

Youth Matters: Not For Export

An tAos Óg:

Bídís Linn agus Beidh Linn

Sinn Féin's analysis of critical youth issues and the Youth Guarantee



Youth Unemployment has become a critical issue throughout the European Union. The rate of unemployment ranges from a low of 7.8% in Germany to a high of 58% in Greece. The negative effects of widespread jobless youth on society are incalculable, both today and into the future. This paper aims to spotlight Youth Unemployment in Ireland. It is divided into three sections. The paper will outline Sinn Féin's assessment of each section and offer recommendations to address a multitude of points raised.

Is ceist chriticiúil í an óg-dhífhostaíocht san Aontas Eorpach. Ta éagsúlachtaí ann maidir le rátaí óg-dhífhostaíochta, chomh íseal le 7.8% sa Ghearmáin agus chomh ard le 58% sa Ghréig mar shampla. Cruthaíonn óg-dhífhostaíocht neart impleachtaí diúltacha don sochaí don lá ata inniu ann agus don todhchaí. 'Se an aidhm atá leis an paipéar seo ná díriú ar óg-dhífhostaíocht in Éirinn. Tá an páipéar roinnte i dtrí mír. Tar éis gach mír léireoidh an paipéar seo measúnú Sinn Féin agus an moltaí ata ag Sinn Féin chun dul i ngleic leis na pointí a ardaítear.

The three areas under consideration are:

Ná trí mír a bheidh curtha san áireamh ná:

- ▶ **Unemployment and Jobs** **3**
Dífhostaíocht agus Poist

 - ▶ **Emigration** **8**
Eisimirce

 - ▶ **Youth Guarantee and Government Initiatives** **12**
Rathaíocht don Aos óg agus Tionscnamh Rialtais
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Youth

Employment

and Jobs

Óg-dhífhostaíocht

agus Poist



Youth Employment and Jobs

Óg-dhífhostaíocht agus Poist

Young people across Europe have been hit hardest by the recent economic crisis. They face serious challenges in their attempts to enter the labour market. Opportunities are rare due to a lack of jobs and the 26 counties has one of the worst ratios of job-seekers to job vacancies within the EU, with 28 job-seekers for every vacancy. In Germany the ratio is 4 to 1. Recent CSO figures revealed that over the last two years, 76,300 under 34s left the labour market, the vast majority lost to emigration.

There is a need for strong political commitment at all levels from community and local, to national and European, in order to seriously address the youth unemployment crisis and the social exclusion that results from it. Co-ordinated policies across the areas of education, social welfare, employment, equality and youth need to be established and implemented. If young people are to be given a fighting chance to remain in this state and attain decent work for decent pay there needs to be better cross- sectoral co-operation between departments. There also needs to be a real commitment by government to promote the social inclusion of young people rather than the implementation of policies that incentivise emigration instead of genuinely tackling the youth jobs crisis.

The youth jobs crisis is not limited to a lack of jobs for young people. It is also a crisis regarding the type of employment available. Part-time work, or jobs that provide no security or future prospects, are not an answer.

Factors Leading To Youth Unemployment

Youth unemployment ranks higher than that of older age groups due to a combination of factors. Young job-seekers may:

- ▶ lack the professional experience required for certain jobs, or,
- ▶ switch employers more frequently as they enter the job market and decide on career paths.
- ▶ the collapse of the economy by Fianna Fail/ Green Government.

Nonetheless, these factors don't fully explain the youth unemployment crisis in this state.

The collapse of the construction and retail sectors, and the lack of strategic industrial and economic planning because of the focus on the banks from 2008 onward, led to the outflow of newly unemployed young men and women to Britain and further afield, and onto the live register at home.

Government austerity measures demanded dramatic cuts in public sector funding with the consequent spike in redundancies. Young people leaving higher education face a bleak future. The much-heralded JobBridge or Gateway schemes which have been set up as part of an effort to curtail youth unemployment levels will not fix the problem.

Both schemes are widely recognised as exploitative measures designed to remove young people from the dole queues and massage the numbers. In addition, the recruitment embargo in the public sector, with government closing off entry level positions, has hit young people the hardest.

Where are the Green Shoots of recovery for young people?

- Before the crash, when jobs were available, Ireland had a higher proportion of young people in employment than most countries with mandatory work programmes. Ireland also had one of the lowest levels of unemployment and long-term unemployment among all age groups across Europe.
- Since the current government came into power, unemployment has fallen by approximately 3% but this is due to the huge rate of emigration which, therefore, masks the reality of unemployment figures.

- CSO data released in February 2014 revealed the highest growth rate to be in low-paid sectors, like hospitality, and in large urban areas. The average weekly take-home pay proved to be falling across all sectors and across all regions.
- Irish people want to work. Jobs growth in the self-employed sector resulted in 63,500 additional jobs since the height of the recession. However, long-term unemployment continues to hover at 60% of the total number.
- Ireland's young people believe they are a generation left behind. From Belfast to Cork, from Ballinamore to Dublin, this was the overriding view expressed in Sinn Fein consultation meetings and research work carried out with youth organisations and youth groups nationwide over the last four months.
- Many young people believe that emigration is the only way out. They see no prospect for relevant work experience with viable job placements for them at home.
- Cuts to young peoples' social security payments by both the previous and current government have compounded and exacerbated their difficult living conditions

Low-paid and Precarious Work

More and more young people in this state are being exposed to poor working conditions through the increase of low-paid jobs and part-time and uncertain work. This is creating a huge rise in the numbers of 'working poor'. Uncertain work makes workers vulnerable to exploitation; it creates instability in young people's lives and diminishes protection of workers' rights. Agency work, fixed-term contracts and 0-hour contracts provide few opportunities for training or career advancement. Such conditions favour the employer's needs over the worker's and allow for quick hiring, firing and staff turnover. Pressure on the minimum wage status is an example of how the rights of workers are increasingly being challenged.

