



## Design and Influence of the EU's Youth OMC

*A case study of the NEET's needs and The Netherlands (part 1)*

**Beryl TER HAAR\***

### **Abstract**

Ever since its introduction in 2000 the open method of coordination (OMC) has generated a lively debate about its functioning and effectiveness. Many studies have indicated that it is very difficult to prove causal relations between the OMC and policy activities of the Member States. Nonetheless, it is possible to study the influence of the OMC at ideational level. This study aims to do this for the Youth OMC. Against the background of the creation of epistemic community and the theory of discursive diffusion a comparative discourse analysis is conducted between the EU's Youth OMC and Dutch youth policies. The discourse analysis for both levels focuses on youth (un)employment measures, in particular those addressing young people who are Neither in Employment, Education or Training (NEET). The study finds that in case of The Netherlands, the outcome of the analysis gives a mixed result on the influence of the Youth OMC. In terms of ideas and sort of measures the Youth OMC and Dutch youth policies are remarkable similar, especially concerning measures serving the NEET's needs, however, these have been developed at different moments in time. Overall The Netherlands seems to run ahead of the EU, and as such possibly influenced the Youth OMC (bottom-up policy diffusion). In one period of time (2004 – 2009) though, the Youth OMC and Dutch policies appear to be synchronous.

**Keywords:** Youth OMC, NEET, Youth Guarantee, Discursive diffusion, Dutch youth policies

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\* Assistant professor International and European Labour Law and academic coordinator Advanced LL.M. Global and European Labour Law at Leiden University, the Netherlands; visiting professor at the university of Warsaw, Poland.

## 1. Introduction

Being introduced as a general instrument for policy coordination in the EU's Lisbon Strategy of March 2000,<sup>1</sup> the open method of coordination (OMC) rapidly gained popularity in the field of social policies, including policies for youth.<sup>2</sup> Every OMC though is unique in its design and consequently its impact.<sup>3</sup> Previous research on the Youth OMC has indicated that the strength of this OMC lies with the creation of a hybrid structure bringing together the eight action fields of EU youth policies.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, it has been illustrated that at institutional level, the hybrid structure of the Youth OMC has resulted in a panoply of instruments and mechanisms enforcing each other in creating incentives for Member States to act up in the field of youth policies.<sup>5</sup> This development has been perceived as positive and an example of one of the strengths of the OMC as a mechanism to coordinate governance.<sup>6</sup> Coordinated governance is presumed to create a stronger pressure on Member States to comply with EU measures. In other words, it suggests a bigger impact of EU measures on the domestic legal orders of the Member States.<sup>7</sup> Following on this research, the obvious next question is: To which extent impacts the Youth OMC the Member States' domestic policies?

Empirical research on the effectiveness of the OMC in other policy fields, among which employment, social inclusion and pensions,<sup>8</sup> has already pointed out that it is very difficult to assess the impact of the OMC on the national legal orders of the Member States. Unlike EU directives, for example, OMC objectives and guidelines do not need to be transposed into the national legal order.<sup>9</sup> Instead efforts are to be undertaken to achieve the goals, hence the outcome of national measures is more important than the actual design.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, previous empirical studies have also shown that it is possible to

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<sup>1</sup> *Lisbon Strategy*: European Council Conclusions, of 23–34 March 2000.

<sup>2</sup> See for an overview of various OMCs: Bridgid LAFFAN – Colin SHAW: *Classifying and Mapping OMC in Different Policy Areas. NEW GOV-New Modes of Governance paper*, 02/09, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Frank VANDENBROUCKE: *The EU and Social Protection. What should the European Convention Propose? MPIJG Working Paper*, 02/6, 2002. 11.; and Susana BORRÁS – Claudio M. RADAELLI: *Recalibrating the Open Method of Coordination: Towards Diverse and More Effective Usages. SIEPS*, 2010/7.

<sup>4</sup> Paul COPELAND – Beryl P. TER HAAR: *The Open Methods of Coordination as Amplifier for EU Soft Law – The Case of EU Youth Policy. Acta Juridica Hungarica*, Vol. 56., no. 1., 2015. 14–29. [Hereinafter: COPELAND–TER HAAR (2015a)]

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* And on the OMC more general in terms of coordinated governance: Kenneth ARMSTRONG: *Governing Social Inclusion. Europeanization through Policy Coordination*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> See on this also: Paul COPELAND – Beryl P. TER HAAR: *The coordinated governance of EU social security policy: Will there ever be enough?* In: Frans PENNINGNS – Gijsbert VONK (eds.): *Research Handbook on European social security law*. Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, 2015. 201–232.

<sup>8</sup> Among others: Milena BÜCHS: *New Governance in European Social Policy: The Open Method of Coordination*. London, Palgrave-MacMillan, 2007.; Contributions in Jonathan ZEITLIN – Philippe POCHE (eds.) with Lars MAGNUSSEN: *The Open Method of Coordination in Action: The European Employment and Social Inclusion Strategies*. Brussels, P. I. E. Lang, 2005.; Manuele CITI – Martin RHODES: *New Modes of Governance in the EU: Common Objectives versus National Preferences. EURGOV*, no. N-07-01, 2007.; and BORRÁS–RADAELLI op. cit.

<sup>9</sup> Among others: Gerda FALKNER – Oliver TREIB – Miriam HARTLAPP – Simone LEIBER: *Complying with Europe: EU Harmonization and Soft Law in the Member States*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Similar: Caroline DE LA PORTE: *Is the Open Method of Coordination Appropriate for Organising Activities at European Level in Sensitive Policy Areas? European Law Journal*, 2002. 39.; and Jonathan ZEITLIN: *The Open Method of Coordination in Action. Theoretical Promise, Empirical Realities, Reform Strategy*. In: ZEITLIN–POCHET–MAGNUSSEN op. cit. 448.

assess the influence of the OMC at the level of ideas and (policy) concepts.<sup>11</sup> In these studies linkages are made between the OMC's intention not only to influence Member States normatively (by setting common objectives; indicators; guidelines; recommendations that all steer towards certain outcomes), but also to influence Member States' policy choices cognitively.<sup>12</sup> The latter happens mostly through the elements of the OMC that are part of the peer review and monitoring mechanisms of the OMC. Moreover, it is by the combination of its institutional and procedural design and its iterative nature that the OMC can foster the development of an epistemic community at European level, which is an important aspect for further (policy) learning at national level.<sup>13</sup>

While many case studies exist about the effectiveness of the OMC, none of these studies focus on the Youth OMC. Consequently, in the doctrine about the OMC / new governance little is known about the Youth OMC in general,<sup>14</sup> and even less in terms of its influence on Member States' youth policies. With in total eight action fields (education and training; employment and entrepreneurship; health & well-being; participation; voluntary activities; social inclusion; creativity & culture; and youth and the world), a full analysis of the Youth OMC goes beyond my abilities as labour law scholar. Therefore the study is limited in two ways. First, the material scope is limited to one of the eight action fields, namely employment and entrepreneurship. More particularly, it is focused on the group of young people who are 'Not in Employment, Education or Training' (NEET). Secondly, it is limited to a textual analysis for signs in national policies and regulations on youth matters that reflect EU youth employment policy.

