

SUMMARY REPORT

PES NETWORK CONFERENCE: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE YOUTH GUARANTEE – CHALLENGES AND SUCCESS FACTORS



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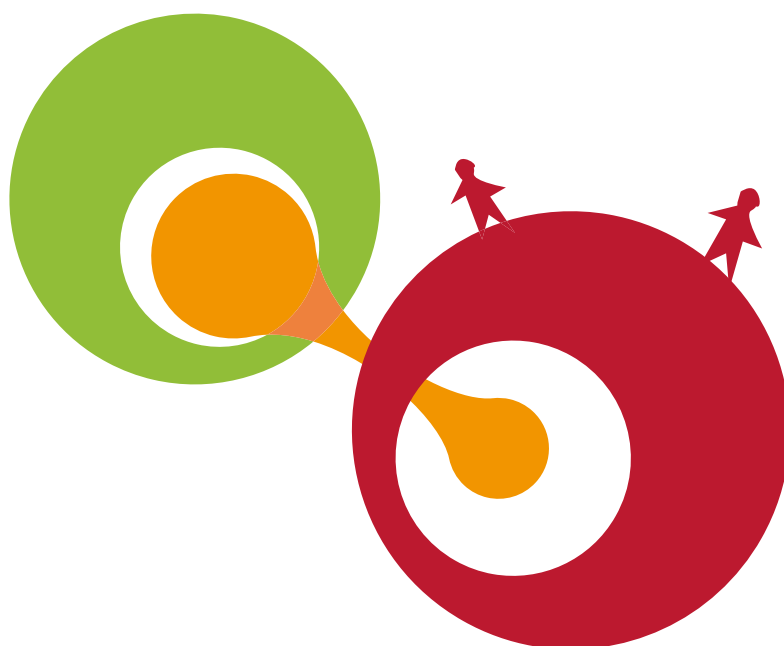
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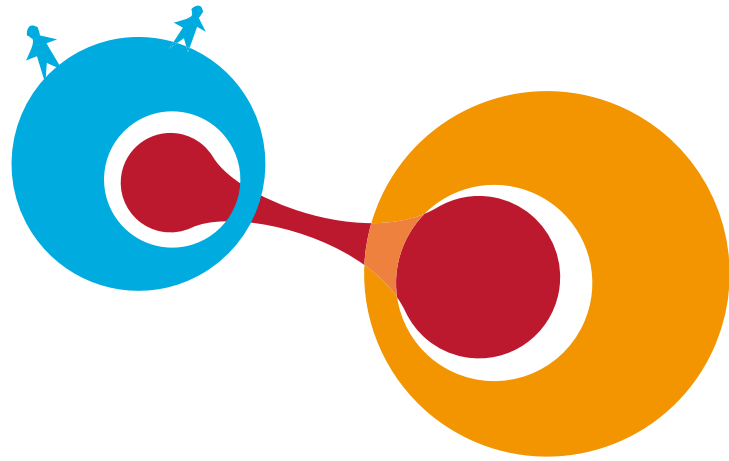


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Contents

1. Background to the conference	6
2. Sustainable activation of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs)	7
3. Working with employers	8
4. Enhancing career guidance for young people	10
5. Strengthening collaboration with schools	11
6. Key conclusions	12





1. Background to the conference

PES are key implementers of the Youth Guarantee in almost all European Member States. PES roles can vary across countries and includes many different tasks, from strategic planning to on-the-ground delivery. Yet, the YG can only be delivered as a collaborative effort of PES and other actors on the labour market and in the education and training sector. Hence, where PES take the lead role, the effectiveness of YG measures relies strongly on PES ability to mobilise a broad range of internal and external resources, and to foster strong collaboration with partners.

The second annual 2015 conference of the PES Network took place in Brussels on 9 December 2015. It brought together 60 delegates from 26 Member States, representing the European PES and their partners in YG implementation¹. Exemplary practices were presented and discussed in workshops.

The conference was structured around four topics that are key to the successful delivery of the Youth Guarantee:

1. Sustainable activation of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET);
2. Working with employers;
3. Enhancing career guidance for young people; and
4. Strengthening collaboration with schools.