In a case study carried out by NERI on the retail sector in last year, 2013, findings show that there's a high degree of working time flexibility: there is dominance of part-time work available in contrast to the strong but unmet desire for longer hours. Many of these jobs are filled by young people.

'Relative poverty' – the income gap between low-paid workers and top earners – is among the highest within the advanced economies of Europe. As stated by Eurofound, the severity of the economic recession, accompanied by this government's deflationary policy response, are having 'a particularly detrimental impact on the country's working poor population and those in a precarious labour market position'.

The Immediate Future

- Depending on growth, the Fine Gael/Labour Government plan could take up to €2 billion out of the economy by the end of this year. The bulk of austerity measures implemented to date – from welfare cuts to property tax, have hit the low and middle-income earning families hardest. Further taxes, in the form of water rates, for example, can only exacerbate the situation, impact negatively on the local economy, and result in more job losses.
- Any talk of recovery needs to focus on the ability of middle and low-earning families to purchase and consume. It means investment instead of retrenchment. It means job creation instead of job cuts. It means payment for work done rather than provision of free labour. It means job dignity and job satisfaction for our young people rather than emigration.

Recovery Or Recession – The Reality

Some startling figures evidenced by Michael Taft, of Unite, reveal that Ireland holds the record for the longest domestic demand recession in the EU. Indeed, we had the longest domestic demand recession and the highest number of years where domestic demand fell within all the European countries studied below.

Consecutive Years of Domestic Demand Recession	Country and Years
Six Years	Ireland [2008–2013] Spain [2008–2013] Greece [2008–2013]
Five Years	Croatia [2009–2013] Slovenia [2009–2013]
Four Years	Finland [1990–1993]
Three Years	Czech Republic [2011–2013] Italy [2011–2013] Cyprus [2011–2013] Latvia [2008–2010] Portugal [2011–2013] Sweden [1991–1993] Belgium [1981–1983] Finland [1976–1978]

Sinn Féin's Focus

Sinn Féin called for a specific focus on youth to be included in the *Action Plan For Jobs 2014* and Senator Kathryn Reilly's office made a written submission to the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation in December of 2013 for that focus to be included.

Youth unemployment is an issue that threatens to undermine the very fabric of society. It is not an area of concern that can be isolated as a singular issue; its consequences have a domino negative affect on families, older people and the economy at large. European initiatives to tackle the issue, taken over the past four years, have failed. Eurofound stated at the end of last year that 30.1% of young unemployed people in the EU had been unemployed for 12 months or more. These alarming levels of youth unemployment in Europe have had serious social implications, with increased levels of crime, alcohol abuse, homelessness and drug addiction in many regions. Ireland has not been immune.

The latest official figures from Eurostat reveal that we rank fourth highest, of the European Union's 28 countries, for the number of long-term jobless people. Statistics show that about 60% of those out of work have been on the Live Register for more than one year.

According to the latest CSO figures, long-term unemployment accounted for 61.4% of total unemployment at the end of 2013. This compared with 59.9% a year earlier, and 62.5% at the end of 2011.

According to Eurofound, despite being more highly educated and skilled than previous generations, young people face more structural hurdles in accessing the labour market than ever before. We cannot continue to ignore this problem. Efforts by some public actors and decision-makers to directly criticise young people for the youth unemployment rate and their subsequent attempts to reduce young people's rights to social protection are unacceptable.

The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) And Ireland

A recent OECD report (*Society at a Glance 2014*) argues that "Income inequality and social divisions could worsen and become entrenched unless governments act quickly to boost support for the most vulnerable in society."

"*Society at a Glance 2014*" highlights the impact of the crisis across a range of indicators:

- The number of people living in households without any income from work has doubled in Greece, Ireland, and Spain, and has risen by 20% or more in Estonia, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Slovenia and the United States.
- Poorer households have lost greater shares of their incomes than the better-off or benefited less in the recovery – particularly in Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Italy and Spain.
- Young people are at greater risk of poverty than before the crisis. The share of 18-25 year-olds in households with incomes below half the national median has climbed in most countries – by 5 percentage points in Estonia, Spain and Turkey, by 4 points in Ireland and the United Kingdom, and by 3 points in Greece and Italy.



The OECD is critical of this government's efforts to address the jobs crisis. Recent published reports describe Ireland as '*leaving behind far too many for far too long*', with an enormous spike in young Irish people categorised as among the long-term unemployed. Key conclusions of its latest *Economic Survey of Ireland and report, Local Job creation: How Employment and Training Agencies Can Help* are:

- ▶ While the unemployment rate in Ireland has begun to decline, joblessness remains a serious concern.
- ▶ Youth joblessness stands at 28% with more than one-in-ten 15-18 year olds not employed or in education. Well-educated graduates are being forced to emigrate to find work.

The USI, ICTU and ISSU

The trade union movement, in collaboration with the Union of Students in Ireland (USI), has developed a collaborative Youth Position Paper, *Locked Out: Investing in a Future for Youth*. The paper outlines positive responses to this crisis. These include:

- ▶ A policy on the Youth Guarantee
- ▶ Best practice for work placements
- ▶ Graduate entrepreneurship and employability.