The study is designed as follows. Section one elaborates on the concepts and theories regarding the creation of an epistemic community in general and on policy learning (discursive diffusion) in the context of the OMC in particular. Against the background of these insights and theories the influence of the Youth OMC is analysed. Section two deals with the analysis of the Youth OMC at European level. The analysis includes an historical account of the development of the Youth OMC, with a particular focus on the action field 'employment and entrepreneurship'. Furthermore, the Youth OMC's institutional structure is unpacked, positioning it also in the wider EU policy framework it is part of, including Europe 2020. Then the discourse of the most important documents and initiatives are analysed. The third section offers an analysis of the youth employment policies and measures of The Netherlands. The analysis is based on a desk research examining documents underlying the Dutch youth employment measures and policies. These documents include parliamentary documents

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<sup>11</sup> For an overview and analysis of this research: BORRÁS–RADAELLI op. cit. 27–37.

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan ZEITLIN: The Open Method of Coordination and Reform of National Social and Employment Policies. Influences, Mechanisms, Effects. In: Martin HEIDENREICH – Jonathan ZEITLIN (eds.): *Changing European Employment and Welfare Regimes*. London, Routledge, 2009. 217.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. David M. TRUBEK – James S. MOSHER: New Governance, Employment Policy, and the European Social Model. In: Jonathan ZEITLIN – David M. TRUBEK (eds.): *Governing Work and Welfare in a New Economy*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003. 47.

<sup>14</sup> An exception on research focus is my previous work on the topic with COPELAND op. cit. note 4.

and other publicly available documents, reports, opinions, etc. of actors that have been involved with or were of influence on respective youth employment policy or measure.

The fourth section holds a comparative discourse analysis between the Youth OMC and the Dutch youth policies. Since it is almost impossible to prove causal relations between the OMC and the measures adopted by the Member States, the existence of influence of the Youth OMC is assumed when similar language, underlying ideas and concepts used at EU level are echoed in the national policies and measures. The last section draws some general conclusions about the Youth OMC, its design, governance structure, and influence on The Netherlands at ideational level.

For publication reasons this research is split in two parts. The first part holds the first two sections, on theory, methodology and research design and the Youth OMC, the second part holds the last two sections dealing with the Dutch youth employment measures and policies and the analysis on the influence of the Youth OMC on the Dutch youth employment measures.

## 2. Theory, methodology and research design

The aim of this study is to analyse the influence of the Youth OMC on the policies of the Member States in the field of employment and entrepreneurship, with particular interest for young people that are Neither in Employment, Education or Training (NEET). As indicated in the introduction, previous studies on the influence of the OMC on the policies of the Member States have revealed that it is very hard to prove causal relations between an OMC and national measures. What has proven possible though, is to measure policy learning from the top (EU-level), down to Member State level through the development of a common language among national elites, or epistemic communities internalising new public management techniques,<sup>15</sup> which in a reflexive response may result into subtle cognitive transformations.<sup>16</sup>

### 2.1. Epistemic Community and discursive diffusion theory

Although the idea of an epistemic community is a concept developed in reference to scientific communities originally, it has been re-interpreted in the context of international policy coordination

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<sup>15</sup> J. Timo WEISHAUP: A Silent Revolution? New Management Ideas and the Reinvention of European Public Employment Services. *Socio-Economic Review*, Vol. 8., issue 3., 2010. 461–486.

<sup>16</sup> BORRÁS–RADAELLI op. cit.; and Kerstin JACOBSSON: Soft Regulation and the Subtle Transformation of States: The Case of EU Employment Policy. *Journal of European Social Policy*, Vol. 14., no. 4., 2004. 355–370.

and more importantly in relation to influencing interests of states.<sup>17</sup> An epistemic community in the latter context is understood to have

“(1) a shared set of normative and principled beliefs, which provide a value-based rationale for the social action of community members; (2) shared causal beliefs, which are derived from their analysis of practices leading or contributing to a central set of problems in their domain and which then serve as the basis for elucidating the multiple linkages between possible policy actions and desired outcomes; (3) shared notions of validity—that is, inter-subjective, internally defined criteria for weighing and validating knowledge in the domain of their expertise; and (4) a common policy enterprise—that is, a set of common practices associated with a set of problems to which their professional competence is directed, presumably out of the conviction that human welfare will be enhanced as a consequence.”<sup>18</sup>

The effect of an epistemic community follows from “the diffusion of new ideas and information [that] can lead to new patterns of behaviour”.<sup>19</sup> Haas find that an epistemic community can be an important determinant of international policy coordination, in particular in policy fields that are characterised by dynamics of uncertainty, interpretation and institutionalization.<sup>20</sup>

A comparison can be drawn here with the OMC, which often is applied in policy fields for which EU competence is weak and which are complex, sensitive and of which the exact effect of a measure is uncertain,<sup>21</sup> moreover underlying differences resulting into a similar problem may need different solutions to achieve the same result. The OMC creates its own epistemic community or better, epistemic policy coordination as it creates a European ground for experimentalism to achieve common goals in order to deal with a common problem in (the European) society.<sup>22</sup> Trubek and Trubek have theorised how the OMC creates changes at the domestic level of the Member States.<sup>23</sup> Close to the idea underpinning the effect of an epistemic community, is the element of diffusion

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<sup>17</sup> Peter M. HAAS: Introduction: epistemic communities and international policy coordination. *International Organization*, Vol. 46., issue 1., 1992. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Claudio RADAELLI: Europeanization, Policy Learning, and New Modes of Governance. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, Vol. 10., no. 3., 2008. 239–254.

<sup>22</sup> See on Experimentalist Governance: Charles F. SABEL – Jonathan ZEITLIN: *Experimentalist Governance in the European Union. Towards a New Architecture*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010.; and the thematic issue of *Regulation & Governance*, Vol. 6., issue 3., 2012., with contributions by Sandra ECKERT – Tanja A. BÖRZEL: Experimentalist Governance: An Introduction. (371–377.); Tanja A. BÖRZEL: Experimentalist governance in the EU: The emperor’s new clothes? (378–384.); Amy VERDUN: Experimentalist governance in the European Union: A commentary. (385–393.); John E. FOSSUM: Reflections on experimentalist governance. (394–400.); Mattias KUMM: Constitutionalism and experimentalist governance. (401–409.); and Charles F. SABEL – Jonathan ZEITLIN: Experimentalism in the EU: Common ground and persistent differences. (410–426.).

<sup>23</sup> David M. TRUBEK – Louise G. TRUBEK: Hard and soft law in the construction of Social Europe: the Role of the Open Method of Co-ordination. *European Law Journal*, Vol. 11., no. 3., 2005. 343–364.

through ‘discursive transformation’. In relation to the European Employment Strategy (EES), Trubek and Trubek summarise this as follows:

“Discursive diffusion theory suggests that various processes, including the requirement for annual reports, committee meetings of various types, peer review, and various monitoring efforts, subtly transform national discourse and thus national policy. Thus when reports must be written in terms set by the guidelines, new concepts, with definitions of reality embedded in them, come to be accepted at national level. When national administrations come to see their performance measured qualitatively through peer review and Council recommendations, and quantitatively through indicators and league tables, they must confront new policy paradigms and take on board new concepts and vocabularies. This process requires them to adopt new cognitive frameworks, a transformation facilitated and reinforced by the need to prepare annual National Action Plans and to defend performance to various audiences that themselves employ the discourse of the EES. Such changes in the way issues are conceptualised, it is suggested, may lead to policy change.”<sup>24</sup>

They link this to the idea of networking that can be generated by the OMC. Networks, in this context, are created in various ways and between various organisations/persons, with different functions. The main functions that are identified are networks serving as transmission belts for ideas coming from the top, and networks serving as settings for deliberation and mutual learning, and thus create channels to move ideas “up” as well as “down”.<sup>25</sup> This process of induced diffusion and learning is also indicated as the effect of the OMC as ‘cognitive amplifier’,<sup>26</sup> an effect that has extensively been studied from an institutional perspective within the theory of experimentalist governance and deliberative processes.<sup>27</sup>