Previous analysis and discussion² showed that under the Youth Guarantee, these four topics are strongly interlinked. To facilitate young people's transitions from education into the labour market, the four topics need to be addressed in parallel, and with a holistic view. Activation measures for young people should be based on a thorough analysis of the relevant NEET groups and their individual labour market situation. PES can support and engage in preventive measures delivered by schools, e.g. career guidance and competence assessment. Data exchange and coordination amongst institutions – in accordance with legal provisions – helps to enhance transparency and ensure appropriate and continuous support to young people through the YG pathway. Employers have an important role to play in providing young people with training opportunities, like traineeships and apprenticeships, work experience and, ultimately, jobs. To enhance labour market relevance, employers should however also be engaged in the design of YG measures and PES practices. Therefore, the **mobilisation of PES resources across all four topics** is needed to ensure the service offer for young people is comprehensive, closely interlinked and coherent. To that end, the Youth Guarantee calls for a **broad collaboration with stakeholders, especially at local level**.

The 2nd Annual PES Network conference 2015 provided a forum to explore and discuss the **challenges and success factors of PES' contribution to implementing the Youth Guarantee** and explore areas of development. The key ideas and messages that came out of the conference are summarised in this report.

¹ MS not represented: Greece and Italy. The group of 60 country delegates consisted of PES (54 individuals), representatives of schools (3 individuals), local and regional governments (2 individuals), employers (one individual). In addition, two independent researchers, nine COM staff and seven ICF staff were present (77 participants in total).

² Cf. PES Network Self-assessment Report on PES capacities to implement the Youth Guarantee (2014), and: Piloting Youth Guarantee partnerships on the ground. A summary report of key achievements and lessons from the European Parliament Preparatory Action on the Youth Guarantee (2015), and PES Network Youth Workshops 2014 and 2015.

2. Sustainable activation of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs)

Early school leaving, low education level and a lack of qualifications were identified as factors putting a young persons' school-to-work transition at risk. Unemployment, particularly amongst youth, bears the risk of a 'scarring effect': it can result in a higher risk of unemployment in later years, and a higher likelihood of subsequent lower pay. This highlights the need for early intervention and sustainable solutions in order to avoid long-term unstable education and work histories, and reduce the risk of disengagement.

PES activities under the Youth Guarantee often focus on those not in employment, education or training (NEETs): **reducing the NEET rate is one of the objectives of the Youth Guarantee**. In most countries the decline in youth employment and the rise of NEETs affected most severely individuals with low educational qualifications. However, a particularly sharp decline in youth employment can also lead to rising numbers of highly educated NEET, as can be observed in Spain, Greece and Ireland. In these countries, the share of NEETs with work experience is higher than EU average³.

The latest research results⁴ show that **the NEETs concept is prone to misinterpretation**. At the PES Network conference, Massimiliano Mascherini (EUROFOUND) presented the results of a recent study. He emphasised that the term 'NEETs' is usually applied to a broad age range (15-29 years). This means that a very heterogeneous group of individuals falls under the NEETs category, each with their own characteristics and needs. From a PES perspective, **NEETs can be young people registered with PES** as long-term unemployed, short-term unemployed or labour market re-entrants; **or not registered with PES** as they are occupied with family obligations, disabled, ill or simply discouraged (possibly because previous interventions have not helped them back into a job).

In response to this diversity, **policy actions need to be tailored to the characteristics of the sub-groups in each Member State**. PES should provide services that support the first critical stages in the career of different groups of young people. Consequently, PES need to adopt targeted strategies and provide tailored services to the specific groups of NEETs they are dealing with⁵. Successful practices in this regard often have a specific focus on identifying where and who the NEETs are and analysing the labour market situation in the geographical area, to ensure targeted interventions. Moreover, PES combine successful outreach strategies with tailored activation and follow-up measures.