Sinn Féin's Proposals for Youth Focused Measures

- Replace the anti-youth policies of JobBridge and Gateway with positive and progressive work schemes. Currently, there are insufficient case-workers in the system to address all the critical needs of young people. There needs to be an additional increase in the number of caseworkers to fully ensure that all young people get a personal plan quickly – not just those prioritised under the current plan.
- An Individual Needs Plan should be provided to all young people within 4 months of becoming unemployed. A complete skills audit should be incorporated into each plan. The audit should identify gaps between the skills of the unemployed and those required in potential economic growth sectors and employers. This should involve formal certification of 'soft skills' and non-formal learning as appropriate.

- Establish a Public Sector Internship Programme with other EU states, thereby encouraging young people to improve their language skills within the workplace.
- Extend the BOOST and RYE (Rural Youth Entrepreneurship) programmes to the 26 Counties. This Six-County initiative aims to develop business skills and potential among vulnerable 16 to 30 year-olds in rural communities.
- Ensure all labour activation schemes are income proofed to ensure that the state is not facilitating the growth of 'at work poverty' levels.
- Invest in social and affordable housing in order to address the needs of our dysfunctional housing market. Employ the young unemployed for construction projects. This would alleviate the scourge of homelessness and address the needs of the new poor while delivering substantial jobs to the construction industry. Extend adequate credit to local authorities and the construction sector.
- Sinn Féin welcomes the new CAP measures designed to encourage young farmers to stay on the land or to return to it. The generational re-balancing of rural communities is a necessary and desirable feature of any such project. The addition of an agricultural qualification as part of the criteria for inclusion in the young farmers' scheme is welcome but attention should be paid to the difficulties posed by rural isolation. Cutbacks in the further education sector means that colleges now offer a smaller range of courses and distance from selected colleges may make accessibility to the scheme extremely difficult.



Youth

Emigration

Óg-eisimirce



Youth Emigration

Óg-eisimirce

Forcing unemployed labour to leave the state through the implementation of policies which penalise young people through savage cuts on dole payments when no jobs are available, and the application of ever-increasing college and apprenticeship fees, amounts to little more than forced emigration.

The Irish Government would like us to believe that this is due to the success of their 'jobs' policies. However, there is one critical factor that needs to be considered when viewing these falling jobless numbers; the elephant in the room is mass emigration. For the first time since May 2009, unemployment figures have fallen. They now stand below 400,000, while the Seasonally Adjusted unemployment rate stands at a Euro-zone average of 11.9%. These figures led Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton, to state that "the figures were encouraging and signalled Ireland's return to being a "normal euro zone country."

Impact of Emigration

Emigration is calculated from April to April each year. The figures are as follows for the year ending in April 2014.

	Immigrants	Emigration	Numbers leaving (net emigration)
2011	53,300	80,600	27,400
2012	52,700	87,100	34,400
2013	55,900	89,000	33,100

Since 2011, 94,900 people have left the state. This government came into office in February 2011. Since then the level of emigration has increased. A total of 127,000 working age people left the state since 2009. Recent research by the EIMGRE project University College Cork shows that 60% of emigrants were in employment before leaving the state. They chose to emigrate because they were in part-time or precarious work, because their pay was well below the high cost of living in Ireland, or because their jobs offered little or no opportunity for job advancement.

- People under the age of 30 form the highest component of emigrants.
- Since this government came into office, there are 40,000 fewer under 35s in work and 85,000 fewer in total in the labour market.
- While some may have returned to study, the vast majority of those 85,000 chose to emigrate.
- It is clear that Irish people want to work judging by the high number emigrating in search of jobs and an equally high number moving into self-employment.

Diverse Aspects of Emigration

- Recession-related factors are not the only drivers of emigration. Even during the boom times, emigration was a reality.
- There are several positive elements in current labour activation programmes, especially when such programmes facilitate a return to education and retraining and encourage constant contact with the labour market.
- However, negative aspects of the labour activation programmes are found in government schemes like JobBridge and Gateway, which contain coercive elements that force young people into employment for remuneration far below the poverty line.

The Brain Drain

- Unlike the 1950s or the 1980s, when many of Ireland's emigrants were in the unskilled labour market, today's migrants are often college graduates: architects, engineers, designers, and other young professionals.
- The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) think tank states that "a lot of the out-migration is of the most skilled and most able." It goes on to say that the population outflow is large, both by international and historical standards, and it calculates that the average age of those leaving Ireland is 28.
- Britain, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and the US are the main destinations for our young talent.
- Official US immigration figures show that approximately 20,000 Irish citizens arrived in the US between April 2012 and 2013. They also noted that 1,171 new Irish immigrants were people with "extraordinary abilities or achievements," and 1,259 were athletes, artists, and entertainers who were awarded green cards. This is worrisome news for the development of Irish culture and society.

Rural Areas Affected Most

- An in-depth study performed last September 2013 by researchers from University College Cork's Institute for Social Science in the 21st Century and the college's Department of Geography found that rural areas have been disproportionately affected by emigration with one in four households seeing someone leave since 2006.
- They also found that those leaving from rural communities were more likely to have a university qualification than emigrants from the general population. They noted that 62% of recent emigrants had a tertiary qualification of three years or more.

- Emigration levels are now four times as high as they were just seven years ago. Compared to other bailout countries such as Spain and Greece, the numbers leaving Ireland are excessive. But at the same time, IBEC claims there is a noticeable shortage of skilled workers in areas such as information and communications technology and high-end manufacturing - particularly around bio-pharmaceutical and medical devices sectors. Why the juxtaposition? Austerity measures imposed by this government over several years have cut workers' take-home pay to a point where even the most highly skilled people find it impossible to make ends meet. Emigration becomes a positive solution.