## *2.2. Approach and design of the study*

This study is conducted against the background of the two concepts described above. Instead of focussing on the institutional settings and processes, the focus lies with discursive transformation of youth policies only. Thus, rather than looking at institutional settings and interaction between national and European institutions and actors, the analysis is confined to ideational transformations within national youth policies and measures. Instead of studying the institutional level, which has also been

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 358.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> BORRÁS–RADAELLI op. cit. 35.; and Martin HEIDENREICH – Gabriele BISCHOF: The Open Method of Co-ordination A Way to the Europeanization of Social and Employment Policies? *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 46., no. 3., 2008. 497–532.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. ECKERT–BÖRZEL op. cit. 371–377.; BORRÁS–RADAELLI op. cit. 35.; and RADAELLI op. cit. 239–254.

indicated as the ‘interactive dimension’ of discourse, this study examines the ‘ideational dimension’ of discourse. Hence, the study follows Schmidt and Radaelli in their definition of the ‘ideational dimension’ of discourse as “a set of policy ideas and values [...] that represent the cognitive and normative aspects of meaning creation”<sup>28</sup> – which fits with the idea of the creation of an epistemic community.

Furthermore, the creation of an epistemic community through the OMC (or experimentalist governance) and by discursive diffusion fostered by the OMC, is a process that does not take place over night, the study covers a temporal dimension of approximately 25 years. Both levels of analysis start in the early 1990s and end around 2015.

As indicated in the introduction the study exists of two parts: an analysis at European level; and an in-depth study of The Netherlands. The analysis at European level is done in three steps. First the regulatory regime of the Youth OMC is unpacked. This enables to identify the most important policy documents and measures at EU level. Secondly, the policy documents and measures are analysed for their ideational discourses. This analysis is limited to one action field only, namely “employment and entrepreneurship”. It is further limited to a more detailed analysis of the policies and measures targeting young people that are neither in employment, education nor in training (the NEETs). The third step is to identify discourse tendencies in EU Youth (employment) Policy.

The case study of The Netherlands starts with a general overview of the development of youth (un)employment in order to get a more general understanding of the issue in the Netherlands. Secondly, a study is made of the main policy and measures dealing with NEETs. The third step in the analysis is a wider inventory and assessment of policies and measures dealing the youth (un)employment. Most of the policies and measures are accessible at an official website of the government,<sup>29</sup> which includes all parliamentary documents and official announcements. To find the policies and measures I started with the ones I knew and via those I traced back previous policies and measures, for example, because the previous measure was mentioned in the parliamentary memorandum of explanation of the new measure. Secondly, since many of the ideas of EU youth employment policy are mainstreamed in the European Employment Strategy, of which youth is a specific target group, I checked the Dutch National Reform Programmes from 1998 to 2015 for policies and measures reported by the Dutch government. These two exercises resulted in 27 policies and measures which I have ordered to policy area within the policy field youth (un)employment, i.e. comprehensive youth programmes, specific youth measures, educational measures, and labour law and social security measures. The last step in the analysis is a description of all these measures against the background of the ideational discourse and terminology of EU Youth (un)employment Policy.

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<sup>28</sup> Vivian A. SCHMIDT – Claudio M. RADAELLI: Policy Change and Discourse in Europe: Conceptual and Methodological Issues. *West European Politics*, Vol. 27., issue 2., 2004. 184 and 197.

<sup>29</sup> [www.overheid.nl](http://www.overheid.nl)

The final part of this study evaluates to what extent the Youth OMC has been of influence on the Dutch youth (un)employment policies and measures. This is done by a reflective evaluation of the Dutch discourse in youth (un)employment policy over the course of time, against the background of the discourse and ideational vocabulary of the Youth OMC. As indicated in the introduction, the following assumption underpins this assessment. Since it is as good as impossible to prove causal relations between the OMC and the measures adopted by the Member States, existence of an impact of the OMC on the Dutch policies and measures is presumed when similar language, underlying ideas and concepts used at EU level are found in the national policies and measures. The stronger the similarities, the stronger the influence of the Youth OMC is presumed to have been on the Dutch policies and measures.<sup>30</sup>

### 3. Youth OMC

This section assesses the discourse of Youth OMC, especially in the policy area of youth (un)employment. Section III.1 maps the Youth OMC's regulatory regime. Section III.2 analyses the ideas and concepts of EU youth (un)employment policy and measures.

#### 3.1. Regulatory Regime of the Youth OMC

Cooperation on youth policy at EU level has a long history which can be traced back to the initial European treaties in the 1950s<sup>31</sup> and particular measures dating back to the 1960s<sup>32</sup> and 1970s.<sup>33</sup> During the 1990s youth policies became more tangible, especially as specific target group within other policy areas, especially employment, social policy, and education and training.<sup>34</sup> All previous initiatives of the EU concerning young people, accumulate in the 2009 Youth Strategy.<sup>35</sup> When focusing on the issue of youth employment, the main initiatives that fed into the Youth Strategy,

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<sup>30</sup> Please mind that it is assessed only to which extent the Youth OMC influences the policies and legislation of the Member States and not whether these policies have been effective in dealing with the issue it is addressing, *i.e.* youth employment and entrepreneurship.

<sup>31</sup> Article 50 of the Treaty on the European Economic Community (EEC) provided that "Member States shall, within the framework of a joint programme, encourage the exchange of young workers".

<sup>32</sup> E.g. Council Decision 63/266/EEC of 2 April 1963 *laying down general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy*.

<sup>33</sup> E.g. Resolution of the Council and of the Ministers of Education, meeting within the Council of 13 December 1976 *concerning measures to be taken to improve the preparation of young people for work and to facilitate their transition from education to working life*.

<sup>34</sup> See for a full description of the historical development of EU Youth Policy: COPELAND–TER HAAR *op. cit.* note 4.

<sup>35</sup> Council Resolution of 27 November 2009 on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010–2018). Further referred to as: Renewed Framework 2010–2018.

include the Commission's White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment,<sup>36</sup> which drew the attention to youth unemployment, and the Commission's White Paper on European Social Policy,<sup>37</sup> which proposed a number of initiatives relating to youth employment, and training and education. Among others, it includes the following initiatives: a Union wide guarantee that no one under the age of 18 can be unemployed, the elimination of basic illiteracy for school leavers, and the improvement of education, training and vocational training.<sup>38</sup> More importantly, since both papers brought together the issue of employment and unemployment, they were able to shift the previous EU narrative of EU employment and social policy from one which concerned workers and the establishment and protection of their rights, to one in which unemployment and the increase of employment were to be the focus of attention.<sup>39</sup>

This laid the basis for the broad approach underpinning EU youth employment policy cooperation. It is in this context that the Commission published its White Paper *A new Impetus for Youth*,<sup>40</sup> which promotes further mainstreaming of the youth dimension in the policy areas education and training, employment, and social inclusion. To provide greater coherence and consistency to the various initiatives in the field of Youth Policy, the European Council adopted the *European Youth Pact* as part of the revised Lisbon Strategy.<sup>41</sup> The Youth Pact identifies four principle issues: 1) the vulnerability of young people; 2) the need for intergenerational solidarity; 3) the need to equip young people through their education and training; and 4) the need for better coherence across all policy areas that concern young people.<sup>42</sup> To support the implementation of the Youth Pact, the Commission published a Communication<sup>43</sup> in which it again stressed the mainstreaming of the youth dimension in the activities of the Lisbon Strategy. Thereto no new structures are to be created, instead the measures for youth within the structures of the EES and SIS are to be reinforced.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the Commission promotes more and better use of (financial) programmes that support national policies as means to implement the Youth Pact. These programmes include the European Social Fund and the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme.

