

ON THE DESIGN OF

**VOLUNTEER PROGRAMMES
TO FACILITATE THE ENTRY
AND RE-ENTRY OF YOUNG
PEOPLE INTO WORK**

Niall O'Higgins

November 2022

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ALMP	Active labour market programme/policy (according to context)
DV	Direct volunteering (work)
ICLS	International Conference of Labour Statisticians
ILO	International Labour Office/Organization (according to context)
NEET	Not in employment, education or training
PEP	Public employment programme
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SNA	System of National Accounts
YG	Youth Guarantee

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1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic and its economic fallout have wreaked havoc on young people's transition to the labour market. Between 2019 and 2020 youth employment fell dramatically, much more so than did employment among older, more established workers. This was especially the case for those in developing and emerging countries (ILO, 2021a) and for young women (ILO, 2021a). Two factors resulted in the disproportionate impact on young people. First, they were more affected by both lock-down measures and the concomitant negative economic shock. As well, they benefited significantly less from the fiscal response measures designed to mitigate employment and income losses (O'Higgins, Verick and Elsheikhi, 2021). Evidence shows that in at least some countries, volunteering increased during the pandemic, especially among young people (Gallup, 2021; ILO, 2020).

In this context, identifying appropriate policies and programmes that can better support the integration of young people into decent work is all the more urgent. Volunteer work has been recognized as crucial for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Recent research undertaken jointly by the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme and the International Labour Organization (ILO) has firmly established that, more often than not, volunteer work is associated with positive subsequent labour market outcomes for young volunteers; however, this is not invariably the case, and substantial differences are observed across individuals and countries (O'Higgins, 2020).

This raises the question as to which features of volunteer programmes and, more generally, which types of volunteer programmes or work are most likely to effectively promote the integration – and re-integration – of young people into good quality employment. This paper examines the issue, looking at different forms of integration support mechanisms, seeking to draw out some of their key features – which can also be incorporated into volunteer programmes – in order to promote their effectiveness in facilitating youth labour market integration.

Following this introduction, the paper includes two substantive sections and a conclusion; each plays a part in reviewing the different forms and key features of the mechanisms that help integrate young people into the labour market. Also examined are the most effective ways to incorporate those same features into volunteer programmes to yield beneficial results.

Section 2 reviews findings on the effectiveness of volunteer programmes as a labour market integration strategy and highlights specific design features. Section 3 then discusses relevant findings regarding more traditional initiatives associated with the school-to-work transition; these include active labour market programmes (ALMP) and internships. The conclusion analyses the implications of the findings and suggests ways in which volunteer work can serve as an effective pathway for young people seeking more stable, long-term employment.

The paper also includes two stand-alone guidance notes as appendices. Appendix A outlines desirable design features of volunteer programmes that are likely to enhance labour market integration. Appendix B offers factors to consider when seeking to integrate youth volunteer programmes into more general national youth employment strategies.

2. VOLUNTEER PROGRAMMES AS A LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION DEVICE

2.1 What is volunteering?

What do we actually mean by the term, “volunteer work”? Volunteering comprises “activities undertaken of free will, for the general public good and where monetary reward is not the principal motivating factor” (UNGA, 2002). For statistical purposes, the ILO defines volunteer work as, “any unpaid, non-compulsory activity to produce goods or provide services for others” (ILO, 2021b).¹ This covers a wide range of unpaid activities, which may be categorized in a variety of ways along a series of dimensions.

Volunteering may be formal or informal, take place in person or online, be episodic or regular, and be primarily motivated by self-building and/or community building concerns. The term recently has been grouped into five not mutually exclusive “typologies” (UNV, 2020):

- mutual aid or self-help
- philanthropy or service to others
- participation
- advocacy or campaigning
- volunteering as leisure

The above definition is clear about what is included and excluded. “Any....activity” means work for at least one hour; “unpaid” means the absence of cash or in-kind remuneration for work done or hours worked (although volunteer and, indeed, also other “unpaid” workers or trainees such as interns may be compensated for costs incurred); “non-compulsory” means work performed without a civil, legal or administrative requirement; production “for others” means work performed outside of the household or family of the volunteer (ILO 2013). Thus, volunteer work is voluntary and involves performing services or contributing to production outside of the family. It is distinct from unpaid family care work, unpaid internships and similar activities that are considered in detail further below.