Will They Return?

Facts on the ground point towards Ireland, north and south, facing into the classic brain drain. When even jobs in the coveted multinational sector offer little opportunity for career progression, many young professionals will ultimately head elsewhere. Many young professionals are not willing to settle for a token job that holds no real prospects for progression or security, or a job that has no real relevance to what they studied. Those who can afford to leave will leave. But many more, the unemployed and under-employed, will remain. This government's stop-gap programmes, its JobBridge and Gateway, offer very few prospects for finding fulfilling and sustainable jobs. The final blow to all Irish emigrants is the Habitual Residence Condition, which serves to exclude them from social welfare support should they wish to return. It's like locking the door behind them.

The National Youth Council of Ireland's research indicates that 82% of emigrants questioned in a recent survey stated that they wanted to return home but only 22% considered it to be a likely prospect. Despite what the government chooses to believe, return immigration is not a foregone conclusion.



Voting Rights for Irish Emigrants

This government points young people towards emigration through policies that give them very little reason to remain. Yet these same young people are denied the right to vote from abroad. One conclusion that can be drawn from this is that this government fears the price they might have to pay at election time for the choices they have made, and for the toll its choices have wrought upon young people.

More than 106 other states, including Italy, Australia, the USA, Dominican Republic and Ghana, all allow their citizens an overseas vote. Britain actively encourages their citizens to vote from overseas.

In 2012 Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Phil Hogan, expressed his “support for the principle” of voting rights for Irish citizens abroad, but he deferred to the then-upcoming Constitutional Convention.

- The most recent Constitutional Convention voted in favour of extending Presidential voting rights to Irish citizens resident outside the state.
- This right should be extended to general elections as well.
- This government is of the opinion that Irish emigrants leave home as a ‘lifestyle choice’, that they leave home in search of new experiences and adventures, and they will return when their search is completed. Government ministers have stated such a view on countless occasions. Therefore, since that is the premise of their argument, the government should support the right of our ‘temporary emigrants’ to vote from abroad, while ‘temporarily’ living and working outside their country.

Sinn Féin Calls for:

- An extension of the right to vote in General and Presidential Elections to all adults of voting age and legally resident in this country for at least 5 years.
- The introduction of appropriate Diaspora Representation in the Dáil by way of reserved constituency, with voting rights subject to a valid passport and regular registration requirement.
- A reform of the Seanad with the Diaspora given representation.
- The appointment of a Minister of State for the Diaspora and Irish Overseas.
- The establishment of a Government Taskforce on emigration.
- Provision for permanent Diaspora representation on the Council of State.



The Youth Guarantee

*Rathaíocht
don Aos óg*



The Youth Guarantee

Rathaíocht don Aos óg

The Youth Guarantee is a European initiative driven by an acknowledgement that Europe needs to confront the escalating youth unemployment crisis across Europe. The European Commission released a Youth Employment Package in December 2012. This paved the way for the Council's adoption of the recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee in April 2013.

Following the Commission communication *Working together for Europe's young people – A call to action on youth unemployment* in June 2013, member states with regions experiencing a youth unemployment rate above 25% were requested to submit a Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan (YGIP) by the end of 2013. The Irish Government requested the advice of the OECD in implementing a Youth Guarantee scheme in this state. This advice was published in January of this year and was titled 'Options for an Irish Youth Guarantee.'

The proposed commitment given by the Youth Guarantee to all young people under 25 in each member state is: *'to ensure that ALL young people under the age of 25 years receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.'*

Funding:

€6.4 billion has been committed to member states' efforts to put their Youth Guarantee implementation plans into practice in countries where youth unemployment rates are above 25%.

€68 million is to be provided by the European Social Fund, Youth Employment Initiative and the Irish Government in equal amounts, giving a total of 204 million euro.

The YEI specific allocation of €68 million will be committed by Commission in 2014 (€38 million) and 2015 (€ 30 million). These amounts are reserved in the Commission's budget for Ireland. The same applies for the ESF contribution. Ireland then has three years to claim reimbursement - that is by end of 2017.

In 2012 the International Labour Organisation, the ILO, reported that 21 billion euro, which roughly equates to 0.5% of Eurozone spending, would be required to effectively implement the Youth Guarantee across Europe.

The ILO estimates that an effective Youth Guarantee, like the one implemented in Sweden, costs approximately €6,600 per participant. There are currently circa 65,000 young people unemployed in this state. Therefore, a comparative Youth Guarantee with long term benefits to Ireland would necessitate a figure of over 400 million euro.

Progress

Last November, EU leaders signed the Youth Guarantee scheme to combat rising youth unemployment in the European Union. The scheme, as stated by the Council Recommendation, aims to ensure that young Europeans – aged between 15-24 years of age – get a quality job, internship or education within 4 months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education and entering the labour market. Its overall objective is to give the most vulnerable young Europeans a chance at employment while cementing skills for a more employable future.

There are huge concerns, however, that although the EU wide scheme represents member states' intentions to tackle youth unemployment, the Youth Guarantee does not go far enough. It has been noted, not only by youth organisations in this state but Europe-wide, that inadequate funding and resources are likely to hinder the commitments outlined.