Find-Mind-Bind (BE-Actiris)

Since January 2015, the Belgian-Brussels PES is using the 'Find-Bind-Mind' approach to promote NEETs' access to work, education or training. 'Find-Bind-Mind' provides funding to projects that are committed to using a specific methodology to provide guidance, orientation, coaching and follow-up support to NEETs, based on three steps:

- Find: identifying the different groups of NEETs in the catchment area. Each project uses its own strategy and involves collaboration with different stakeholders, such as social workers, sport clubs, social integration partners and at-risk-youth associations to reach their target group.
- Mind: providing orientation and guidance, and preparing individual action plans.
- Bind: delivering coaching services for NEETs to access jobs, internships or training.

This methodology is the result of a trans-regional institutional partnership between the Belgian-Brussels and Belgian-Flemish PES. The experiences of the Belgian-Flemish PES (where the approach was implemented earlier) show that success is enhanced when multiple and diverse stakeholders are involved, and when the transitions between the three steps is handled flexibly to better address the individual needs of the different NEET groups.

3 Carcillo, S. et al. (2015): NEET Youth in the Aftermath of the Crisis: Challenges and Policies, OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 164, OECD Publishing, Paris.

4 Cf. Mascherini, et.al. (2015): Social inclusion of young people, Eurofound, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg; or Carcillo, S. et al. (2015): NEET Youth in the Aftermath of the Crisis: Challenges and Policies, OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 164, OECD Publishing, Paris.

5 As underlined in the keynote speech by Massimiliano Mascherini, Eurofound.



Reaching out to NEETs who are not registered as unemployed can prove to be particularly difficult. PES are often not in the best position to reach out to some non-registered who need a less institutional approach involving partnerships. Outreach strategies call for strong collaboration with schools, youth work, and NGOs. However, PES often struggle to gather a good understanding of the target group and identify opportunities, especially in countries with a low labour demand.

Holistic approaches take into account multiple dimensions of a young person's life, for instance they also address barriers such as individual learning difficulties, family problems, drug abuse etc. Such approaches have been found to provide more sustainable results regarding NEETs' transitions to education, training or jobs. PES however face the challenge of **creating teams with the necessary, multiple competences** to be able to deliver this approach. Developing sustainable collaborations with schools, youth work, and NGOs (for instance, youth organisations), especially at the local level, can help to address this challenge, as partners can take over certain tasks and integrate them into their own services. This type of collaboration has been found to be particularly successful when based on formal and tailored collaboration agreements among stakeholders.



Youth Integration (Sweden)

The 'Youth Integration' project was set up by the Swedish PES in order to offer NEETs aged 16-24 years old (especially those in the socio-economic peripheries) opportunities to work or continue their education. The project aimed to provide an integrated service offer to NEETs based on a holistic approach; considering multiple dimensions of a young person's life (interests, competences, background, family situation etc.), adapted to local conditions.

The project ran from June 2012 until May 2014. It was delivered as a one-stop-shop where a multi-disciplinary team from PES and other local actors provided comprehensive support. A local mapping of the target group helped

to identify the main obstacles and challenges in each community. Within a national framework, local agreements were made, based on the identified local needs. Consequently, actors differed according to the local needs. However, a broad coalition of stakeholders was found to be necessary for successful implementation at local level; consisting of municipalities, social institutions, NGOs, social partners, schools and training providers, police, and care services.

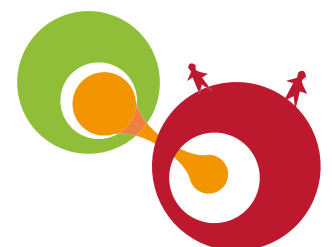
The main results of the project are improved and formalised collaboration structures between actors at local level: the collaboration structures between the different actors that were developed through the project were found to respond well to the needs of target group. In the majority of Swedish municipalities, local agreements between the local PES and relevant stakeholders were formalised and continued after the project ended.

A success factor in the **development of trustful relations between PES and young people** is providing services in line with young people's needs. Using communication channels that are familiar to them, e.g. social media, can help to do so. For instance, some countries have had good experiences with online-counselling (e.g. BE-VDAB, see section on career guidance).

Through these and other actions, PES hope to change the perception of young people: registering with PES should not be perceived as a bureaucratic formality, but as an attractive opportunity to improve their lives and make a real difference.