So far, EU Youth policy is thus characterised by a programme of mainstreaming the interests of young people in other, often more general programmes, such as the EES and SIS, that affect a particular

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<sup>36</sup> European Commission: *Competitiveness, Employment: The Challenges and Ways Forward in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – A White Paper*, COM(93) 700 Final.

<sup>37</sup> *EU strategy for youth – Investing and empowering. Analysis of national reports from the Member States of the European Union concerning the implementation of the common objectives for a greater understanding and knowledge of youth*. Staff Working Document SEC(2009) 549 final of 27 April 2009 from the European Commission.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 17.

<sup>39</sup> Samantha VELLUTI: *New Governance and the European Employment Strategy*. London, Routledge, 2010.

<sup>40</sup> European Commission: *A New Impetus for European Youth – White Paper*, COM(2001) 681 final.

<sup>41</sup> European Council: *Youth Pact*, OJ [2006] C70/1; and Annex 1 to European Council Conclusions of March 2005, 7619/1/05, REV 1.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 19.

<sup>43</sup> *European policies concerning youth. Addressing the concerns of young people in Europe – implementing the European Youth Pact and promoting active citizenship*. Communication COM(2005) 206 Final.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 4–5.

part of the lives and positions of young people. The positive side of this is that through this an overall youth-policy has been developed covering many aspects of the lives of young people. There are also negative sides to this approach. Firstly, the policies in which the matters of youth are mainstreamed are rather general. In these policies, youth is merely one of the target groups, competing for attention with for example elderly, disabled people, women, migrants, etc. This means there is ample, if any, room for the specific policy needs of young people. A second down-side to this approach is that, for as far as there is room for more specific policies, this is left up to different institutions and actors, discourses, contexts and approaches. Within the EES, for example, the Employment Committee (EMCO) has a dominant role in setting the policy guidelines and priorities, whereas it is the Social Protection Committee (SPC) for the SIS. This enhances the risk of a splintered and incoherent EU youth policy; a critic that is commonly heard of about EU social policy in general.<sup>45</sup> Although not explicitly recognised as a down-side of the mainstreaming approach, the need for a more genuine youth-centred approach has been acknowledged in the next development of EU Youth policy, *i.e.* the Commission's Communication on *An EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering*,<sup>46</sup> formalised by the 2009 Council Resolution on *a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field*.<sup>47</sup>

Figure 1 illustrates the governance regime that is created by the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field, also referred to as the Youth Strategy. The Youth Strategy aims to encourage 'joined-up' policy making, on genuine youth policies as well as feeding into other policy fields and processes. The main regulatory driver for this is the OMC.<sup>48</sup> The renewed framework set two general objectives: (i) to create more and equal opportunities for all young people in education and in the labour market; and (ii) to promote the active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity of all young people.<sup>49</sup> To achieve these objectives, a dual approach is followed: 1) mainstreaming initiatives to enable a cross-sectoral approach in which due account is taken of youth issues; and 2) specific initiatives in the youth field.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, it is underlined that youth policy cooperation should be 'firmly anchored in the international system of human rights', which includes the promotion of gender equality and non-discrimination.<sup>51</sup> It is also agreed that the cooperation is based on work cycles of three year and that for each work cycle priorities are being set at European level<sup>52</sup> and national level<sup>53</sup>.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Catharine BARNARD: *EC Employment Law*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006. 60–61.

<sup>46</sup> Communication COM(2009) 200 final of 27 April 2009 from the European Commission on *An EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities*.

<sup>47</sup> Renewed Framework 2010–2018. op.cit.

<sup>48</sup> COM(2009) 200 final, op. cit. 5.

<sup>49</sup> Accordingly agreed point 1 Renewed framework 2010–2018. op.cit.

<sup>50</sup> Accordingly agreed point 3 Renewed framework 2010–2018. op.cit.

<sup>51</sup> Underlined point 1 Renewed framework 2010–2018. op.cit.

<sup>52</sup> Further agreed point 3, sub ii Renewed framework 2010–2018. op.cit.

<sup>53</sup> Accordingly invites the Member States, point 2 Renewed framework 2010–2018. op.cit.

Characteristic for the Youth Strategy is that the policies should be evidence based.<sup>54</sup> Consequently, much attention is paid to knowledge building in order to get a better understanding of the living conditions, values and attitudes of young people. Many research resources are to be mobilised for this, among others, the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy, Eurydice and the use of special European youth surveys.<sup>55</sup> The effect of this knowledge building at European level is that a common vocabulary is created in which youth matters are being discussed, hence, indicators are being developed and indications are given about issues to be dealt with in order to achieve the common objectives. This is also referred to as “a dashboard of youth indicators”, which also includes existing indicators of policy areas in which youth matters are to be integrated, e.g. employment and social inclusion.<sup>56</sup> The Member States are invited to report about their policy activities in the youth field by use of a survey issued by the European Commission,<sup>57</sup> and the Commission is invited to examine “the degree to which the overall objectives of the framework have been met”.<sup>58</sup> More particularly, the Commission is asked to draw a EU Youth Report,<sup>59</sup> which consists of two parts: a political part (which is a joint Council-Commission report); and a statistical part. The first part, the political part, is based on the information provided by the Member States in the youth survey and on information in national reports submitted by the Member States as part of the policies in which youth matters are to be mainstreamed, such as the European Employment Strategy, but also on reports of other European bodies, for example Eurofound.<sup>60</sup> For the second part, statistical data, use is made of several sources, including Eurostat data, Eurobarometer surveys, etc.<sup>61</sup> Based on the EU Youth Report priorities for the next three-year cycle will be adopted by the Council.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Further agreed point 3, sub iii, under (a) Renewed framework 2010–2018. op.cit.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Staff Working Document SEC(2011) 401 final of 25 March 2011 from the Commission *on EU indicators in the field of youth*. And similarly argued regarding the indicators of the OMC on Social Inclusion: Eric MALIER – Antony B. ATKINSON – Bea CANTILLON – Brian NOLAN: *The EU and Social Inclusion. Facing the challenges*. Bristol, The Policy Press, 2007.

<sup>57</sup> E.g. the 2015 EU Youth Report: [ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/publication/EUyouthreport2015part1](http://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/publication/EUyouthreport2015part1).

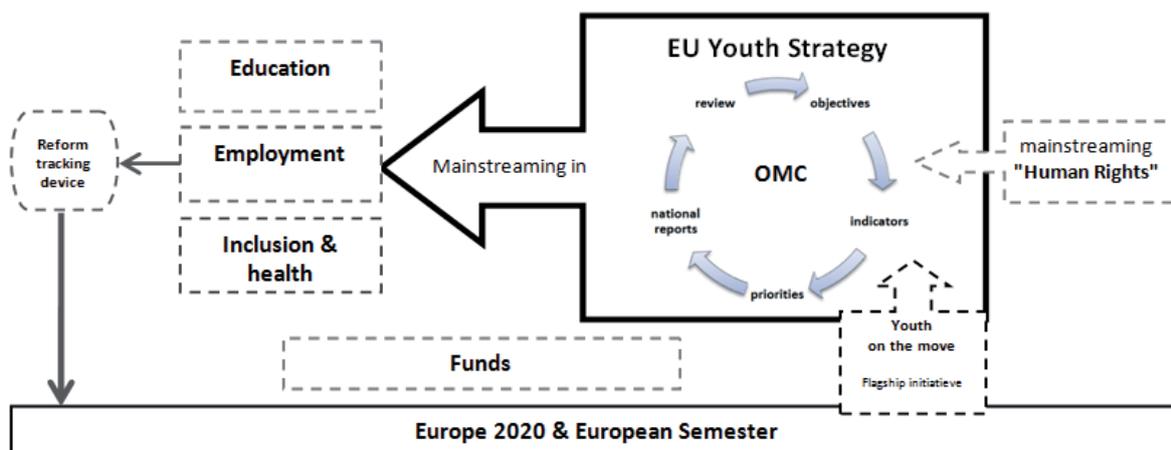
<sup>58</sup> Further agreed point 3, sub iii, under (a) Renewed framework 2010–2018. op.cit.