As stated by the National Youth Council of Ireland, resources required for a proper Youth Guarantee should have been researched and estimated as the first step, followed by an the allocation of monies. Not the other way around. The NYCI also made a proposal to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs recommending the establishment of an 'Innovation Fund' which youth services could access. Such a fund would run local initiatives aimed at bridging the gaps between young job seekers and their education, training and work experience opportunities.

Currently, there is no formal role in the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan for youth organisations within these plans. Those who represent and give voice to young people should be consulted and consistently included in the development of the process. It is vital that this type of partnership approach is valued.

It is difficult to understand a declaration that the state does not have sufficient funds to enhance the overall value of a Youth Guarantee in the context of the billions of euro that were pumped into failing banks. It is also understandable that this should generate huge anger and frustration in our younger population.

Youth unemployment has been identified as “Europe’s most pressing problem” by German Chancellor Angela Merkel. In 2014 Youth unemployment continues to be the problem that won’t go away, and it is a problem that is growing.

- There is huge disparity between member states youth unemployment levels: the lowest is in Germany at 7.8% and in Austria at 9.4%, with the highest ranking at 41.2 % in Spain, 58% in Greece (dated November 2013) in Ireland currently at approximately 26%

The European Commission’s Influence?

Member states are at liberty to design, implement and partly fund their national Youth Guarantee. During a meeting with Sinn Féin’s Senator Kathryn Reilly and MEP Martina Anderson and the European Commission in March of this year, it was outlined during the course of the meeting that with regards to the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan for Ireland, the European Commission acts as an advisory mechanism. It was made clear to Senator Reilly and MEP Anderson that there will be no rubber stamping of plans from the EU. Ultimately, the full responsibility for decision making comes from the Irish Government. However, as stated in a research paper conducted by the Houses of the Oireachtas for Senator Kathryn Reilly titled ‘Responses to Youth Unemployment in Europe’, EU policies in combating youth unemployment remain vague and general.

Key national and European stakeholders are sceptical of the EU’s institutions’ ability to impact positively on the issue. It found that even where specifics have been spelt out (such as with the Youth Guarantee), they are still general recommendations with little obligation on national governments to implement them.

A well-designed Youth Guarantee should include goals that are achievable even in the context of the recession. Otherwise, the scheme both here and in other member states, will be viewed as a costly box ticking exercise that provides no long-term solution.

Traineeships and Apprenticeships

The European Youth Foundation has called for a greater emphasis on quality traineeships and apprenticeships, increased participation by young Europeans in the policy-making processes, and an extension of the scheme to 25-30 year olds.

In order that a high- quality traineeship or apprenticeship is offered, it is essential that the placement allows for a significant skills acquisition and provides an accumulation of worthy experience. Any state supported internship programme must have proper monitoring and controls, including pre-placement checks and consultation with trade unions where a collective agreement exists, to prevent displacement of paid work and ensure meaningful employment-enhancing training.

Irish Jurisdiction:

The word *Guarantee* holds currency. It signifies complete commitment to the proposals outlined in the Implementation Plan. But the *Guarantee* becomes a hugely challenging prospect when insufficient funds are provided. Moreover, a plan without defined targets becomes no more than an abstract generalisation. The government is capable of setting targets in areas such as the manufacturing industry, financial services and foreign direct investment. It should, therefore, be possible to do the same for the Youth Guarantee. Finally, the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan needs to follow a rights-based approach to employment with the recognition that young people of all disabilities have a right to expect certain services and provisions from the state.

A Youth Guarantee should:

- ▶ Focus on connecting young people with placements that match their education or experience level.
- ▶ Not subject young people to obligatory or underpaid labour or unnecessary sanctions.
- ▶ Be subject to on-going and verifiable assessment and monitoring.
- ▶ It should identify in a clear and precise manner how young people who are not on the Live Register, including young people with disabilities, will be identified, communicated with, provided for and 'guaranteed'.

The success of the Youth Guarantee also relies on political will to implement a clear strategy. This requires deep structural reforms in sectors such as employment, administrative services, and education and a strengthening in co-operation between education, business and the voluntary sector. There should not be a solitary focus on private sector employers.

Youth employment initiatives must be treated as long-term continuous investment in quality jobs, education and training for young people. Eurofound's research has confirmed that youth unemployment does not only impact negatively on young people, but it also imposes significant economic costs to society and the economy *vis a vis* earnings forgone and revenue lost.

- Eurofound estimated that youth disengagement from the labour market costs about 1.2% of GDP in the EU or about 135 billion euro per annum, and in Ireland 2 billion euro per annum. Failure to sufficiently fund a Youth Guarantee will result in substantial costs to the exchequer.

The current Implementation Plan for a Youth Guarantee in Ireland, although well intentioned, has been seriously under-funded from the start. The funding, as previously stated, is being sourced through the European Social Fund, Youth Employment Initiative and the general exchequer.

Points For Consideration on the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan for Ireland

- During the Presidency of the European Union last year (2013), agreement on a European Youth Guarantee was reached and championed as guaranteeing "young people a quality offer of employment, education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship, within four months on becoming unemployed or leaving full-time education." Despite publicly endorsing the implementation of the Youth Guarantee, all Fine Gael, Labour, Fianna Fail MEPs and the Independent MEP from the 26 counties voted against an amendment to increase the Youth Guarantee funding to required level in the European Parliament during July of last year. Sinn Féin's MEP Martina Anderson acted as draftsman for the Opinion of the Regional Development Committee on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy 2010 -2012.

