents have a lower level of education or are divorced.

From all age categories, women are more inactive, particularly those who are NEET. The situation in the RS is such that the number of NEET-unemployed decreased from 2019 to 2020 and NEET-Persons outside of the labor force are on the rise. NEET-unemployed people tend to be more male dominated.

The number of NEET-inactive in the labour market has been increasing among women aged 15 to 29, while, among women 15-24, it has not changed in the last 2 years. According to the survey conducted by Ana and Vlade Divac (2019), this is also related to employment, as young NEET women are more likely to be economically inactive (i.e., not actively looking for work) whose distinction becomes even more pronounced when it comes to those 25-29 years of age. Divacs' work has concluded that this may be attributed to differing gender roles related to caring for children and / or dependent family members.

5.2. Focus group 1 - Career management skills, employability and entrepreneurship

There have been many attempts to provide a clear and understandable definition of career management skills. Although sometimes differing in scope, context or complexity, all definitions explain career management skills as those required for an individual in order to manage and control his/her own career path and perspectives including being an entrepreneur as a legitimate career option. Career management skills as a broader concept encompass employability skills referring to transferable skills necessary for all employment. Support in developing career management skills, strengthening employability and fostering entrepreneurship competences are of vital importance for the successful implementation of the Youth Guarantee (YG) and effectiveness of youth employment policies in general. Such services represent important policy tools aiming to prevent youth from becoming NEET and facilitate easier school-to-labor transitioning. Strengthening career management skills as well as entrepreneurship skills required for self-employment targets at-risk students who are perceived to be at greater risk as school drop-outs or failing to acquire recognized qualifications. Furthermore, youth who are already NEET represent an important component of the labor market who need to (re)integrate and acquire competencies required for self-employment. In this context, they are often coupled with complementary support measures such as business start-up incentives and training in multiple fields.

Given this background of the importance of career management skills in relation to NEET youth, a focus group of all stakeholders across government and non-government sectors that deal with career management and youth entrepreneurship was conducted in order to

collect qualitative data on policies aimed at developing career management, employability and entrepreneurial skills of youth in Serbia. The focus group results covered 3 groups of questions to yield data that may lead to conclusions on (re)designing specific policy measures in the context of better implementing the YG in Serbia.

1. What are the main barriers hindering youth entrepreneurship in Serbia?

Conclusions:

Tax benefits: In general, the current business environment in Serbia is not considered to be favourable to start-ups. It would also appear that young entrepreneurs are also not positively discriminated. Although previous studies already do indicate that young entrepreneurs are particularly vulnerable due to a lack of experience and lower initial capital when launching their businesses, the focus group participants report that they find no tax benefits to be in place to cover their first years of their operations. The danger then exists that the initial investment of young entrepreneurs might then be easily spent to cover prohibitively high administrative costs within the first year(s) of their operations.

FG participant: *“High administrative costs and uncertainty forces youth to heavily consider starting business in neighboring economies.”*

Access to capital: Perceived as being too risky for traditional sources of finance, young entrepreneurs often face difficulties when trying to attract initial capital. However, youth in Serbia are at a double disadvantage as well, since, as with the wider business community, there is limited or no availability of alternative sources of capital to access for funding. While there may be existing platforms created to promote the exchange knowledge and ideas as well as to provide mentoring support, platform to help secure capital are still not effective in terms of attracting young entrepreneurs.

Insufficient access to information / guidance on starting a business: Focus group participants suggest that youth are still left in the dark on the exact administrative requirements needed to set up a businesses including any incentives to help them do so with in the first few years of operation. Despite the existing manuals and guidelines produced by the Serbian Chamber of Commerce, the Serbian Association of Employers as well as other business associations, and regular training provided by both Serbia’s NES and local youth organizations, youth still find it difficult to know exactly what is required to open their own business . There is also insufficient access to training and persistent low trust in institutions which depresses youth demand for support programmes. Institutional links remain undeveloped between business associations and associations representing interest of youth interests, particularly to the most vulnerable youth

FG participant: *“NEET youth have particularly low trust in institutions. They will hardly approach courses on their own.”*

Recommendations:

- ◆ Serbia’s tax system should create incentives, breaks and subsidies to make it more supportive towards young entrepreneurs. Tax burdens are heavy on young entrepreneurs, especially social

security contributions. All taxes should at least be temporarily minimized so that initial capital may be spent on the start-up itself and not on tax and administrative costs.