<sup>59</sup> Further agreed point 3, sub iii, under c; and point 2 under ‘invites the Commission to’ Renewed Framework 2010–2018. op.cit.

<sup>60</sup> As can be deduced from Staff Working Document SWD(2015) 169 final of 15 September 2015 from the European Commission *on the situation of young people in the EU*.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 3.

<sup>62</sup> Further agreed point 3, sub ii Renewed Framework 2010–2018. op.cit.

*Figure 1 Governance regime EU Youth Strategy*

Although the Youth Strategy was adopted before Europe 2020, it has been integrated in the wider context of Europe 2020 via the flagship initiative ‘Youth on the move’. Moreover, in seeking more cohesion between the Youth Strategy and Europe 2020, it is explicitly acknowledged that the objectives of both strategies enforce each other.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, the enforcement of the strategies includes an enhancement of the visibility of youth policy in the policy fields it is mainstreamed in, especially employment and social inclusion.<sup>64</sup> An example of the result of closer cohesion is the inclusion of youth (un)employment in the Reform Tracking Device and the Scoreboard resulting from it, which are both part of the EES.<sup>65</sup> It is also argued that this would strengthen the impact of youth policy, on its own terms and as contributor to Europe 2020.<sup>66</sup> It is in this context that particular emphasis is put on young people who are ‘not in employment, education, or training’ (the NEETs),<sup>67</sup> which forms the focus target group among young people for this study on the Youth OMC.

To conclude this part, figure 1 illustrates that a regulatory regime is created of which the OMC is the core governance mechanism. In its three year cycle the OMC sets the priorities for the next period. Within this process it is also determined which issues of these priorities are to be mainstreamed in other policy fields, especially the EES and SIS, and which are worked out in specific youth measures. Through Flagship Initiative *Youth on the Move* the Youth Strategy is directly anchored in Europe 2020. Through its mainstreaming in the EES, SIS and Education OMC, many of its issues are integrated in the European Semester, which is governance mechanism of Europe 2020 (also an OMC). The Youth

<sup>63</sup> 2012 Joint Report of the Council and the European Commission on *the implementation of the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-18)* (OJ [2012] C394/5); and Council Conclusions 9094/13 of 3 May 2013 on *Maximising the potential of youth policy in addressing the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy*.

<sup>64</sup> 2012 Joint Report (OJ [2012] C394/5), op. cit. 5.

<sup>65</sup> Communication COM(2012) 173 final of 18 April 2012 from the Commission *Towards a Job-rich Recovery*; and more specifically: European Commission, Non-paper on *The Employment Reform Tracking Device*, available on: [ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1039&langId=en](http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1039&langId=en).

<sup>66</sup> Council Conclusions 9094/13 op. cit., point 11 (at p. 5).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. point 14 (at p. 6).

Strategy finds further anchoring in various European funds that financially support Member States activities related to the eight action fields of the Youth Strategy. Overseeing the whole regulatory regime the main role of the OMC appears to be that of coordinating governance at European level, more than directly steering the policies activities of the Member States.

### 3.2. *Ideas and concepts of EU youth (un)employment policy*

In this part I analyse the ideas and concepts underlying EU youth (un)employment policy. The analysis starts with the first initiative in the field of Youth that used the OMC as governance mechanism. This was the 1991 Council Resolution on *Priority actions in the youth field*.<sup>68</sup> The intention of this Resolution was to “reinforce young people’s consciousness of belonging to Europe and take account of their wish to play a positive role in the building of the European Community.”<sup>69</sup> Ten years later this intention is repeated, and continued, in the 2001 White Paper *New impetus for European Youth*.<sup>70</sup> More specifically, the general tenor of the White Paper is about giving young people a stronger say and make them stakeholders in the European society, at all levels – from local to international level.<sup>71</sup> It is stressed that the aim of the Youth programme is

“to encourage young people to make an active contribution to European integration, to developing intercultural understanding, strengthening fundamental values such as human rights and combating racism and xenophobia, developing a sense of solidarity, encouraging a spirit of enterprise, initiative and creativity, stimulating the recognition of non-formal education, and strengthening cooperation on the part of all people active in the youth field.”<sup>72</sup>

There to five policy subjects have been indicated as priority areas: 1. Education, lifelong learning and mobility; 2. Employment; 3. Social integration; 4. Young people against racism and xenophobia; and 5. Autonomy for young people.<sup>73</sup> The focus in the second priority area (employment) is on mainstreaming in the EES. As far as young people specifically are concerned, the

“Employment Guidelines stress the need for policies to prevent long-term unemployment based on individual counselling; improved education and training systems; reducing the

<sup>68</sup> Council Resolution 91/C 208/01 of 26 June 1991 *on priority actions in the youth field*.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. preamble.

<sup>70</sup> European Commission *A New Impetus for European Youth – A White Paper*, COM(2001) 681 final, 14 *et seq.*

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 4, 10 and 12.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 21.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

number of young people who leave education and training systems prematurely; making instruction in the technology universally available.”<sup>74</sup>

The focus of the White Paper is thus on active citizenship of young people, which is to be developed and encouraged. Empowerment of young people is not only important for young people themselves, as they are the ones affected by economic change, demographic imbalance, and global and cultural diversity. It is also important for the European society, since young people are the future of the European societies, they are the persons that create new forms of social relations, different ways of expressing solidarity or of coping with differences and finding enrichment in them.<sup>75</sup> Employment is an essential resource for the autonomy of young people, which enables (empowers) young people to fulfil their role in society.<sup>76</sup>

The next policy development is the adoption of the Youth Pact in 2005 as part of the relaunch of the Lisbon Strategy.<sup>77</sup> recognises that the integration of “young people in society and working life, and making better use of their potential, are essential for ensuring a return to sustained and sustainable growth in Europe”.<sup>78</sup> The discourse in the Youth Pact shifts slightly from an emphasis on the role and importance of young people in society, to a recognition of the vulnerability of young people themselves in society.<sup>79</sup> Other principal issues include: the need to develop solidarity across the generations, in an aging society; the need to equip young people through their education and training; and the need for better coherence across all policy areas that concern young people.<sup>80</sup> Against the background of these principle issues, three strands for youth policies and measures are formulated: employment, integration and social advancement; education, training and mobility; and reconciliation of family life and working life.<sup>81</sup> Active citizenship of young people is mentioned, however, from being the first and primary issue it has moved to the last place in rank of issues being addressed.<sup>82</sup> Remarkable is that the issue of human right values is no longer in focus as it is merely mentioned as “other policies with relevance to young people” in which the youth dimension is to be mainstreamed.<sup>83</sup> Nothing at all is mentioned about strengthening the autonomy of young people.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid. 20.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Council Conclusions of 22 and 23 March 2005, Annex 1 *Youth Pact* (7619/05), 3.