- The Irish Government promises a 'Youth Guarantee Offer' within 4 months to those considered to be the most in need of its provision, yet possibly within nine months for those not falling within that bracket. This does not keep to the commitment outlined in the EU Council Recommendation of 4 months for all. Roll-out of the Youth Guarantee is to be staggered, and will not be fully ready until the end of 2015 at the earliest.
- The Youth Guarantee will not be reviewed until the end of 2015. This in itself is problematic given that funding is over the 2014/2015 period. By the time proper reviews, evaluation and amendments are considered, funding will no longer be available. Frequent periodic reviews need to be considered in order to ensure that funds are spent effectively.
- Concerns have been expressed that the Implementation Plan will repeat many problems of the past. In order to do what it says on the tin, adequate money needs to be invested in services that create personalised plans for each individual and then deliver on-going coaching, mentoring and direction towards credible career plans. The Youth Guarantee should not just be about placing a person in a job. It should also be about the development of each young person according to his or her needs and equipping that person with skills for life. Financial resources need to be provided for staffing requirements. Case-workers need to be able to assess the education levels, skills and career ambitions of each client without duress. The OECD report 'Getting Youth on the Job Track' published last September 2013, raised the issue that at that time, Ireland only had 1 case worker for every 800 jobseekers. Even with the recent increase in that number, the state still falls dramatically short of what is needed. Experiences from Finland and Sweden demonstrate that case-worker overload is a critical obstacle to success within their schemes.

- Success of the Youth Guarantee should not be measured in terms of numbers on the Live Register only. We cannot have a revolving door system of young people leaving placements if they are unsuitable and then returning to the Live Register, or indeed, to another inadequate and short-lived placement. If the Youth Guarantee turns into a box-ticking exercise to decrease the number on the Live Register in the short-term, it will have failed in addressing the underlying issues.
- The Youth Guarantee is meant to guarantee a job, apprenticeship or training offer for all young people under 25, however, the government does not appear to be committed to this. There is little or no provision for:

- ▶ young people with a disability (there are approximately 10,000 young people on disability allowance)
- ▶ lone-parents or carers
- ▶ young people who are not engaged in the employment services

Essentially our most vulnerable young people are excluded in the government's Implementation Plan. If these groups of people are not included in the preliminary stages, they are sure to be excluded later on.

- The privatisation of the welfare system is another cause for concern. Tendering for the outsourcing of contracts at a local level is a worrisome development. Private companies have now tendered for the JobPath contracts to implement aspects of the unemployment service. They will be paid on a results based basis. This incentivises companies to remove young people from the Live Register by whatever means necessary. Ultimately, it raises concerns around motive, and it could jeopardise the quality of placements for young people. The government should immediately suspend the consideration of JobPath bids, and in light of the negative evidence from overseas, halt this process.

The Ballymun Pilot Project and NEETs (Neither in Employment, Education or Training)

The Council Recommendation on the 22nd April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee stated that:

'The starting point for delivering the Youth Guarantee to a young person should be the registration with an employment service, and for those NEETs who are not registered with an employment service, Member States should define a corresponding starting point to deliver the Youth Guarantee with same four-month time-frame.'

According to Eurostat, those with low levels of education are three times more likely to be NEET compared with those in tertiary education. Young people suffering from disability or health issues are 40% more likely to be NEET than those in good health. NEETs are at a higher risk of political and social alienation and have a lower level of trust in government and social services. In order to ensure success with any scheme there must be a rebuilding of trust between those young job seekers and the authorities.

Currently, there is no provision within the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan or Ballymun Pilot Project for those young people not on the Live Register. The Implementation Plan only states that if the PES direction is not working, an approach with youth organisations 'may be explored' (footnote from the YG Implementation Plan p15). This creates the significant risk that youths who are not engaged with employment services will find themselves excluded and lose any potential benefit from the Youth Guarantee. If the Ballymun Pilot does not provide an alternative corresponding starting point, and youth groups and organisations are not feeding into the process, there is significant risk that the Youth Guarantee will result in being an initiative for some, not all young people. This runs contrary to both the Council Recommendation and YGIP commitment. This is of serious concern for Sinn Féin.

Meetings with various youth groups in Ballymun, held for the purpose of this paper, brought to light the fact that little or no consultation has taken place with the groups during the course of establishing the pilot project. This is unfortunate as these groups could act as a valuable information resource.

Non-formal Learning

The National Youth Council of Ireland and Foróige have regularly emphasised the need for the inclusion of non – formal learning into the Youth Guarantee.

Value should be given to young people's development of 'soft skills' and to non– formal education.

While there is a high degree of certification amongst youth, this does not automatically translate into education and skills required by the labour market and employers. In order to actually tailor apprenticeships to the needs of the labour market, design and implementation should be should be partnered with relevant stakeholders and intermediaries and sectoral organisations. Non-formal learning needs to be upgraded through a recognised system of accreditation.

During the course of meetings with youth groups and organisations for this paper, it was highlighted that many young people being placed on schemes or courses in the past lacked simple life skills and work discipline. Young persons' needs should be catered for adequately prior to placing them on courses or traineeships.