3. Working with employers

PES collaboration with employers is particularly important to facilitate young people's transition from school to work and ensure that employers are involved in the education, training and guidance of young people – for instance, by providing apprenticeships and traineeships.





Jobs for the future (France)

In France, the 'Jobs for the Future' programme supports the labour market participation of young people with lower levels of education, from deprived areas or with disabilities. It uses subsidised contracts for three years (both in the for-profit and non-profit sector), complemented by mandatory training (formal-qualifying- and non-formal) and counselling.

The majority of the mandatory training within the project leads to certifications that are relevant to the needs of the sector concerned. The French PES works with employers in the planning stages and throughout the subsidised contract to ensure that the training offers are adapted to local needs. In all cases, the contracts are re-negotiated within the three-year timeframe to ensure they are meeting the needs of the employer and the young person.

The French PES has observed that the adaptability of the programme to differing local contexts has contributed to its success. Face-to-face contact with employers and close collaboration with Mission Locales (local youth agencies) have also been critical success factors in matching the right young person with the right opportunity.

Sustainable collaboration between PES and employers is often preceded by **specific engagement strategies that help to create trust and help employers to see the opportunities and benefits for their business**. Such strategies should always underline the win-win aspect of the agreements for both parties, the PES and the employer.

Furthermore, employer engagement strategies should be supported by effective communication plans. PES should identify **specific communication strategies towards specific types of employers** (e.g. big companies and SMEs); a successful strategy towards SMEs, for instance, is typically centred on contacting employers directly.

Once the contact is established, collaboration can be sustained by a range of services to inform the employers about PES services: databases accessible

to the employers, easy-to-use 'employer-centred' services, regular meetings and briefings, etc. Dedicated staff are needed in the PES to implement these strategies sustainably.

PES can find it helpful to **sign 'cooperation agreements', 'memoranda of understanding', or 'employment and youth activation charters' with employers to formalise the respective**



Ballymun project (Ireland)

The 'Ballymun' Youth Guarantee pilot project (implemented between 2013 and 2014) focused on providing good quality offers to young people aged 14 to 24 and informed the roll out of the national Youth Guarantee. The pilot project developed and delivered new ways of working with employers to ensure that there were ways for young people to gain work-based experiences and this target group could be placed as quickly as possible into the labour market.

The project developed a 'menu of options' for employers, which listed several ways for employers to get involved in the project. This ranged from giving a short talk at a job club and hosting a visit and tour of their premises to offering a work placement, apprenticeship or job.

Throughout the pilot project, the PES learnt that it was important to define what the PES ultimately wants from employers. In addition, the PES further refined their communications strategy so that employers received clear and concise messages that were tailored to their circumstance (e.g. large employer or SME).

As a result of the pilot project, the Irish PES has implemented a new employer engagement strategy that specifies different approaches for different types of employers; contains specific key performance indicators and targets; focuses on relationship-building; differentiates between the business need and corporate social responsibility; and outlines the dedicated resources within the PES that are available to deliver the work.



engagements and actions. Indeed, a quick survey among the conference participants showed that a large majority (84%) collaborate with employers to activate NEETs⁶ and this collaboration is often based on formal structures – which have been agreed either as part of active labour market policies (ALMPs) (55%) or are embedded in the legal regulations that underpin vocational training (30%). A minority of conference participants also use voluntary agreements (15%)⁷.

4. Enhancing career guidance for young people

The Youth Guarantee encourages PES to improve work with educational institutions and career guidance services. This collaboration is important in providing labour market information to students at the critical stage while they are still in school. In some countries, **career guidance** provision for *all* students is compulsory in order to ensure that large numbers are reached.

groups and classes into one of the 64 ‘Berufs-InfoZentren’ (BIZ, Career Information Centres).

The visits include a presentation of PES services for young people, including an emphasis on the importance of starting to think about career choices. During the visit, young people are asked to do research on a job-related question put forward by BIZ staff and teachers.