- ◆ Business associations should make a greater effort to promote entrepreneurial opportunities (trainings, mentoring, financial incentives and non-financial support) for young entrepreneurs and spread success stories. They should initiate closer institutional cooperation with youth offices and youth associations, especially in rural areas.

2. Policy measures to support youth entrepreneurship

Conclusions:

Current policy measures: Existing policies aiming to provide support to young entrepreneurs have been chiefly developed under the Strategy to Support the Development of Small and Medium Enterprises, Entrepreneurship and Competitiveness from 2015 to 2020. The Republic of Serbia's NES is central to the system as it is the institution providing financial and non-financial support measures including mentoring, counseling and support for grant applications. As policy, through active-labour measures, the NES of the Republic of Serbia prioritizes youth under 30. Complementary support programmes are also provided by the Serbian Chamber of Commerce, regional development agencies and through competitive tenders funded by the MoYS and implemented by both civil society and local youth organisations. Despite existing measures providing multiple pillars of support to meet the diverse needs entrepreneurs face when entering the market, young entrepreneurs share the same issue that all youth do in the Serbian market: inactive youth fall beneath the radar of the institutions.

FG participant: *"Around 70% of all who started business after having received training from the NES were only able to keep their business open 6 months, on average, after having set up their business."*

Entrepreneurship in a formal education system: Entrepreneurship has been incorporated into Serbia's formal education system since 2002, in which it is taught as achievable horizontal competences in primary and secondary education. A crucial foundation of the existing system is student cooperatives and dual education programmes implemented in secondary vocational schools. Nevertheless, students have shown insufficient motivation to choose entrepreneurship as an elective subject and participate in such programmes. In order to remedy this lack of interest and promote activity, young entrepreneurs should be directly engaged in business plan development as it is the only way to understand the risks and critical factors of business success.

FG participant: *"Students are still reluctant to choose entrepreneurship as an elective subject. We are considering ways to boost their motivation."*

FG participant: *"After completing secondary school most of students do not have basic financial literacy."*

Informal education programmes: Providing adequate informal education for strengthening entrepreneurship activities is recognized officially among educational institutions. Notable progress has been made since 2005. 2016 was of special importance as it was named the Year of Entrepreneurship. Despite these advances, the focus group participants

state that current policies have failed to provide proper educational programmes. They also claim there is insufficient competences to form informal entrepreneurship education programmes, especially in rural areas. Civil society representatives also indicate that successful programmes frequently lack sustainability thereby substantially reducing their long-term effectiveness. Additionally, the quality of the training support provided is sometimes questionable, lacking testing of its usefulness in the actual market and being “far from real business world”.

FG participant: “Currently, I would acknowledge there to be an insufficient number of knowledge providers that care able to provide adequate entrepreneurship programmes in rural areas. “

Recommendations:

- ◆ Existing policy measures should target a greater share of youth in order to reach out to youth who are most vulnerable. Leading service providers should therefore also be more proactive in promoting training opportunities and open to collaboration with all institutions regardless of its background.
- ◆ Education programmes in the field of entrepreneurship should be standardized as well as based on practical skills and competences needed by the current market, not merely theory.

3. Career management and counseling activities

Conclusions:

The current career management and counseling system is lacking as there is significant space to extend their scope and areas in which they may be improved. Despite notable progress made over the last several years and doubling the share of students receiving career and management counselling, only 55% did so in 2020. Although slightly more than half, 2020 only rose by 5% as it was limited to 50% in 2019. The existing system chiefly relies on professional orientation and providing support related to decisions about the next level of education when youth are supposed to do so; therein lies its only outstanding advantage: its presence encourages youth to start thinking about their future career and therefore normalizes counselling as an accepted or expected behavior. However, the services provided are inadequate and access insufficient for rural youth. Attention should be shifted to placing career management centers in secondary schools so that a greater share of youth may be directly reached as secondary school likely to soon become mandatory in Serbia. It should be noted that, as with many social services, The covid pandemic also stretched thin the limited resources already invested into career counselling.

FG Participant: “*The absence of youth from many areas stems from unsatisfactory coordination between secondary education institutions and the business community.*”

Potentials. Youth associations and youth in general are not sufficiently involved in career development and counselling. Youth have increased access to information through social media and online resources. Yet counsellors fail to make the best use of these resources, generally ignoring data-based solutions entirely including data obtained directly from the labour market. Focus group participants have reported the necessity to develop

government-led measures aimed at strengthening career competences as well as providing more equitable resources to reach out to more youth, particularly those who are most vulnerable and receive the least amount of social attention. Moreover, teachers should be more involved in the counselling process and further government-led measures to broaden stakeholder involvement across all institutions involved with youth education, welfare and development.