Points highlighted were:

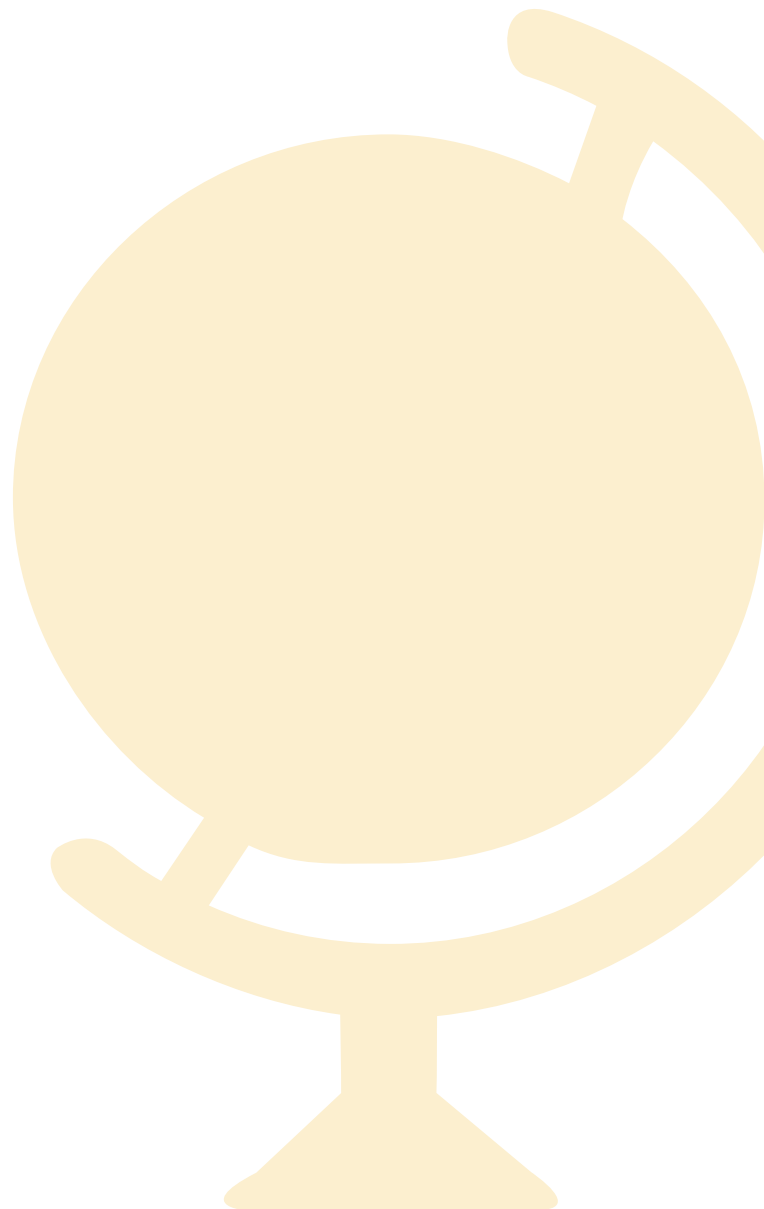
- ▶ Self-worth should be a first step that needs to be nurtured in those young people from troubled or underprivileged backgrounds and early school leavers. 'Develop the person, before the skills.'
- ▶ Any Youth Guarantee model should prioritise the young person's needs first, be that an introduction to life skills, interview skills or personal skills. Practical skills should be developed along with the personal.
- ▶ There needs to be a focus on transferable skills so that young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, can apply those skills in any number of work placements.
- ▶ There must be a match between acquired skills and the young person's interests so that the final results become sustainable.

How is the Youth Guarantee to be evaluated?

- There are insufficient clear or measurable targets. What are the benchmarks and indicators for the provision of meaningful positions based on the needs of young people?
- What measures are the government putting in place for tracking once a placement has been completed? If follow-up assessment is not part of the plan in place, the exercise runs the risk of becoming a once-off intervention.

Sanctions – Rights – Collective bargaining

- The government has stated that there will be sanctions imposed on young people who do not take up placements or who drop out of a placement. Young people should not be penalised if the plan offered does not meet the needs, skills or capabilities of the individual.
- A rights-based approach to work placements must recognise the fact that young people have rights to certain services and provisions from the state. They are the same as all other citizens and should not be penalised for being young or exploited by questionable schemes such as JobBridge and Gateway.
- Any state supported internship programme must contain proper monitoring and controls. Pre-placement checks and consultation with trade unions where a collective agreement exists should take place to prevent displacement of paid work and ensure that quality and up to standard training is being offered.
- Participants in any Youth Guarantee should enjoy the rights to organise without intimidation, the right to collective bargaining and the right to union membership in common with all other workers.
- Sinn Féin calls on the government to ensure that trade unions give the oversight on all government supported labour activation schemes



Irish Government Youth Guarantee Initiatives 2014

Intreo: The move towards one-stop-shops in the guise of Intreo which brings together employment and income supports is long overdue. It will be vital that Intreo staff are trained and supported to offer a professional and welcoming service to young jobseekers delivered to the highest standard - so that young jobseekers are appropriately supported into meaningful training, education and quality jobs.

Youthreach/Community Training Centres: Sinn Féin believes that 'second chance secondary' be a real option and the number of places provided through Youthreach should be drastically increased. The government needs to reverse the decision to reduce allowances to participants and should consider the real cost of learning in its assessment.

JobBridge: Sinn Féin believes that the JobBridge scheme is beyond repair following a long line of abuses and the on-going refusal of the government to acknowledge the many systemic flaws in the scheme. While acknowledging that some individuals have had a positive experience, overall the JobBridge scheme displaces existing paid work, defers real job creation, depresses wages and exacerbates underemployment. It also offers a significant advantage in the form of state funded free labour to exploitative employers against which good employers who want to pay decent wages are finding it increasingly difficult to compete.

