



# JobTown Policy Recommendations for the European Parliament and the European Commission

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We, the **members of the JobTown network** – elected officials, public administrations and institutions, private sector stakeholders and engaged civil society representatives, from a diverse network of European cities and regions – offer the following concrete recommendations to the European Parliament and Commission.

They are put forward in a spirit of constructive contribution to policy debate and the design of future EU actions and programmes.

They are the result of three years experience developing *on the ground* responses to the Youth Unemployment crisis that is harming Europe in so many ways.

## The Recommendations:

EU competences and resources may well seem limited, however, at a time when resources are limited across Europe, **well-targeted** EU money – which is often a large part of a local or regional administration's **discretionary spending** – has a great potential capacity to **influence**. As such it should be instrumentalised to drive key Youth Employment-related policies, actions and reforms.

We suggest the EU, through its policymaking, programmes and funding, support the following:

### Capacity Building

#### *Consultation*

– **Capacity building for running effective Consultation processes.**

Complementary to the current emphasis on Cross-Sector Partnership, the EU should support capacity building (through training, exchange, dissemination, pilot projects) for all levels of public administration, in **conducting effective, fruitful public consultation processes** – very much from a **practical** point of view of 'how to do it so it really works', rather than excessive theoretical argumentation about 'why it's good to consult' (a view generally accepted in the abstract).



Likewise, more and better consultation needs to be supported and encouraged, from higher levels of administration with lower ones — e.g. national with local.

**Why?:** Many localities in the JobTown network find the lack of consultation and/or incorporation of local understanding of specific needs and opportunities is a **common barrier to more effective employment policies and actions**. Furthermore, consultation from central level to the local is often conducted **ineffectively**, or is **inconsequential** as to what is actually done after.

Likewise, policy, services and programmes are **less likely to be effective** or used by their target group – e.g. young people – if said target group is not consulted in how they are designed and implemented.

Too much consultation of youth (and other groups) is **tokenism**, not leading to anything concrete; this soon leads to disengagement and scepticism.

#### *Support the Unemployed*

– **Support to those young people experiencing unemployment**, reducing isolation, skill erosion and other negatives resulting from extended periods of unemployment.

**Why?:** Much of the policy, reasonably, focuses on treating unemployment through employment (getting a job); however in a long-term crisis environment, characterised by a fundamental (possibly structural) **lack of demand**, in much of Europe, there is a need to help people who are **coping** with unemployment. The ‘Youth Guarantee’ is not a solution for all, either because it is implemented ineffectively where they find themselves, or, being over-25’s, they are ineligible.

**Hysteresis or ‘scarring’** – the long-term negative after-effects of experiencing extended unemployment, particularly at a formative stage in life, resulting in reduced lifetime earnings, further unemployment, health problems, etc. – is being inflicted on significant numbers of Europe’s young, and will continue to be for the foreseeable future.

In societies facing long-term decline in **dependency ratios**, the minimisation of hysteresis – in addition to being a moral imperative – is in the general interest of society, not only that of the individuals suffering it.

**Minimising** this damage should be a top policy priority, accompanying efforts to achieve eventual employment.

There is a lack of available **know how** on how best to minimise the inevitable damage (scarring/hysteresis/skills erosion) of long-term unemployment; thus projects exploring and piloting ways to address this problem are already overdue.



**Youth Work** is one of the more obvious candidates for delivering and exploring such actions – through breaking isolation, supporting participation and involvement, skills exchange, and other such ‘hysteresis-busting’ activities – without, of course, limiting the potential roles and contributions of other actors.

### *Labour Market Analysis*

– Improve labour market analysis and forecasting **available to local and regional administrations**. The EU should strive to raise **minimum standards** and **interoperability** of labour market data.

Such data needs to facilitate concrete decision making *on the ground*; hence the data and projections need to offer enough **specificity and relevance** to be useful to a local context. Local administrations need a minimum **autonomous** capacity to supply themselves with data suited to their own needs.

The use of newer **low-cost efficient IT technologies** needs to be encouraged and supported, to make labour market analysis accessible to administrations with limited resources.

**Why?:** Across Europe the quality of labour market analysis available to local administrations, and other employment-relevant actors, varies greatly; it often arrives late or **too late**, is **not actionable** in terms of concrete local (or even regional) decision making (being too aggregate or general), is not sufficiently specific about local circumstances and priorities (referring to the aggregate of a larger geographical area), and is not interoperable with the data of other European administrations (of particular importance in cross-border areas).