Recommendations:

- ◆ The effective implementation of career management activities requires a systemic approach as well as the development of an institutionalized strategy for its successful operationalization and application to achieve its goals.
- ◆ Youth associations should be more involved in development of career management support programmes and youth themselves more encouraged to take part in their own career planning and management.
- ◆ Secondary schools should be more open to working with the private sector in order to provide an education that will aim to instruct on competences that meet the rapidly changing business environment. Educational institutions should also coordinate with youth offices in order to collect data on problems already affecting youth in their local communities. Career management support activities need to also regularly adapt to meet changing situation presented in the market and in society. A platform to facilitate collaboration among multiple institutions across diverse stakeholders in regards to career management activities should also be developed.
- ◆ Career management centers in secondary school are crucial. Those resources already utilized should be built on and developed further. Capacity building activities are required in terms strengthening career-management related competences.

5.3. Focus group 2 - Employability of NEET population

NEET Youth in Serbia – Outreach and Strengthening Employability

In order to obtain qualitative data on the current state of NEET youth, as well as policies and measures aimed at strengthening them, a focus group was conducted of stakeholders involved in NEET youth and NEET oriented policies.

1. What are the main challenges faced when trying to strengthen the employability of NEET youth?

Conclusions:

There is a weak institutional cooperation and a shortage of data on NEET youth among stakeholders. As a heterogeneous group of youth, NEET concern stakeholders coming from social policy, education, youth and employment. MoYS was the first institution to recognize NEET as part of the National Youth Strategy (2015-2025). Internal analyses carried

out by the MoYS have shown that the most vulnerable subgroups of youth need further attention in particular as policies implemented before the adoption of the Strategy had not been effective in activating and strengthening their employability. The root of their ineffectiveness was a shortage of data on the structure and characteristics of NEET youth, the inability of institutions to reach out and establish communication to NEET youth in order to improve NEET employment potential and poor coordination among institutions dealing with NEET youth.

Institutional capacities. Local youth offices and civil society organisations are tasked with establishing direct communication with NEET youth, which are hindered by issues limiting effectiveness of their work. As previously discussed in Chapter 3, local youth offices in Serbia are highly diverse in terms of the quality and scope of their work, as well as their capacities and resources. Despite the outlying instances of good practices in place, these are few and uncharacteristic of the whole. Local youth offices and civil society organisations fail to proactively communicate with NEET subgroups. Although a majority of the local youth offices do recognize unemployment as being crucial, youth unemployment is not viewed as a top priority in their policy agenda. The civil society sector highly depends on the priorities of its donors who demand sustainability and intervene accordingly. The capacities of the civil society sector in rural areas are also questionable in terms of their effective implementation of policies aimed at strengthening the employability among vulnerable youth subgroups. While the Republic of Serbia's NES may provide support to youth registered as unemployed, a significant share of inactive youth remains under the radar of the NES. Social Work Centres might prove to be a good means to access NEET youth and act as the first critical point providing them with opportunities. Furthermore, Social Work Centres might act as a gateway to other institutions that may better target NEET employability.

NEET factors and a failure to address them or take them into consideration. In addition to heterogeneity, it should be noted that the NEET youth is a fluid category. Youth who become or stop being NEET may do so for a number of reasons. Unfortunately, policies that are currently in place fail to take into account barriers and critical factors of success that determine such trends as well as factors that determine the NEET rate. Focus group participants suggest socio-economic status, the educational profile of parents, the place of residence and early school drop-outs as being among the most important factors affecting NEET.

FG participant: *"Regional economic disparities are some of the most important factors determining if one is NEET. There is significantly a higher number of NEET youth in southern and eastern Serbia."*

FG participant: *"Gender is also important when designing NEET prevention policies. Although women are at greater risk to become NEET, men are at a greater risk of becoming unemployed."*

Youth mobility in Serbia is quite low and represents an additional challenge that limits the effectiveness of policies. Unfortunately, even though it is necessary as a tool and a social policy, the practice of detecting youth at risk of becoming NEET has not been developed.