<sup>78</sup> Communication COM(2005) 206 final of 30 May 2005 from the European Commission *Addressing the concerns of young people in Europe - implementing the European Youth Pact and promoting active citizenship*, 2; and Council Conclusions of 22 and 23 March 2005, Annex 1 *Youth Pact* (7619/05).

<sup>79</sup> First identified principle issue of the *Youth Pact*, Communication COM(2005) 206 final, op. cit.

<sup>80</sup> COM(2005) 206 final, op. cit. 2–3.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 3–4.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 8–9.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 10.

With regard to the issue of employment, the same approach of the White Paper is followed, i.e. mainstreaming of youth issues into the guidelines of the EES. The discourse shifts slightly though. While the White Paper was concerned with preventing long-term unemployment in general, the Youth Pact is concerned with the reduction of youth unemployment.<sup>84</sup> This signals that unemployment among young people is becoming an issue of particular concern. Particularly, employment pathways are to be build, and personalised action plans, with job assistance, guidance and training are to be developed.<sup>85</sup> The context in which this is promoted is within that of empowerment of young people. However, also investment is becoming more important, especially within the wider context of the Employment Strategy which includes a guideline on the “expansion and improvement of investment in human capital”.<sup>86</sup>

The shift from empowerment to investment is continued by the 2009 Youth Strategy. In the Commission’s Communication implementing the Youth Strategy, it is already indicated by the title: *An EU strategy for youth - Investing and empowering*.<sup>87</sup> The effects of the financial and economic crisis at the political background are clearly visible in the Youth Strategy and foster the need of investment in young people. In the words of the Commission, “[y]outh are a priority of the European Union’s social vision, and the current crisis compounds the need to nurture young human capital.”<sup>88</sup> The Commission explicitly spells out the dual policy approach underpinning the Youth Strategy:

“– *Investing in Youth*: putting in place greater resources to develop policy areas that affect young people in their daily life and improve their well-being.  
– *Empowering Youth*: promoting the potential of young people for the renewal of society and to contribute to EU values and goals.”<sup>89</sup> (emphasis in original)

Furthermore, the fields of action are more comprehensive than that of the predecessors of the Youth Strategy – the White Paper and the Youth Pact. Indeed, it brings together all previously introduced policy areas, i.e. 1) education and training; 2) employment and entrepreneurship; 3) health and well-being; 4) participation; 5) voluntary activities; 6) social inclusion; 7) youth and the world; and 8) creativity and culture.<sup>90</sup> Mainstreaming of youth matters or integration of the youth dimension, in other policy fields is continued, including into the Employment Guidelines. Additionally, more emphasis is put on the development of specific initiatives in the youth field, including in the area of

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid. 4 and 5.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> COM(2009) 200 final, op. cit.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. 5; and point 5 in the preamble of the Renewed Framework 2010–2018. op.cit.

<sup>90</sup> Accordingly agreed point 2 Renewed Framework 2010–2018. op.cit.

youth work.<sup>91</sup> Thereto, possible initiatives are listed in Annex I of the Youth Strategy. These include general initiatives that should be considered in all the fields of action, as well as youth-related aims and possible initiatives for each specific field of action.<sup>92</sup> The general initiatives are concerned with governance aspects and include initiatives such as “strengthening cooperation with local and regional authorities” and “supporting the development of youth work and recognising its value”.<sup>93</sup>

The youth-related aim for the action field “Employment and entrepreneurship” is the following:

“Young people’s integration into the labour market, either as employees or as entrepreneurs, should be supported. The transition from education and training, or from unemployment or inactivity, to the labour market should be facilitated and supported. Opportunities to reconcile working life with family life should be improved. In the post- 2010 Lisbon Strategy a youth perspective needs to be ensured, and work carried out in line with the overall objectives of the European Youth Pact needs to be continued.”<sup>94</sup>

This is followed by a (non-exhaustive) list of in total eleven initiatives,<sup>95</sup> among which initiatives to increase and improve investments in the provision of suitable skills for those jobs in demand on the labour market; to take into account the specific situation of young people when devising *flexicurity* strategies; and initiatives to promote quality internships and apprenticeships to facilitate the entry to, and progress within, the labour market.<sup>96</sup>

Annex II of the Youth Strategy defines the priorities for the first OMC-cycle, which is youth employment.<sup>97</sup> Thereto three specific priorities areas are defined. The first specific priority area is social inclusion. The most significant activity in this priority area is the strengthening of the Youth Pact within the context of the post-2010 Lisbon Strategy, i.e. Europe 2020. This indicates that the Youth Strategy is not replacing the Youth Pact, instead it is merging it within the wider Youth Strategy and the even more general strategy Europe 2020.<sup>98</sup> Hence, previously formulated discourses are integrally incorporated in the Youth Strategy.

The strategy Europe 2020 affected the discourse on youth employment in two ways. Firstly, as Europe 2020 is more about the coordination of governance, it has created a stronger governance structure to align various initiatives, i.e. the European Semester.<sup>99</sup> This has affected the discourse of

<sup>91</sup> Accordingly agreed point 3, sub (i) Renewed Framework 2010–2018. op.cit.

<sup>92</sup> Annex I to the Renewed Framework 2010–2018. op.cit. 5–9.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. 5 (under (a) General initiatives).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 6 (under Employment and Entrepreneurship).

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Annex II to the Renewed Framework 2010–2018. op.cit. 10.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. COPELAND–TER HAAR (2015a) op. cit.

<sup>99</sup> See above in section 3.1.

EU youth policy in the sense that it creates more attention for *flexicurity* as policy path to deal with youth employment.<sup>100</sup> Secondly, Europe 2020 includes a special flagship initiative for youth: Youth on the Move.<sup>101</sup> Youth on the Move “aims to improve young people’s *education and employability*, to reduce high youth unemployment and to *increase the youth-employment rate*”.<sup>102</sup> (emphasis in original) The policies supporting the aims of Youth on the Move reflect those introduced in the 2001 White Paper. Especially on the issues of youth mobility, non-formal and informal learning, and the promotion of apprenticeships and internships.<sup>103</sup>

Over the course of time, the financial and economic crisis severely affected the position of young people on the labour market in most of the Member States (see figure 2). While youth unemployment rates were average when the 2001 White Paper was adopted with its emphasis on employment as resource for autonomy, and were going down in the period 2005 - 2007 when the Youth Pact was adopted which focused on the promotion of employment opportunities for young people, youth unemployment rates increased dramatically in 2008, which urged the need for focussed and determinate youth employment actions, especially for young people that were neither in employment, education, nor training (NEET).<sup>104</sup> This change in youth unemployment rates is reflected in the discourse on EU youth employment policies. The 2001 White Paper considered youth employment as a resource for the creation of autonomy of young people, needed to fulfil their role in society. The in 2005 adopted Youth Pact promoted youth employment as part of the wider context of the Lisbon Strategy to raise employment levels and create better quality jobs. The 2009 Youth Strategy initially continues on this path by making the issue of youth employment the overall objective of the first priority area, resonating the approaches of both the White Paper and the Youth Pact. It is only with the adoption of Europe 2020 in March 2010, when the deteriorating position of young people on the labour market becomes more apparent in EU policy document. More importantly, the discourse changes from ‘promoting employment’ to ‘tackling unemployment’.<sup>105</sup> This is also the moment that the measures change from empowering to investing in young people.