Dependence on other levels of administration for data supply hampers local administrations’ access to the kind of data they need; more **autonomous capacity** is needed.

Innovative applications of IT data gathering tools – like **‘Web Crawlers’** – offer new technical possibilities; they are highly flexible, tweakable and less expensive than traditional methodologies.

No policy-making in the dark: Administrations, and other concerned bodies, need to make fact-based decisions and planning. If the relevant information is inadequate or inexistent, decisions and planning will always be flawed – e.g. **mistakes in resource allocation, training and education curricula, guidance and support, development strategy, investment** etc.

### *Advocacy Skills*

– **Capacity building for local administrations, actors and civil society has to include advocacy skills.**



**Why?:** To build cross-sector partnerships for employment – as was done in JobTown – local administrations need the necessary skills to successfully advocate participation and contribution from key actors.

Once such partnerships are set up and running, a large part of their work is that of making their case to other administrations, employers and decision makers.

This sort of capacity building is perfectly viable, as advocacy skills are learnt and taught regularly.

### *Local Approaches 2 Business Environment*

– The EU should do more to support and disseminate successful **local approaches to improving the business environment**.

**Why?:** Many local authorities **underestimate** the role they can play in improving the business environment. Wider dissemination of successful measures local authorities can take (e.g. supporting ‘maker spaces’, ‘hacker spaces’, support in navigating bureaucratic requirements imposed by other levels of government, ‘speed dating events’ for employers and young job seekers, etc.), within the limitations of their competences and resources.

### *Social Innovation & Social Enterprise (SI & SE)*

– Practical understanding of: **What Social Innovation and Social Enterprise are**, what **practical benefits** they can bring, and **how public administrations can support them**.

**Why?:** SI and SE are not generally well understood; they are often confused with charity or the outsourcing of social service delivery; i.e. the SE ‘business model’ is not well grasped.

In a time of squeezed resources and austerity, SI and SE can be a way for public administrations to **do more with less**.

## **Directed @ Youth**

### *Guidance*

– **Improving guidance for career, study and training choices**.

Improving guidance for **entrepreneurs and start-ups**.

**Why?:** Too many young people have **erroneous and/or substantially incomplete knowledge** of the options available to them. Too many young people **drop out** of fields of study or training discovering too late they chose the wrong option for themselves.



Good guidance services are key to successful employment actions; yet across Europe, these services are underperforming.

Following OECD-LEED recommendations, good guidance support needs to: reach young people early on, in a **timely** way – i.e. well prior to when a young person has to make significant decisions, be easy to **access** (online access is important), and be provided by **qualified** people. Moreover, guidance through ‘**tasters**’ and other more innovative *hands on* experiences – to help a young person learn if a given sector or activity really is for him/her – should be fomented and incentivised.

Efforts to reform and improve guidance (and to address more general issues of **(mis)perception of the World of Work** and different sectors) need to address not only young people themselves, but also the people around them that influence their choices – e.g. **parents, teachers, general public**, etc.

EU economic vitality depends on youth, as **most early stage entrepreneurs are young**. Quality of guidance available to young business start ups varies greatly across Europe and standards need to be raised; **guidance needs to come from qualified people** with personal experience of entrepreneurship or senior business management. In this regard, the UK’s ‘**Growth Accelerators**’ are a successful practice, whose dissemination and adaptation elsewhere the EU should support.

#### *All Under One Roof*

– **The spread of the ‘All Under One Roof’ approach, to clustering and coordinating the range of diverse services that affect the same young people** – taking inspiration from current practice in Germany and Finland.

**Why?:** The practice is both effective and efficient. Putting youth employment within a complete view, of a young person’s situation and needs, leads to more effective outcomes; particularly where multiple factors are at play, as is often the case with **NEETs** and those **furthest from the labour market**.

Likewise, better coordination of services and resources leads to more efficient use of the same, reducing **waste and redundancy**.

Existing experience, in those countries where an ‘All Under One Roof’ practice is already established, can be drawn on for implementation of pilot projects and dissemination elsewhere.

#### *NEETs*

– **Early action and prevention, addressing multiple causes and structural factors**.



**Why?:** The rising numbers of NEETs (young people Not in Employment Education or Training), while worsened by the economic crisis, pre-date it and stem from structural issues – which are likely to continue on after the conjuncture eventually improves. Better understanding of the multiple causal factors producing NEETs, and the approaches most suitable to addressing different causes needs to be achieved and disseminated.