FG participant: *"We still have many early drop-outs, particularly those at the end of primary and beginning of their secondary education."*

Recommendations:

- ◆ As a central actor to carrying out the Youth Guarantee, local branches of the NES must strengthen their work with support institutions (i.e., local youth offices and civil society organisations) in order to detect and facilitate a smooth transition of NEET into the labour market.
- ◆ Long-term capacity building programmes must be introduced to increase capacities of the local youth offices that actively deal and address the needs of NEET youth. Furthermore, regular data collection and analysing the characteristics and barriers NEET youth face when entering the labour market needs to be incorporated into scope of work. Such a process requires consensus and close coordination between national and local government bodies.
- ◆ Further support must be extended to civil society organisations that are active in youth unemployment and for soft skills of NEET youth in particular. Support programmes should, at the very least, strengthen civil society organizations' capacities as well as provide incentives to establish contacts with local youth associations. Moreover, these programmes should also create direct communication with NEET youth in the field.
- ◆ As there is still as significant risk of youth dropping out of their education as they near the end of either their primary or secondary education, additional efforts must made to recognize those most at risk of doing so in order to decrease the overall NEET number.

2. Programmes targeting NEET youth and improving NEET employability skills

Conclusions:

Sustainability. Programmes implemented to deal with NEET youth are highly determined by the capacities of the implementing institutions and local youth offices themselves. The focus group participants have reported carrying out instances of good practice and successes among both of these actors. The most effective activity has been “learning by doing” which is implemented over the long term. Civil society representatives suggest that successful activities are based on coordinated approaches that gather together local support institutions, youth organisations and the private sector.

Programme requirements needed to address NEET youth. When designing effective programmes for NEET youth, extra effort must be made to encourage NEET youth to participate, as they are a vulnerable group whose members may not all share the same connection through social linking as others. NEET youth may also not always react to ordinary incentives as they have been closed off to undertaking new activities due to negative past experiences. In addition, they might lack basic digital competences or other competences that other non-NEET youth may possess.

FG participant: *“We were planning to hold trainings for NEET youth under the ERASMUS programme which, upon completion, would include a 1 to 6 month-long internship at a company operating abroad. We considered this to be a great opportunity for them to acquire experience, learn and increase employability. However, none of the 20 participants applied. They would rather choose to work in fast food as it would be more familiar to them.”*

One focus-group participant indicated a one-stop shop model as a comprehensive model involving several stakeholders including civil society, private sector, local youth offices and the NES. This model proved to be effective as it combined a direct approach in attracting NEET youth, including capacity building activities related to development of soft skills.

Other local stakeholders need to be actively engaged in local youth-policy implementation providing necessary support to local youth offices. Challenges related to the implementation of the YG include dealing with youth who are NEET status but there is weak coordination among all stakeholders.

Focus group participant: *“Municipalities that deal most effectively with youth issues and policies are also those who have most developed their local institutions, youth organizations, their civil society organisations that deal with youth issues, their youth clubs and, naturally, their local youth offices.”*

Recommendations:

- ◆ With regards to offer, active labour market measures should be developed in line with the EU Digital agenda in order to provide NEETs with at least basic digital skills
- ◆ A one-stop-shop model which has already been implemented in several municipalities needs to be included into YG services offer as it is based on mobilizing partnerships and providing comprehensive support for the low-skilled youth

5.4. Focus group 3 - Local youth institutions

FG3 - Strengthening the competencies of institutions working with local policy and their actors

One of the main challenges facing the implementation of the Youth Guarantee (YG) is institutions' overall capacity to effectively implement it in terms of adapting, shifting or changing their administration practices. In addition to the MoLEVSA and the NES who are key actors for the YG, other stakeholders must also provide support to ensure YG coordination. In order to analyse existing institutional capacities of youth policy actors at the local level and their potential contribution to effective implementation of the YG programme, the focus group conducted covered 2 areas related to strengthening the institutional capacities of local youth policy makers.

1. “What are the main instruments used to conduct youth policies locally?”

Conclusions:

There are funding issues that severely affect local action plans and youth policy. 15 municipalities are currently developing local youth action plans that were, at the time of conducting the questionnaire, expected to be adopted by the end of 2021. Both the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities as well as the Republic Secretariat for Public Poli-

cies are actively supporting these processes. A KOMS analysis has shown that 106 (73.1% of the total) of local municipalities have not adopted any local action plans as their main local strategies to refer to when dealing with youth issues (KOMS, 2021). The same analysis found that around 36% of local municipalities also have no budget for youth policy implementation. Moreover, there is a quite a limited number of local municipalities possessing all instruments needed for local youth policies - 20% do not even have any policy instruments, whatsoever. Overall, an analysis of local youth practices shows diversity in both the approach and capacities of local institutions but is neither linked to local economic development nor population size or type of the local governing unit; rather, it relates to political circumstances as well as local development priorities. It may therefore be required to introduce mandatory activities and minimal work standards, particularly in regard to youth unemployment and NEET youth.

