



EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK

Public Consultation regarding the provision of services to long-term unemployed in the Member States and at EU level

Identifying information

Name

European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN)

Address

Square de Meêus 18, 1050 Brussels

Phone number

0032 (0)2 226 58 50

E-mail

amana.ferro@eapn.eu

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1. Challenges

In the context of this consultation, long-term unemployed are considered as those that have been without a job for more than one year, but are actively looking for a job and are willing to accept if they are offered a job.

Member States have different approaches to preventing and reducing long-term unemployment in scope, timing and intervention schemes. There are also significant differences across Member States in the share of long term unemployed participating in active measures and in the length and coverage of benefits.

The background document outlines several challenges to address long-term unemployment.

* Q1. Do you agree with the description of the challenges?

Yes

No

2. Policy features

2.1. Integration of service provision

Cooperation between organisations delivering activation support, benefits and social services resulting in one-stop-shop delivery. Such coordinated service offer can include for instance activation support (e.g. training or subsidised employment), benefits (unemployment or social benefits) and social services (e.g. care or childcare). Collaboration may involve public and private organisations, including social partners, education and training providers, NGOs, voluntary organisations and social enterprises.

Q7. How important is the integration of service provision in the support for long-term unemployed?

Not important at all

Not important

Neutral

Important

Very important

2.2. Individualised services to long-term unemployed

Tailoring services to address individual needs of those unemployed for more than one year.

* Q8. How relevant is it that services for the long-term unemployed are individualised?

Not relevant at all

Not relevant

Neutral

Relevant

Very relevant

Q12. How efficient is the training of long-term unemployed in providing the skills needed to re introduce them effectively into the labour market?

Not efficient at all

Not efficient

Neutral

Efficient

Very efficient

Q14. What recommendations would you make to improve individualised services to long-term unemployed?

Individualized services must be designed with the aim of providing a life in dignity for both those able to access work and those who can't, guaranteeing access to rights, resources and services. An inclusive social vision starts from the assumption that people want to work, if they can, and if they are able to access decent employment. The primary goal of individualized services must be to support people's integration and inclusion in society and to prevent poverty – with positive activation into quality jobs being one element. A holistic approach to inclusion calls for an integrated Active Inclusion strategy, including comprehensive tackling of issues such as adequate income through the life cycle including income support and social protection, and access to affordable, quality services (including childcare, housing, health, education and training, debt counseling etc).

Pathway approaches to quality employment need to start from the individual and their specific aspirations, interests, necessities and obstacles. Insertion plans needs to be flexible and recognize changing needs and circumstances in one's personal situation. A case management approach should involve a direct, one-to-one relationship with a key worker, as well as empowerment, motivation, confidence-building, life-coaching and mentoring. Ownership is extremely important, and tailored responses need to be designed together with the beneficiary, and re-evaluated together every step of the way.

Training and skills upgrading, while an essential component in ensuring better access to employment opportunities, need to focus on more than just labour market needs, aiming to also improve personal, social and vocational skills and competences, enabling further social integration and participation in communities, alongside support towards the labour market. Recognition of existing competences is also vital, including non-formal skills, rather than a rigid focus on formal qualifications, which many excluded people have not been able to acquire.

2.3. Mutual responsibilities

Setting minimum standards for the activation of persons unemployed for more than one year with mutual binding commitments from both the individual and the organisations delivering services. These commitments could be formalised through individual action plans or other forms of written agreements.

Q15. How relevant is the mutual responsibilities approach for interventions for the long-term unemployed?

- Not relevant at all
- Not relevant**
- Neutral
- Relevant
- Very relevant

Q18. Should all services provided to long-term unemployed be subject to mutual responsibilities?

- Yes
- No**

Q19. What recommendations would you make on the application of a mutual responsibilities approach?

The starting point should be a rights-based and “trust first” approach, as framed by the Charter on Fundamental Rights and the Social Charter and the Active Inclusion Recommendation.

Most ALMP fail to recognize the complex, multiple barriers that people currently excluded from the labour market face. Positive activation measures are often marred by tightened eligibility, punitive conditionality, and the imposition of sanctions - reduced or cut benefits when people don't take up jobs offered, regardless of their quality, or people's individual circumstances, or indeed ability to work. Another concern is the lowering of unemployment benefits and reduction in coverage - the overarching priority remains to get people into any kind of employment, at all costs, and off welfare.

In 2014, 75% of EAPN members felt that their Governments were pursuing negative activation, and that these measures will not improve access to quality employment, but would result in increased poverty and exclusion. Members underlined that activation at any price has become the mantra, without any regard to the fact that the jobs are simply not there, and the jobs that do exist do not take people out of poverty (8.9% working poor and 1/3 of people in poverty are in work - EUSILC 2013).

In EAPN's view, most people want to work, to contribute and to feel useful. However, once engaging with job-seeking services, people often feel disempowered, discouraged, disrespected, and presumed guilty of slacking and of wanting to cheat the system. This, in the context of a crisis that has destroyed millions of jobs, yet to be replaced, where few and low-quality jobs available, and where social protection rights have been undercut. Until this attitude towards the (long-term) unemployed changes, and is replaced by supportive, integrated approaches, Europe will not be able to tackle its unemployment problem, much less to build cohesive, inclusive societies and labour markets, free from poverty.

2.4. Adequate incentives and services for employers to employ long-term unemployed

It includes direct support to employers who recruit, train or offer short-term work experience to long-term unemployed. The support offered includes subsidised employment, tax or social contribution reductions and post-placement support and more general support to broad groups of employers (e.g. awareness building among employers on hiring of long-term unemployed).