Tools and practice are needed to identify those at risk of becoming NEET, and to act early so as to prevent the condition; prevention is the most desirable outcome. Where already a NEET, the sooner help arrives the better; faster response needs to be supported.

EU youth policy has put much emphasis on for helping young people make successful transitions (school to work, school to further education or training) and more needs to be done.

#### **Better Youth Outreach & Cooperation with Youth Work**

– Youth Work *know how* should be taken advantage of, to learn how best to design services, programmes, policy and actions concerning youth and in developing effective communication aimed at youth. The EU should capitalise on the specialist insight contained within organisations that work directly with young people and youth workers – such as SALTO-Youth.

**Why?:** Approaches to communication and communication channels used by young people are often divergent from those used by companies or institutions. Approaches to communication, by the EU and other public bodies, are often ineffective with young people, who often feel a notable sense of ‘disconnect’.

Youth workers – who shouldn’t be expected to become something they are not (employment agencies) – have a valuable *real world* understanding of how to connect with young people. Opportunities to capitalise on this capacity should be explored.

#### **Perception Problems of Professions**

– **Correct misperceptions, misunderstandings and lack of awareness, regarding the opportunities that *in demand* trades and technical fields offer.**

Within the broader framework of reducing **mismatch** in skills supply and demand – the EU should support projects and actions that are corrective to problems of perception, misperception and lack of awareness affecting, in particular, many of the trades and technical professions.

Such communicative efforts should include, in their message, an emphasis on the **modernisation** of practice in many fields – about which the general public often retains an outdated and unattractive image.



**Why?:** Across Europe, many valuable trades, professions and career options suffer from negative perceptions associated with them or lack of awareness among young people, who could potentially do well for themselves in those fields. These image problems affect many of the **technical professions, crafts and trades**, and often stem from a misunderstanding of what it's like to work in those fields, and of the opportunities available therein.

These problems, of perception and awareness, are a detriment to effective **study-career path choices** made by young people, and contribute significantly to mismatch between **skills offer and labour market demand** in the EU. From the employer point of view, these perception issues are an impairment to the supply of needed skills in many sectors.

Moreover, there is often a **gender** dimension to these prejudices – i.e. with stereotyping of what jobs are suitable for girls, and so forth.

#### *Entrepreneurial Education & Attitudes*

– **Education** and training that reinforce generic **entrepreneurial skills and attitudes** (teamwork, initiative, problem solving etc.) **early on** and introduces awareness of entrepreneurship as part of the World of Work.

Change attitudes and other conditioning factors attaching stigma or punishment to **business failure**.

**Why?:** Europe needs more entrepreneurial thinking and entrepreneur-friendly social attitudes. Generic entrepreneurial skills are useful to a person whether or not they ever start up their own business. Education can do a lot to introduce such attitudes and awareness from an early age.

The **stigma** still attached to business failure is **holding the EU back economically**.

#### *Modernisation of Education – Generic/Soft Skills*

– Better inclusion of **generic (also known as 'soft') skills in educational objectives and approaches**. Continued efforts to support the **validation** of generic skills, and more generally of competences acquired informally or non-formally.

**Why?:** Education varies greatly across Europe; in too many locations education is outdated in approach, based on rote learning and weak in inculcating and valuing generic skills. EU youth policy has done much to advance this agenda, and much still needs to be done.

## **Governance**

#### *National-local Coordination*

– **Macro to local coordination**. Better linkages and conditionalities **incentivising** greater and more effective consultation and coordination between the national level — of designing youth employment policy, programmes and



actions — and the local level, where those things are implemented and experienced, and succeed or fail.

The purpose of such coordination is to make policies, programmes and actions more effective, and better suited to the specificities of divergent local circumstances.

**Why?:** JobTown localities consistently cite their own lack of competence or involvement in policy making as a fundamental **barrier to them taking action** locally in favour of youth employment. In many cases, this leads to a **'hands off'** attitude towards youth employment – at a time when public administrations need to be **'firing on all cylinders'** to combat youth unemployment. Each level of administration has a potential constructive role to play and can contribute – each with its respective strengths and advantages – to favouring the employment that European citizens want and need.

#### *Time Lag 4 New Education*

– Improving **throughput** of systems leading to the appropriate redesign of teaching, curricula and training contents and approaches – stemming from the identification of particular labour market skills demands (present and forecasted).

The EU should provide more incentive and support for pilot projects and actions for setting up, or improving, qualifications supply systems, adapted to specific functional (local/regional) labour market demand – improving and accelerating throughput, of systems for identifying labour market demand and translating that into adapted curricula.