FG participants: *"There are two main issues conducting local youth policies – there are insufficient policy instruments have been adopted and their functionality is limited. It is essential that both issues be analysed and worked on jointly in order to overcome them."*

Monitoring and evaluating local strategic documents is not a regular practice in Serbia. Within the 15 local action plans for youth developed for 15 separate municipalities, an analysis was conducted of previous action plans that had been in effect in order to provide groundwork for current youth policy issues. Focus group participants including local youth office coordinators considered this the analysis and results to be useful particularly for data collection and the effectiveness of measures.

Recommendations:

- ◆ Introduce a minimum work scope and mandatory activities that must be carried out locally to remedy youth unemployment and deal with youth in NEET situation.
- ◆ All municipalities must develop their own local action plan for youth that provides a minimal budget needed to conduct local youth policies.
- ◆ In order to support evidence-based youth policy and help detect policy instruments that are most effective, local strategic documents must be adopted and introduced as a regular practice of monitoring and evaluating youth policy.

2. What are the local youth offices capacities?

Conclusions:

The function of local youth offices. Based on the reports of the focus-group participants, only a small number of local municipalities employ a local youth office coordinator, which reflects the low priority youth issues and local youth offices have received. This distinct lack of attention has led to inadequate continuation for local youth policy and insufficient institutional memory. Frequent changes to local coordinators stem from political changes or from successful coordinators being promoted out of the position. Essentially there are no fixed terms in which youth coordinators may reliably serve, neither de jure as laws differ based on location or de facto. While the Republic of Serbia's Law on Youth and National

Strategy for Youth recognize main youth policy issues and set priorities for local policy makers, local youth offices are completely under jurisdiction of municipalities.

FG participant: *“Local youth offices should be central to gathering and coordinating the work of local youth-policy actors.”*

Local youth office coordinators pose another issue as their individual capacities as policy coordinators are inconsistent. Programmes and trainings aimed at increasing their capacities have yet to be established. When positions related to local youth policy are given as sinecures, it results in frequent changes to the coordinators and relatively flexible or no job requirements. Currently, for those positions that do exist, they are not systematized, requiring no specific professional/educational background, skills or competencies.

Recommendations:

- ◆ Strengthen the position of local youth offices in the administrative structure of local municipalities including the local budget assigned to carry out youth-policy activities.
- ◆ Establish a “local youth office coordinator” for every local youth office and municipality whose position must consist of standardized job requirements to ensure minimum capacities and competencies. Steps must also be taken to ensure that local youth officers are non-government appointed to ensure their placement outlasts political fortunes of larger parties.
- ◆ Introduce regular capacity building programmes to strengthen the competences of local youth office coordinators.

MAIN RESEARCH FINDINGS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Main research findings

Desk research and lessons learnt from YG implementation in other economies

Although the NEET rate in Serbia has been declining gradually over the past 5 years, being even somewhat lower if compared to other economies of the WB region, the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) is still inordinately high. Particular problems that policy makers in Serbia are facing refer to relatively **stable and even increasing share of inactive youth**. Recent data show that the share youth not interested to work accounts for 4.4 and 5.3% of the total youth population between 15-24 and 15-29 respectively.

Similarly to the issues identified within YG programme evaluations across the EU, youth employment policy and institutional framework in Serbia face **difficulties aiming to reach and activate inactive youth**. The main reasons refer to institutional deficits of the NES branch network and incapacitated local stakeholders.

Desk research identified **increased institutional efforts with regard to strengthening entrepreneurship and employability skills** within several interventions initiated by stakeholders at the national and local level including MoLEVSA, MoYS, NES, Serbian Association of Employers, SKGO and Chamber of Commerce. Their success in the following years will, among other, depend on the involvement of youth and youth associations, as well as pursuing multi-stakeholder approach.

Local Youth Offices

Position of the local youth offices within the local administration does not indicate that **local youth issues have been set as priority on the local development agenda** in most Serbian municipalities. About half of the analysed local youth offices do not have systematized local youth coordinator position with permanent contract. Most of them employ only 1 person which represents significant burden in conducting fieldwork activities and maintaining direct and frequent communication both with youth and other local stakeholders. More than one third of the analysed offices report the lack of direct communication with youth “in the field”.

Capacities of the local youth offices for dealing with youth in NEET status are not sufficient. Inquired local youth office coordinators indicate the lack of funding as an important obstacle, rated 2.8 (1 to 5 scale). Moreover, self-assessment results show a need for capacity building activities (e.g. training and courses) in several areas – project management (65.2% confirmed the need for this type of capacity building activities), youth policy (47.8%), youth worker (41.3%), and digital competences (41.3%).