Q22. What recommendations would you make to improve the efficiency of the services delivered to employers?

While employment is usually viewed from a narrow supply-side perspective, not nearly enough is done to render labour markets more inclusive.

Employers and PES staff need to receive adequate anti-discrimination training, to ensure that no worker or jobseeker is discriminated on any grounds covered by national and European legislation, including socio-economic background. The long-term unemployed from specific discriminated target groups are at particular risk.

Many people returning to work after a long time, especially older workers or workers with health/disability issues, require specific adaptations to the working environment and conditions. Financial support and expert guidance can be provided to employers, together with follow-up support for the development of adapted contracts and conditions, including training and personalized coaching.

For (single) parents, and for women who are most often the main carer, a supportive environment is needed for proper balance between private and their professional life, through guaranteeing affordable access to high-quality care facilities, encouraging flexible hours and tele-working, and bridging the gender pay gap. This support should be equally granted to unemployed parents and carers.

Social economy enterprises, particularly WISEs (work integration social enterprises) and sheltered employment workshops, are also essential, as they provide intermediate placements, as well as open ended contracts for those furthest from the labour market. Equally important is the role of trade unions and collective bargaining, and the preservation of the right to trade union membership as part of core employment rights.

The creation of decent jobs, which can meet the real needs of those furthest from the labour market, requires the involvement and commitment of communities, as well as more responsible and ethical responses from companies. Corporate Social Responsibility and social clauses in public procurement can play a key role.

3. EU-level action

Current EU-level action includes support to Member States in addressing long-term unemployment policies through mutual learning and the European Semester process. Furthermore, ESF supports Member States' investment priorities related to long-term unemployment and the reform of labour market institutions.

* Q23. In your view, is there a need for further EU level action, targeted at raising awareness and keeping political momentum for improving effectiveness and efficiency of Member States' actions when tackling long-term unemployment?

- Yes, the EU should define general principles for an effective activation framework and recommending guidelines for measures to be used in Member States
Yes, the EU should recommend a set detailed guidance for the introduction and development of an "individual activation offer", bringing together the policy features described above into a coordinated package of services. The guidance would include required parameters to ensure effective outcomes, based on the general principles for an effective activation framework
- No, there is no need for further action at EU level

Q29. Do you have any other comments?

The most important question is what is the aim of the initiative for long-term unemployment? Reducing the perceived burden on public finances, by significantly decreasing so-called welfare-dependency? Artificially reaching the Europe 2020 employment target, by placing people into any job according to the Eurostat definition of “one hour worked in the week of reference”? Or making a difference in people’s lives, by empowering and supporting them into quality, sustainable employment, contributing to their social inclusion and effectively sheltering them from poverty?

Inclusive labour markets do not just mean a numbers’ game, artificially diminishing unemployment statistics, but implementing supportive pathway approaches to inclusion in the labour market and society, especially for those who have the hardest time reaching it and protecting the living standards in an outside work. The 75% employment target of the Europe 2020 Strategy cannot be achieved without an inclusive vision on employment, underpinned by a commitment to invest in quality and sustainable jobs, in personalised, integrated services, and in fighting discrimination inside and outside the labour market, ensuring access for those excluded to adequate social protection (including minimum income) and services, through integrated Active Inclusion. The poverty-reduction target will only be undermined by pursuing negative activation practices and condoning low-quality employment.

An inclusive society is mirrored by an inclusive labour market. The long-term unemployed require holistic approaches and integrated strategies, and real commitment to tackle the causes, not just the symptoms. In Portugal, our members highlight subsidies to employers as sole measure proposed to address rising long-term unemployment, while opining that such a piecemeal initiative is largely insufficient. In Austria, long-term unemployment is a multidimensional problem, involving mental and/or physical health issues, family problems, drugs/alcohol consumption, housing etc, and the projects are deemed insufficient. In Ireland, the lack of resources hinders measures to tackle this problem. Case management approaches have been seen to work, involving an integrated, joined up approach, involving a wide set of service coordinated through a key worker, particularly for excluded groups eg Roma (see CZ, also IE). But the objective must be to promote inclusion, not just employment at any price.

More investment must be made to counter discrimination and promote diversity in work and employment. Migrants (particularly undocumented) and ethnic minorities (particularly Roma) face ever-increasing difficulties due to racism and xenophobia. The growing problem of the gender and ethnic pay gap needs to be tackled. Many groups see their access to the labour market and to social participation blocked because of their particular vulnerable situation, such as suffering from long-term sickness or disability, people experiencing poverty, or having had substance or alcohol misuse problems.

Social economy and third-sector initiatives, particularly Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISE), have proven to be very successful instruments for supporting such excluded groups into work, especially in areas of new social and sustainable services. An integrated plan and approach involving joined up planning and delivery is essential.

More emphasis must be given to the recognition that an integrated Active Inclusion approach will only be successful if the people most affected are directly engaged in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of measures and policies aimed at them. Ownership of one's reintegration plan is essential to its success. Putting individual rights and needs at the core also means also prioritizing participation and empowerment. The continuous involvement of jobseekers and people experiencing poverty, directly as well as through the NGOs representing them, as key stakeholders in the European Employment Strategy, in the poverty, employment and education targets of Europe 2020, through the NRP process and the NSRs, remains key to the success of these strategies.

References:

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