Sinn Féin strongly rejects the coercive aspect that has been introduced in JobBridge by the government's Youth Guarantee Scheme. As part of the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan, moves have made to make JobBridge become mandatory:

'Failure to apply for or accept an opportunity on the national internship scheme (JobBridge) will give rise to sanctions which will include':

- Cutting job-seeker payments by up to 25 percent. This could see a young person, already trying to survive on a €100 a week, being cut to €75. For those receiving €144 per week they will be reduced to €111.
- This also suggests that the young unemployed must pro-actively apply for JobBridge – something that was not required before, prior to the YGIP

There is a very real danger that JobBridge internships open up the possibility for exploitation rather than advancement and potential for where genuine market vacancies are compromised by such 'internships' when companies avail of JobBridge in order to reduce their labour costs. Sinn Féin concludes that:

- It is unacceptable for a scheme that provides free labour to employers be mandatory for the unemployed
- A scheme like JobBridge distorts competition and creates a loss in revenue to the Exchequer
- A new intern on any scheme must not create another type of displacement – one in which an intern replaces a fully waged person who might have been hired had JobBridge not existed. ESRI's Philip O'Connell – a leading researcher in labour market programmes' effectiveness has stated that, 'We don't know the dead weight or displacement' of the scheme.
- A positive state supported internship programme would have to respect the principle that an internship should be a benevolent act by employers and all productive work must be paid for.

Tús: Sinn Féin opposed the introduction of the Tús scheme because participation is not voluntary and, unlike the much better Community Employment Scheme, it does not involve formal accredited training.

Jobs Plus: Sinn Féin warmly welcomed the Jobs Plus scheme. This scheme involves real jobs with real pay, terms and conditions. Employers receive a subsidy from the state when they recruit an employee from the long-term unemployed on the live register.

Momentum: Sinn Féin has been supportive of Momentum in that it is a relatively positive activation scheme, however we are very concerned regarding threats to privatise its delivery

BTEA: The Back to Education Allowance is a very positive scheme which offers income support to jobseekers to return to advance their education. It was undermined however by the government decision to discontinue the associated Cost of Education Allowance which had been payable.

BTWEA: The Back to Work Enterprise Allowance is a very good activation measure which allows a person to take the risk of starting up their own business without precipitating an immediate loss of the social welfare income support. Income support is withdrawn in stages and this eases and encourages the transition off social welfare.

VTOS: Working class communities have suffered due to cutbacks to VTOS scheme. Sinn Féin have long argued for the restoration of childcare provision for VTOS course participants and extra supports and resources, and increased VTOS places.

FAS/Solas training for unemployed: Sinn Féin welcomed the establishment of SOLAS as a means to bringing to closure the scandalous misuse of funds and expenditure by senior FAS personnel which discredited the good work that FAS did.

SOLAS must be part of the delivery of further education and training we need to establish a more integrated and coherent system that can

meet the future needs of the labour market. We have concerns that the functions of SOLAS have been limited by the narrowness of their scope which while identifying employers as key stakeholders have neglected to engage in any meaningful way with providers of FET and adult learners themselves. Current labour market programmes are limited in the way they cater for people with literacy and numeracy needs and all too often they fail to address the needs of the long-term unemployed.

Gateway: Sinn Féin are opposed to the introduction of the Gateway scheme. Participation on Gateway is not voluntary and it does not involve meaningful accredited training.

It is a new compulsory workfare scheme –where young and unemployed people will be forced to take up employment for county councils for 20 hours per week . A 20 euro ‘top-up’ will be added to on their weekly social welfare payment which amounts to only one extra euro hour.

The scheme is unlikely to improve jobseekers’ long-term employment prospects. It may, however, place the state in breach of the UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, relating to the right to freely choose one’s work, and the European Convention on Human Rights which states that no-one shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour. As cited recently by Unite, ‘there is no evidence that compulsory labour schemes such as this help the long-term unemployed find a route back into employment: on the contrary, a peer-reviewed study carried out for the UK’s Department of Work and Pensions in 2012 found that such schemes had no effect in helping people access employment.’

Community Employment: Sinn Féin have long advocated for greater use of the Community Employment Scheme which is based on structured accredited training. It is a positive model which should have been expanded on by government instead they introduced a series of cheaper, exploitative schemes and even undermined CE itself by cutting the associated training and materials grants.

Bibliography and Acknowledgements

Leabharliosta agus

Buíochas



Acknowledgements

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Sinn Féin would like to thank and acknowledge the input from the following groups and organisations. All contributions through meetings or advice are greatly appreciated and proved essential for the purpose of this document.

Bee Park Resource Centre – Manorhamilton Co. Leitrim

Acorn – Co. Longford

Lus na Gréine Family Resource Centre

St. Michael’s Youth Project – Inchicore, Co. Dublin

Waterford Area Partnership Youth – Co. Waterford

Youthreach – Gortahork, Co. Donegal

The Yard – Falcarragh Co. Donegal

YES Centre – Co. Cork

Deer Park School – Co. Cork

Ballyphehane Youth Centre – Co. Cork

Youthreach – Granard Co. Longford

Buncrana Youth Drop-in Centre

North Connaught Youth Partnership

NI Youth Forum

The National Youth Council of Ireland

Foróige

USI (Union of Students in Ireland)

We’re Not Leaving Campaign

Mandate Youth

SpunOut

Ballymun Resource Centre Pilot Project

The European Commission – DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

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This paper has examined a critical set of issues that confront young people in the areas of unemployment, social exclusion, training and forced emigration.

It highlighted the Irish Government's failure to address each of the issues fairly and convincingly.

Finally, this paper has aimed to present Sinn Féin's perspective on each issue in an EU context and has proposed constructive measures in order to address these issues as a matter of urgency.