Despite of recent encouraging trends of adoption of **Local Action Plans for Youth, local plans are still not perceived as crucial strategic documents to shape local youth policies.** Twenty-seven out of 48 offices (56.3%) answered that they have an active LAP for youth, whereas 13 stated the development of the LAP for youth is in progress. Around two-third of the local youth offices indicated that LAP for youth is being used as the basis for their annual plans.

Dealing with youth in NEET status is considered outside of the scope of activities in many local youth offices. More than 85% of the offices do not have data on the number and structure of youth in NEET status in their communities, while more than 40% answered that they do not maintain any communication with youth under this category.

Assessment in regard to collaboration of the local youth offices with other youth policy stakeholders also indicates significant space for improvement. Although communication with the MoYS and educational institutions has been very active over the previous period, around 50% of them do not collaborate with NES and Centres for Social Work. Only a couple of inquired local youth offices confirmed collaboration with business associations and private sector.

Civil society organisations

Interviews conducted with representatives of the civil society organization provided us with several policy measures that proved to be effective in terms of outreach. Most of the representatives underlined **multi-stakeholder interventions** (e.g. one-stop-shop model) as particularly effective in strengthening employability of youth in NEET status as they combine resources of the local administration, private sector and civil society. In addition, previous experience highlighted the importance of establishing contacts with local community officers and direct communication with youth in order to encourage youth in NEET status to get out of their comfort zone and improve soft skills prior to enrolling specific training.

In terms of capacities, civil society organization representatives suggest that further informal education aimed at developing competences of the civil sector is particularly important. In addition, civil sector representatives indicate the lack of long-term funding programmes which could improve sustainability of the performed interventions. Lack of sustainability raises the problem of human capacities, staff retention and long-term planning.

Career management skills, employability and entrepreneurship

Focus group results indicate that the main youth entrepreneurship barriers in Serbia refer to the **access to capital and insufficient information** related to starting business, particularly among women and within rural areas.

Although it was introduced in formal education system in 2002, **the quality of entrepreneurship education** is still not at satisfactory level. Students are not motivated to choose entrepreneurship as elective subject. Focus group discussion indicates the necessity to increase the quality of education curricula and conduct training of trainers. Entrepreneurship education within formal education should be closer to economic reality and more oriented towards the development of IT skills and requirements of the Industry 4.0.

Career management and counselling are among crucial mechanisms to prevent youth entering the NEET situation. Despite significant efforts being made in developing secondary school career management centres over the past years, they are still considered undeveloped and isolated from the rapidly changing private sector.

Employability of the youth in NEET status

A shortage of data on the structure and characteristics of NEET youth and the inability of institutions to reach out and establish bidirectional communication are considered main challenges in regard to their employability.

Another important issue refers to the **lack of multi-stakeholder interventions**. While the NES may provide support to the youth registered as unemployed, a significant share of inactive youth remains under its radar. Only proactive collaboration between NES and other stakeholders including local youth offices and youth associations, Centres for Social Work and civil society could increase chances for their successful transition to the labour market.

Youth mobility in Serbia is quite low and represents an additional challenge that limits the effectiveness of policies. Unfortunately, even though it is necessary as a tool and a social policy, the practice of detecting youth at risk from becoming NEET has not been developed. Focus group discussions still indicate many early dropouts, particularly those at the end of primary and the beginning of secondary education.

Many previous interventions failed in **encouraging youth in NEET situation to participate**. NEET youth did not react to ordinary incentives as they have been closed off to undertaking new activities due to negative experience from the past or lack of basic digital skills. Focus group participants underline mandatory preparation of youth in NEET status prior to enrolling training and courses designed to develop specific competences.

Local youth institutions

The main barriers for conducting effective local youth policies refer to funding and lack of available policy instruments. Analysis of the National Youth Council found that around 36% of local municipalities have no budget for youth policy implementation. Moreover, there is quite a **limited number of local municipalities possessing all instruments needed for local youth policies** – around 20% even lack any policy instruments whatsoever. Overall, an analysis of local youth practices shows diversity in both the approach and capacities of local institutions but is neither linked to local economic development nor population size or type of the local governing unit; it rather relates to political circumstances and local development priorities.

Low capacities of the local youth institutions are an important barrier limiting their potential support to YG implementation. Insufficient capacities of local youth offices indicate necessity for developing programmes and training aimed at increasing their capacities. In rural areas there is a notable lack of experienced civil society organisations that could provide support to NES and local administration “in the field”.