Austrian PES regard this approach as a highly effective way to get in touch with young people early on and offer services tailored to the needs of each age group. For example, age-specific communication is a key success factor in helping 13–14 year-olds to develop realistic perceptions of the real jobs available to them. Making better informed decisions at this stage will help to avoid drop-out from vocational education and training later on.

PES can either take **a lead role by providing career guidance directly or play a conductor role** by working together with career guidance providers to ensure the best services available to young people. A survey undertaken at the conference showed that most respondents (44%) collaborate with schools to enhance career guidance by providing information and career guidance in schools. Others invite schools to come to the PES (18%), do events together (12%) or facilitate data exchange⁸.

The PES conductor role includes a coordinating function between different actors in career guidance (schools, youth work, guidance institutions, NGOs, social partners, Ministry of Education etc.) to ensure greater coherence and avoid the duplication of similar services. By enabling trial internships and first work experience, employers can also be engaged in career guidance. **Individualised career guidance**, based on the profile and aspirations of the young people, should be provided. Moreover, career guidance to young people should not be oriented at short-term results. Guidance counsellors should address young people with a view to **long-term career perspectives** and future professional development opportunities.

Career information centres (Austria)

In countries with a strong dual system like Austria, many students leave school at the age of 15 or 16 and enter the dual system. This entails for these youngsters to take decisions about their future training and career path that can influence their whole life. Targeted career guidance is therefore needed to empower young people to make informed decisions already at such an early age.

In Austria, the co-operation with schools – especially lower secondary schools – has been a cornerstone of the Austrian PES’ youth-related activities since the 1990s. Career guidance is obligatory for every student at an early age as part of the Education Act. Usually, this is implemented by local PES offices who invite

6 N = 49 voters

7 N = 47 voters

8 N = 50 voters

To ensure that the guidance results in the preparation of concrete plans and opportunities, PES should have a clear overview of further education and training options on one hand, and **opportunities and requirements of the local labour market** on the other hand. Databases on vacancies can, for instance, help with the latter.

Online guidance services were found to be much appreciated specifically by young jobseekers, as they are efficient and quick, and respond to the needs of many young people.



Online Guidance for highly educated jobseekers (Belgium-VDAB)

Since 2011, the Belgian-Flemish PES has provided online guidance to highly educated jobseekers. The service consists of obligatory guidance delivered by a dedicated team of e-coaches. The practice is focused on young people under 25 years old who have a university degree (bachelor or masters level) and are encountering difficulties in accessing the labour market.

The service is based on a client-oriented approach adapted to the needs of the youngsters. E-coaches use different channels (email, telephone and videochats) to communicate with the young jobseekers. Apart from guidance, e-coaches can also signpost them to other PES services.

The evaluation of the pilot phase of this service highlighted several success factors: individualised and flexible service; tangible assistance from the e-coach; and continuous follow-up of the client.

E-coaches are PES counsellors who opted to work in that manner and received a specific training. In addition to having excellent communication skills, e-coaches need to be flexible to adapt to their clients' needs. To ensure this, e-coaches are provided with a laptop and the relevant software to carry out their tasks from satellite offices and home. Once a month, the full team of e-coaches meet in Brussels to share their experiences and discuss any challenges encountered.

5. Strengthening collaboration with schools

Strengthening the collaboration between PES and schools is an important area to ensure young people's transition from school into labour market in the context of the Youth Guarantee, as already mentioned in the context of the previous three topics.

A quick survey among the conference participants showed that a large majority (78.7%) collaborate with schools⁹. Examples also show that PES can play a proactive conductor role in **supporting schools by providing additional knowledge, tools, measures and services to prevent drop-out and ensure students leave school with a formal qualification**. Close collaboration can also help to follow-up on those who have already dropped out. Both the school and PES should collaborate to ensure that early leavers register with the PES and are given options, such as alternative training, work experience or a learning offer, for instance through an apprenticeship or traineeship.



PES tutors in secondary schools (Norway)

In Norway, PES and schools are working together to prevent drop-out from upper secondary schools and provide support to young people for their transition into the labour market. The Directorate for Labour and Welfare and the Directorate of Education and Training provide funding for local pilot projects. This national political backing is important for the activity to take place and reinforces high-level commitment at the local and institutional level.