<sup>100</sup> E.g. Employment Guideline 7 Annexed to Decision 2010/707/EU of the Council of 21 October 2010 on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States includes “Work-life balance policies with the provision of affordable care and innovation in the manner in which work is organised should be geared to raising employment rates, particularly among young people, older workers and women. Member States should also remove barriers to labour market entry for newcomers, promote self-employment, entrepreneurship and job creation in all areas including green employment and care and promote social innovation.”

<sup>101</sup> Communication COM(2010) 200 final of 3 March 2010 from the European Commission *EUROPE 2020 A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*; and Communication COM(2010) 477 final of 15 September 2010 from the European Commission *Youth on the Move. An initiative to unleash the potential of young people to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the European Union*.

<sup>102</sup> [ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=950&langId=en](http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=950&langId=en).

<sup>103</sup> COM(2010) 200 final, op. cit. 14.

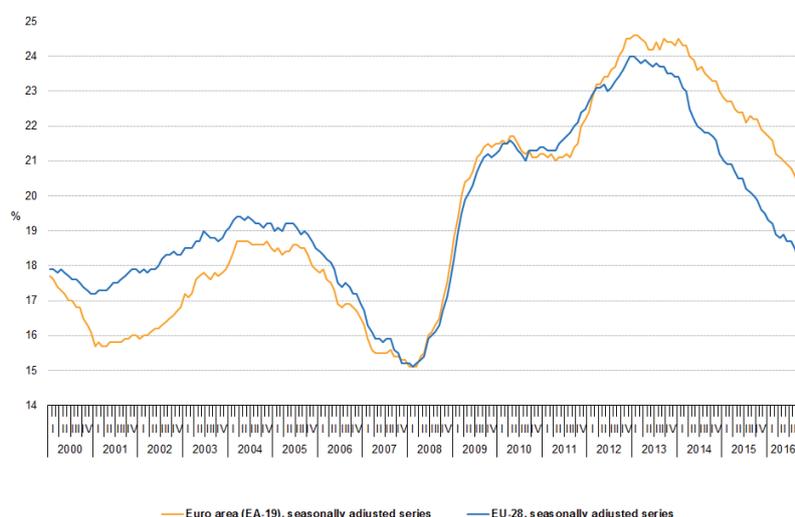
<sup>104</sup> Cf. Giovanni S. F. BRUNO – Enrico MARELLI – Marcello SIGNORELLI: The Rise of NEET and Youth Unemployment in EU Regions after the Crisis. *Comparative Economic Studies*, Vol. 65., issue 4., 2014. 592–615.; and also Employment Guideline 8 Annexed to Decision 2010/707/EU of the Council of 21 October 2010 on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States, which stresses the need to “support young people and in particular those not in employment, education or training” and invites that “Member States, in cooperation with the social partners, should enact schemes to help those people find initial employment, job experience, or further education and training opportunities, including apprenticeships, and should intervene rapidly when young people become unemployed.”

<sup>105</sup> E.g. Communication COM(2011) 933 final of 20 December 2011 from the European Commission *Youth Opportunities Initiatives*.

With the peak of youth unemployment in 2012 and 2013 the EU adopts, as part of the Youth Strategy, the Youth Employment Package, which specific focus on the NEET.<sup>106</sup> Although it is acknowledged that the underlying causes for the high youth unemployment rates are several and vary per Member State,<sup>107</sup> one thing is clear, they are in this situation, because they have to make the transition from education into employment. Another common understanding seems to be that good educational qualifications are essential for a smooth transition from education onto the labour market.<sup>108</sup>

When related to the situation of (un)employment of young people, EU countries can be divided into five groups, based on 1) the degree to which those in education are simultaneously on the labour market; and 2) the level of youth unemployment, measured in terms of the youth unemployment ratio.<sup>109</sup> This is illustrated in figure 3. The first group is comprised of countries in which very few students are employed or unemployed. For countries in this group, the overlap between the labour market and education is very small. The second group of countries has two features: firstly, they have a moderate overlap between education and the labour market; and secondly their youth unemployment levels are around the EU average. The third group of countries has also a moderate overlap between education and the labour market, but these countries have a high level of youth unemployment. The fourth group displays a high involvement of students in the labour market, combined with an average level of unemployment. The fifth group also displays a high involvement of students in the labour market, and a very low unemployment rate among those in education.<sup>110</sup>

**Figure 2** Youth unemployment rates, EU-28 and EA-19, seasonally adjusted, January 2000 – September 2016 (%)



Source: Eurostat November 2016.

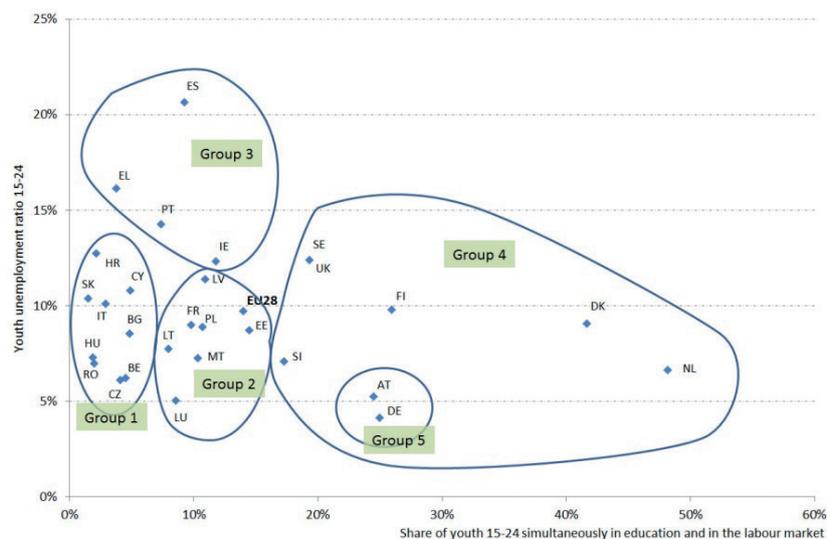
<sup>106</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>107</sup> BRUNO–MARELLI–SIGNORELLI op. cit.; Jacqueline O'REILLY et al.: Five Characteristics of Youth Unemployment in Europe: Flexibility, Education, Migration, Family Legacies, and EU Policy. *SAGE Open*, Vol. 5., issue 1., 2015.; Malcom SARGEANT: Young People and Age Discrimination. *E-Journal of International and Comparative Labour Studies*, 2013.; and Beryl P. TER HAAR: EU Age Discrimination Law: Is it a Curse or a Blessing for EU Youth Policy? In: Ulad BELAVUSAU – Kerstin HENRARD (eds.): *EU Anti-Discrimination Law Beyond Gender*. Oxford, Hart Publishing, 2018. ??????

<sup>108</sup> Cf. [ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Archive:School-to-work\\_transition\\_statistics](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Archive:School-to-work_transition_statistics).

<sup>109</sup> [ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Participation\\_of\\_young\\_people\\_in\\_education\\_and\\_the\\_labour\\_market](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Participation_of_young_people_in_education_and_the_labour_market).