**Why?:** The response time, in making needed changes in training and education offer, is **harmfully slow**.

There are a great many factors of **resistance or friction** in such systems; for instance, common bureaucratic and organisational inertia, missing qualification among teaching staff, a lack of incentive to update knowledge and skills, or the arduous delays that are often a barrier to reform where **national governments** control school curricula or must approve any changes.

In the case of Vocational Education and Training, **outdated contents** and/or **inadequately qualified teaching** are a path to unemployment.

The **need for competitive adaptation in Europe is just too great** to accept *status quo* in the current levels of throughput – from local/regional labour market analysis to the reform or adaptation of curricula, teaching or training matching the specificities of local/regional demand.





### *User(citizen)-friendliness*

– Reduce **administrative barriers to projects with good potential** to support young people's transitions from school to labour market, or out of unemployment – particularly those projects aimed at young people with more disadvantaged and/or with complex multiple problems.

Calls for project proposals affecting youth employment, need to be written and designed with greater concern for **end user (citizen) experience, usability and accessibility**. Language needs to be as accessible as possible, with criteria enforced for limiting excessive technical phrasing and jargon.

**Why?:** Many EU calls for project proposals effectively filter out those less skilled at navigating bureaucratic language and process, rather than prioritising the approval of those projects with the greatest potential for real world impact. While exercising the same level of caution with public money, EU authorities can introduce **criteria of usability and accessibility** to how documents are written and procedures designed – prioritising end **result over process**. Such concern for the experience of citizens taking part in EU application procedures would complement the larger task of making the EU, in general, more understood and accessible for European citizens.

### *Functional Economic Areas (FEA)*

– The adoption of '**Functional Economic Area**' structures, to better coordinate policy, resources and action, across organisational and administrative boundaries.

**Why?:** Efforts to tackle unemployment, particularly structural unemployment, and for regional economic development, necessarily involve multiple actors and institutions and integrated strategies and actions, over a '**messily**' defined territory.

Moreover, administrative **lines on maps frequently do not correspond to how a territory is used** and develops, in practice; mismatch between real geographic patterns of activity and administrative boundaries (e.g. city limits) can hinder effective action and policy.

As such, finding the right governance structure is a real challenge – when pursuing ambitious goals, involving a complexity of actors and elements, over an ambiguous sense of territory. Accordingly, there is demand for new types of city/regional networks suited to integrated development strategies and actions.

'**Functional Economic Areas**' – essentially territory as defined by the patterns and spatial flows in which people, live, work and study, rather than administrative boundaries (e.g. the London Stansted Cambridge Corridor) – offer a **model for governance suitable** to managing the above mentioned challenges of complexity and administrative 'messiness'.



An FEA allows for policy and implementation to match the real dynamics of a territory, and for public administrations to **achieve more than they could otherwise, with the same resources.**

There is much scope for the expanding of the practice throughout Europe, and **EU regional policy** can drive a growing awareness and understanding of the practice, and support different European territories in successfully adopting and adapting the FEA concept to their needs and priorities.

### *Organisational Learning & EU Projects*

– All projects funded by the EU, should incorporate into their design and implementation, measures and protocols to ensure organisational learning that is **independent of any individual project participant**, and that will **live on after project completion**. Such an approach has been piloted successfully in JobTown's '**Knowledge Transfer Workshop**' (KTW) practice, variations of which should be incorporated into future EU-funded projects.

**Why?:** The individuals participating in European projects have opportunities for valuable learning; however, it is not always clear how much this **learning extends beyond them to the organisations or communities they represent**. Often when an individual leaves an organisation, the **knowledge acquired through EU projects leaves with that person**.

**JobTown piloted a 'KTW' process** whereby formal plans were drawn up and carried out, to communicate the knowledge acquired in European Workshops to the larger organisations that participating individuals represented or worked with. This practice **was successful and well received** (though it took some explaining at first).

With a view to continual improvement of process and a natural ethical concern for the maximum value and impact of spending public money, a dimension should be built into more EU projects (certainly those concerned with learning or capacity building) **addressing how participating organisations will, as a whole, absorb and retain the knowledge** or capacities generated.

The issue of organisational learning and, by extension, the impact of money spent is a fundamental one, and it **should be explored more explicitly** – what works best, in which sort of situation? For whom? etc.



## **JobTown participants endorsing these recommendations:**

Name, Organisation