6.2. Recommendations for policy makers

In line with the obtained findings, there are several policy recommendations that could contribute to adequate preparation of policy makers in Serbia aiming to start the effective implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Serbia. Since the focus of this analysis was on youth policy actors, primarily local youth offices as a part of the local administration, MoYS, youth and for youth organisations, developed recommendations mainly refer to the improvement of their capacities as complementary support to NES and MoLEVSA holding a central role in YG implementation. Moreover, as the activities of local youth offices ultimately depend on the inputs provided by local municipalities and MoYS, developed recommendations largely refer to policy changes that need to be pursued by these actors. The recommendations are structured into 5 groups. They have been developed also consulting the Youth Guarantee - Thematic, Policy Phases, according to the Council recommendation of 30 October 2020, RCC (2021). Among the presented recommendations, Recommendations 1-4 mainly provide policy inputs for the Phase 1: Mapping, Phase 2: Outreach and Phase 3: Preparation while Recommendation 5 mainly refers to Phase 4: Offer

1) Strengthening capacities of the local youth offices

There is no doubt that local youth offices have very limited capacities to actively contribute to YG implementation in Serbia, including unclear scope of their work, underdeveloped human capacities and infrastructure. Therefore, the ultimate goal of the MoYS, National Association of Youth Offices and local municipalities should be to intensify efforts in building capacities of the local youth offices. There are several interventions that need to be introduced to support the development of local youth office capacities with regard to YG implementation:

- **Setting up minimum requirements/working standards that local youth offices need to follow in respect to youth policy and youth in NEET status.** Local youth offices need to have data on the number, structure, and characteristics of NEET in youth status in their municipalities, to develop and monitor policies aimed at improving their status including strengthening their employability, as well as to maintain contacts with the most relevant stakeholders in the field. Minimum working standards should be also incorporated into the local action plans for youth as the main local strategic documents covering youth policy issues.
- **Conducting training for local youth office coordinators.** In line with working standards, local youth office coordinators should be provided with adequate knowledge and skills related to dealing with youth in NEET status. As per obtained research results, there are several courses/training that local youth office coordinators have to complete in

order to satisfy minimum competency level with regard to effective youth policy implementation – course for youth workers, course on outreach of the youth in NEET status, course on project management/evidence-based youth policy.

- **Development/adjustment of local infrastructure required for gathering youth (establishment of properly equipped local youth centres, clubs and similar premises).** In line with the practice already established in some local youth offices, local municipalities should consider the development or adaptation of premises that could be used for organization of training/courses and similar events aimed at strengthening employability skills and gathering.

2) Institutional changes at the local level

Although institutional elements have been already developed in some cities and municipalities (e.g. development of local action plans for youth, established youth clubs, etc.), the position of local youth offices within the local administration indicates that dealing with youth in NEET status has still not been set as local development priority. In that context, there are several changes that could improve the position of local youth offices transforming them to adequately respond to YG challenges:

- **Establishment of local youth office coordinator position with permanent contract.** Being employed under temporary contracts, local youth office coordinators are very dependent on the local political changes and institutional reorganizations. In addition, such a status has adverse impact on their motivation as they are working under pressure continuously searching for better long-term job opportunities.
- **Increase the number of people employed in local youth offices.** Overwhelming practice of employing one person in local youth office does not enable the covering of numerous issues that local youth face. As a result, local youth officers rarely meet youth, they do not have the opportunity to be proactive, to initiate contacts in the field or to establish contacts and collaborate with other local stakeholders. The examples of good practice have proved that small municipalities require at least 2, whereas large municipalities and cities require at least 3 or 4 employees to adequately deal with local youth policy issues, depending on the priorities.

3) Public policy management and data collection

Research results indicate that local youth policy has been mainly conducted on ad-hoc basis, even in case of municipalities where local action plans for youth exist. Local stakeholders including local youth offices and councils do not have data on the number of youth in NEET status, they do not monitor activities in progress and do not evaluate impact of the previous policies. Data collection activities have been occasionally performed, often prior to developing new strategic documents, but almost never to obtain evidence on effectiveness of the previous policies and measures. In order to respond to YG challenges, local municipalities need to reform the existing approach by:

- **Adoption of mandatory practice of monitoring and evaluation of the local action plans for youth in line with requirements of the Law on Planning System.** Such prac-

tice would help local policy makers in detecting the most effective measures of youth employment and activation policies.