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

**Figure 3** Country groups by participation of persons simultaneously in education and in the labour market

Source: Eurostat Statistics Explained: Youth unemployment (2012)<sup>111</sup>

What these statistics illustrate is that the education and employment situations of young people in the Member States differ significantly. Nonetheless, to tackle youth unemployment, especially concerning the NEETs, the Youth Employment Package indicates the following points as factors of relevance in most of the Member States:

- Early school leaving without qualifications.
- Lack of relevant skills and lack of work experience.
- Precarious employment followed by spells of unemployment.
- Limited training opportunities.
- Insufficient/inappropriate active labour market programmes.<sup>112</sup>

In order to cope with these factors, the Youth Employment Package recommends the Member States to undertake actions in four main areas: 1. Preventing early-school leaving; 2. Developing skills that are relevant to the labour market; 3. Supporting a first work experience and on-the-job training; and 4. Access to the labour market: getting a (first) job.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, it is stressed to make more use of the financial support the EU can offer for youth employment measures through its funds.<sup>114</sup> More concretely, emphasis is put on initiatives to support the transition from education to work, especially via the development of apprenticeships and traineeships. Key actions within the Youth Employment

<sup>111</sup> [ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Main\\_Page](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Main_Page).

<sup>112</sup> COM(2011) 933, op. cit. 6.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. 6–7.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. 8.

Package are therefore: Youth Guarantee (supported by the Youth Employment Initiative);<sup>115</sup> a Quality Framework for Traineeships;<sup>116</sup> and the European Alliance for Apprenticeships.<sup>117</sup>

The three key actions are connected with each other by Youth Guarantee, since the aim of it is to create

“a situation in which young people 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. An offer of continued education could also encompass quality training programmes leading to a recognised vocational qualification.”<sup>118</sup>

The Quality Framework for Traineeships supports

“the improvement of working conditions and the learning content of traineeships. The main element of the Quality Framework for Traineeships is the written traineeship agreement that indicates the educational objectives, adequate working conditions, rights and obligations, and a reasonable duration for traineeships.”<sup>119</sup>

Consistent with the discourse on non-formal or informal learning as part of EU Youth employment policies fostered by the Youth OMC, the Recommendation on the Quality Framework for Traineeships also promotes the proper recognition of traineeships and the validation of knowledge, skills and competences acquired during the traineeship.<sup>120</sup> This point has also been stressed as important in the Declaration on Apprenticeships.<sup>121</sup> What both, traineeships and apprenticeships also have in common, and which is stated clearly in the Apprenticeship Declaration is that:

“High-quality apprenticeship schemes can make a positive contribution to combating youth unemployment by fostering skills acquisition and securing smooth and sustainable transitions from the education and training system to the labour market.”

<sup>115</sup> Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 *on establishing a Youth Guarantee*; and European Council Conclusions of 7 and 8 February 2013 *on Multiannual financial framework*, paras 59 and 60.

<sup>116</sup> Council Recommendation of 10 March 2014 *on a Quality Framework for Traineeships*.

<sup>117</sup> European Alliance for Apprenticeships Declaration of the European Social Partners, the European Commission and the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, available at: [ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1147&langId=en](http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1147&langId=en); and Council (EPSCO) Declaration 14986/13 of 15 October 2013 *on European Alliance for Apprenticeships*.

<sup>118</sup> Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 *on establishing a Youth Guarantee*, par. 5 preamble and Art. 1.

<sup>119</sup> Council Recommendation of 10 March 2014 *on a Quality Framework for Traineeships*, par. 11 preamble, and Art. 1–11.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.* Art. 13.

<sup>121</sup> Art. 7 of the Declaration on Apprentices, *op. cit.*

Although often used in the same contexts and documents, there is a difference between apprenticeships, traineeships, and internships. However, they all serve the same aim: to ease the transition from education into the labour market for young people.

How necessary it is to undertake (employment) measures for young people is underlined again in the EU 2015 Youth Report, which states that “[s]ome young people are increasingly excluded from social and civic life. Worse still, some are at risk of disengagement, marginalisation or even radicalisation.”<sup>122</sup> Many young people are still neither in employment nor education or training (NEETs); about 13,7 million.<sup>123</sup> Therefore, the work cycle of the Youth OMC for 2016 – 2018 prioritises: 1) social inclusion of all young people, especially the NEETs; 2) stronger participation of all young people, especially those at risk of marginalisation (which includes NEETs); and 3) easier integration into the labour market for all young people, especially those in transition from education to work (which applies in particular to the NEETs).<sup>124</sup> More generally, the tenor of the 2016-2018 work cycle is that of investment in young people, which is confirmed by the Commission’s Communication on *Investing in Europe’s Youth*.<sup>125</sup>

Investing in Europe’s Youth is a renewed effort to support young people in the form of a package comprised by three strands of action: 1. Better opportunities to access employment; 2. Better opportunities through education and training; and 3. Better opportunities for solidarity, learning mobility and participation.<sup>126</sup> Within the first strand of action no new goals or policies are introduced. Thus, the designated activities are Youth Guarantee and its financial support programme the Youth Employment Initiative.<sup>127</sup> Interestingly, the second action strand introduces a Skills Guarantee<sup>128</sup> as part of the New Skills Agenda<sup>129, 130</sup> Skills Guarantee is complementary to Youth Guarantee, since it is available for those who are not eligible for Youth Guarantee, moreover, it is for people in-work and out of work.<sup>131</sup> The aim of the Skills Guarantee is to improve the employment opportunities of low-skilled adults by improving their “literacy, numeracy and digital skills and – where possible – develop

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<sup>122</sup> Communication COM(2015) 429 final of 15 September 2015 from the European Commission on *Draft 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010–2018)*.

<sup>123</sup> Eurostat 2014.

<sup>124</sup> COM(2015) 429 final, op. cit.

<sup>125</sup> COM(2016) 940 final of 7 December 2016 from the European Commission on *Investing in Europe’s Youth*.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. 4–5.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on *Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults*.

<sup>129</sup> Communication COM(2016) 381 final of 10 June 2016 from the European Commission on *A new skills agenda for Europe. Working together to strengthen human capital, employability, and competitiveness*.

<sup>130</sup> COM(2016) 940 final, op. cit. 6.

<sup>131</sup> Cf. European Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation COM(2016) 382 final of 10 June 2016 on *establishing a Skills Guarantee*.

a wider set of skills leading to an upper secondary education qualification or equivalent”<sup>132</sup> Therefore Skills Guarantee provides a programme in three steps:

- a skills assessment, enabling low-qualified adults to identify their existing skills and their upskilling needs;
- a learning offer, responding to the specific needs of individuals and of local labour markets; and
- opportunities to have their skills validated and recognised.<sup>133</sup>

Although Skills Guarantee is not exclusively for young people, on the contrary it is suggested that they should first appeal to Youth Guarantee, young people, especially when aged above 25, can benefit from it. Moreover, when reviewed in light of the discourse analysis, it is a further example of the strong emphasis on investment which dominates EU youth policies since 2009. At least in the policy area of youth (un)employment.

#### **4. Brief reflective conclusions part I**

What is interesting to take from the development of the Youth OMC regarding the policies dealing with the NEET's needs are the following things. First, on this particular policy field the Youth OMC seems to have developed from a governance mode mostly fostering mainstreaming of the interest of young people in other policy fields, especially employment (in general) and education, to an instrument coordinating more genuine policies addressing the interests of young people directly. When analysing the content of the latter type of policies a shift in focus can be noted from employment measures and policies as a resource for empowerment of young people to participate to their fullest capability in society more broadly, into measures on investment in youth employment as a goal in itself. Second, the issue of the NEET's needs are at ideational level strongly geared by the Youth OMC via the Youth Guarantee and the promotion of traineeships and apprentices, etc. In order to find some influence of the Youth OMC regarding the NEET's needs it would therefore be interesting to analyse whether a similar shift of sort of policies (from empowering to investment) and measures resembling the youth guarantee can be found in the Dutch national policies. This will be done in the second part of this study, which will be published in the next issue of the HLLJ.

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid. 4–5.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. 5.