In each pilot project, a PES tutor is located in an upper secondary school for 50% of their time. In each school, they sit within the student support team and coordinate with the pupil services within the school and with employers, child welfare authorities and the regional follow-up service. This cross-sectoral approach provides holistic support for each student and helps the PES to better track and follow up with pupils who drop out of school.

⁹ N = 47 voters



Schools and PES have observed that the PES tutors have helped to reduce the drop-out rates of young people leaving upper secondary school as schools can provide much better advice and support to young people. Within one school, the dropout rate has reduced from 4.8% to 3.1% from 2012/2013 to 2014/2015 and the number of drop-outs fell to 11 out of over 800 students in this school.

An integrated approach which entails collaboration between PES and the education and training sector also ensures that young people are not 'lost' in the system. This is especially important at the local level. It is however a challenge for PES to create incentives for other institutions to contribute to the tracking of individuals who have dropped out of school.

Consequently, such collaboration needs to be organised. More structural cooperation at policy level can support and enhance the cooperation on the ground. For instance, detailed collaboration agreements make it easier to specify the roles and responsibilities of the different actors and avoid duplication. In many countries, legal issues prevent institutions' access to each other's data, particularly on an individual level. This impedes the coordination of services to young people and makes it more difficult to establish a baseline against which progress can be monitored. Therefore, **agreements on data exchange between public bodies dealing with NEETs are a strong success factor in establishing effective follow-up systems.**

One-stop-shop approaches encourage PES to look for new and easier solutions for data sharing.

6. Key conclusions

The sustainable activation of NEETs, working with employers, enhancing career guidance and strengthening collaboration with schools are strongly inter-linked. To achieve the goals of the Youth Guarantee and facilitate young people's transitions from education into the labour market, PES need to address them in a multi-faceted way and maximise the synergies, wherever possible.

The figure below shows how the four topics can be addressed in a manner that is both coherent

Data exchange regulations (Croatia)

In many Member States, data exchange between schools, PES and other public bodies is limited due to legal restrictions. This issue has been addressed in Croatia as an agreement has been signed between the Ministry of Education and other partners (Ministry of Labour, Croatian Employment Service and the Croatian pension authority).

The Croatian agreement allows the partners to gather data, share data and track pupils' progress through the education system. It clearly explains the different roles and responsibilities of each partner. The results are used to identify and support those who are likely to be early school-leavers, and thus the PES is able to provide assistance as soon as possible to help young people to make a smooth transition from school into the labour market.

and adds value. The figure highlights the need for close collaboration between PES, the education and training sector, employers, and other labour market actors across the four topics. It should be noted though that in practice, the topics can overlap: For instance, school-to-work transitions can also include first internships.

The discussions during the conference specifically highlighted the key challenges and success factors regarding each of the topics.

To ensure the **sustainable activation of NEETs**, PES practices need to be tailored to the characteristics of each specific NEET sub-group in each Member State. PES often struggle to establish a clear understanding of the target group and identify relevant opportunities and services, especially in countries with a low labour demand. Reaching out to NEETs who are not registered as unemployed is particularly difficult. Successful practices often have a specific focus on identifying where and who the NEETs are. This includes analysing the labour market situation in the geographical area, to ensure interventions are targeted to local needs. Moreover, PES combine successful outreach strategies with tailored activation and follow-up measures.

Holistic approaches tend to create more sustainable results in terms of supporting NEETs' transition into education, training or jobs. PES however

face the challenge of creating teams with multiple competences who are able to deliver this approach. Relevant stakeholders, especially at the local level, can take over certain tasks. **Employers** especially have an important role to play to increase the recruitment of young people, generate new jobs and ensure that employers are involved in the education, training and guidance of young people. To engage employers, specific strategies are needed that help to create trust. Such strategies should always underline the win-win aspect of the agreement for both parties, the PES and the employer.

By enabling trial internships and first work experience, employers can also be engaged in **career guidance**. PES can take a proactive conductor role in career guidance, and take on a coordinating function between different actors (schools, youth work, guidance institutions, NGOs, social partners, Ministry of Education) to ensure greater coherence and avoid the duplication of similar services. Career guidance to young people should be carried out with a view to long-term career perspectives and future professional development opportunities.