- **Regular collection of data related to youth in NEET status, including inactive youth being outside of the NES registers.** Data to be obtained include not only a number, but also structure of the youth in NEET status with regard to age, socio-economic characteristics (e.g. level of education, type of residence, qualifications, etc.), youth with disabilities, etc. Such practice would help local youth offices to obtain a clear picture on the structure and specific needs of the local youth and formulate effective NEET prevention, outreach and activation policies. Additionally, it would enable local policy makers to formulate and follow indicators relevant to YG implementation (e.g. number of youth in risk from becoming NEET).
- **Adoption of proactive approach with regard to communication with local youth and civil society organisations using both channels of digital communication and direct contacts.** Obtained research results indicate the examples of periodic organization of events, surveys or focus groups gathering local youth and youth associations as very beneficial in terms of collecting data on the existing youth problems and preferences, including obtaining data beyond youth issues, also relevant for the overall economic development.

4) Establishment of the inter-institutional collaboration

As elaborated in more detail within desk research section (Chapter 1), effective implementation of the YG requires inter-institutional approach and collaboration of stakeholders in different areas. Current practice of local youth offices, NES and development agencies operating as “isolated islands” needs to be changed. International practice shows that programmes funded by multiple sources requiring partnerships among Government and private sector results with better outcomes. There are several recommendations that need to be adopted with an aim to establish efficient institutional links between local youth policy actors:

- **Stakeholder mapping and analysis.** Following well-known power/influence matrix, local youth offices should conduct stakeholder analysis in order to obtain clear picture on the stakeholders that could contribute to achieving youth policy objectives. Analysis proved that what is particularly missing is the collaboration between local youth offices and companies, including business associations (e.g. Chamber of Commerce), development agencies, NES and civil society.
- **Establishment of institutional links and cooperation between local municipality (local youth offices) and NES local branches.** Active collaboration should be agreed on the highest institutional level (between the MoYS, NES, local municipality and/or SKGO as association of local municipalities) and pursued for the mutual interest – sharing data on unemployed/inactive youth, applied policy measure, active projects, examples of good practice, etc.
- **Establishment of institutional links between local municipality (local youth offices), private sector and civil society organisations.** With regard to YG, local youth offices need to have detailed information on the active local civil society organisations dealing

with youth unemployment issues capable of providing outreach and capacity building support, as well as information on private sector entities interested in collaboration.

- **Redesigning the annual Calls for local youth offices and civil society organisations launched by the MoYS and national Youth associations.** Under the current conditions, calls for projects targeting local youth offices or civil society organisations do not require inter-institutional partnerships as mandatory eligibility criteria. Current practice should be changed in order to provide incentives for interinstitutional collaboration. Depending on the project objectives, the Ministry should provide support to local actors aiming to engage other relevant stakeholders such as NES local branches, educational institutions, business associations, regional development agency, etc.

5) Strengthening existing policy measures and introduction of the new ones

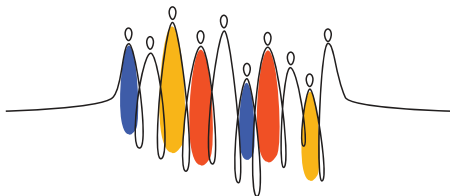
- **Active labour market measures.** A more flexible active labour market measures would prevent vulnerable youth subgroups from being excluded from the labour market due to specific barriers they face. For example, a single-parent young person may be unable to afford a childcare therefore being resistant to accept job opportunities and courses over the standard 9 am. to 5 pm. working time. It is necessary to improve existing measures by making them more flexible in order to match very specific needs of vulnerable youth. This has to be followed by gradual increase of the NES capacities to provide individualised support as well.
- **Career guidance and counselling.** Participation in the career management support should be mandatory for the secondary school students. In order to tackle issues related to scope of the career management support there should be developed a national information system that would include all relevant information related to skills, occupations, informal as well as formal education opportunities. Developed information system should be linked to youth and employers web portals to increase labour market relevance. With regard to quality, Euroguidance platform activities should be further strengthened through greater involvement of the private sector stimulating direct contacts between both students and guidance practitioners with employers.
- **Strengthening entrepreneurial skills.** Existing entrepreneurial education should be redesigned with an aim to stimulate aspiring entrepreneurs with businesses, incubators and start-up support mechanisms. In line with European Skills Agenda priorities, set of emergency measures should be developed to support vulnerable youth in acquiring at least basic digital skills. Since one of the main barriers that aspiring youth entrepreneurs face refers to the lack of networks, it should be designed programme supporting strengthening of the youth entrepreneurship networks and share of knowledge.

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