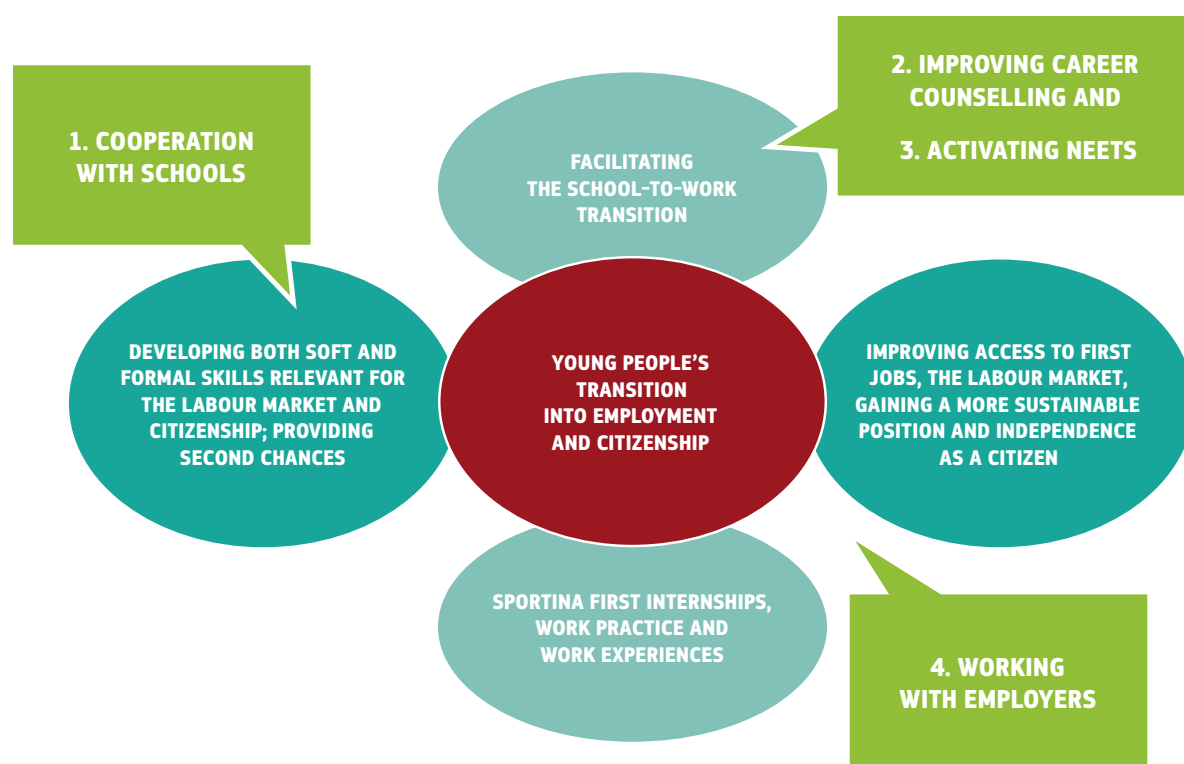
PES can also play a proactive conductor role in supporting schools with additional knowledge, tools,

measures and services to prevent drop-out and ensure that students leave school with a qualification. Many countries opt for an integrated approach which entails **close collaboration between PES and schools** as well as other actors in the education and training sector; to ensure that young people receive seamless service and are not at risk of getting 'lost' in the system. The collaboration should be underpinned by detailed collaboration agreements, which specify the roles and responsibilities of the different actors.

Data exchange between those involved is an additional success factor. Data exchange is key to follow-up on those who have already dropped out, can feed into the identification of 'hidden' groups of NEETs, and enable early intervention.

The conference created an opportunity to share insights, compare and contrast different types of practices, network, and have interesting discussions with colleagues from other countries in plenary and workshop sessions – but also during breaks, over a cup of coffee. PES and their partners identified learning points that will help them to advance further developments in the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in their country.

Figure: PES (conductor) role in young people's transition to employment



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