The resolution of the International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS), which established the aforementioned definition of volunteer work (ILO, 2013), also introduced an important new distinction between employment and work; all employment is work, but not all work is employment. By definition, unpaid work is no longer considered employment. In addition to excluding activities that had previously been considered employment, such as subsistence farming, the new definition also implies a broadening of the concept of work to encompass various activities that previously had not been included and to further clarify the relationship between these. Since it is unpaid, volunteer work is indeed work, but it is not employment. Similarly, but distinctly, unpaid care activities are work — but not employment. There is an overlap here, in that unpaid care work undertaken in the context of the family and/or household is not volunteer work, but unpaid care work undertaken outside the family is. This is an important issue and is useful in explaining some of the results, especially gender differences, in the impact of volunteer work discussed further below.

Another issue clarified by the employment/work distinction concerns internships (or traineeships), which are neither a form of employment nor a form of volunteer work. Here, the distinguishing factor regards the explicit goal of the acquisition of work-related skills.

¹ ILO, Resolution concerning statistics of work, employment and labour underutilization. Resolution I. The 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, October 2013, Geneva.

Table 1 visually clarifies these relationships. The ICLS resolution clearly and separately identifies volunteer work and unpaid traineeships (or internships)². Various forms of care work, however, fall under different categories. Paid care work is employment. Unpaid care work is work — but not employment; if it is performed outside of the family, unpaid care work is also a form of volunteer work.³ Globally, women undertake more than three-quarters of unpaid care work (ILO, 2018). Moreover, although the gender differences are not quite as stark, women spend on average significantly more time than men in unpaid care work outside the family — that is, voluntary care work (Charmes, 2019).

Table 1. Relationship between different forms of unpaid and paid work and employment

Destination of final production	Forms of work							
	For own final use		For use by others					
Forms of work	1) Own-use production work		2) Employment (work for pay or profit)	3) Unpaid internship or traineeship	4) Other work activities	5) Volunteer work		
	of services	of goods				in market and non-market units	in households producing	
						goods	services	
Care work	Yes (unpaid)	No	Yes (paid)	No	No	No	No	Yes (unpaid)
Relation to 2008 System of National Accounts (SNA)	Activities within the SNA production boundary							
	Activities inside the SNA General production boundary							

Source: Adapted and expanded from ILO (2013, Diagram 1, p. 3).

In terms of institutional arrangements, the ICLS also distinguishes between two broad forms of volunteering:

- a. organization-based (formal) volunteer work – arranged through market and non-market organizations including groups and associations
- b. direct (informal) volunteer work – performed directly for the volunteer’s household or for the household of a family member

In what follows, the focus is primarily on volunteer programmes, which refer to the first of these broad types and in which young people are more commonly engaged.

This paper builds on the work reported in O’Higgins (2020) drawing on evidence of the effectiveness of ALMPs and internships in facilitating the school-to-work transition to identify relevant insights for the design of volunteering initiatives that, inter alia, seek to improve the employment prospects of young people.

² However, paid internships (and some other forms of paid work-based learning, such as apprenticeships, are included within employment. The terms internship and traineeship typically refer to the same concept and can be used interchangeably. See, for example, Stewart et al. (2021, esp. chapter 2.2).

³ See, for example, Charmes (2019, section 1).

One significant difference between volunteer work and these other mechanisms is the time frame over which they operate. ALMPs and internships are typically undertaken during a concentrated period of time; a participant would usually, albeit not necessarily, participate on a full-time basis for a specific period during which this is their main activity. Volunteer work, on the other hand, often involves a small portion of a person's time over a longer period. The significance of this will be touched upon later.

2.2 Youth involvement in volunteer work

On the whole, young people are less likely than prime-age adults to engage in volunteer work, but they are slightly more likely than them to engage in organization-based volunteering.⁴

Young people are by no means a homogeneous group. Their individual differences influence their ability to find decent work in different contexts, their likelihood of participating in some form of volunteer work, and the effectiveness a particular volunteer programme in supporting their entry into employment. All of these factors must be considered when designing such programmes.

Thus, for example, young (and older) women are, on average, more likely to engage in both types of volunteer work than men, but this is especially true of direct, as opposed to organization-based, volunteer work.⁵ In both cases there is also much variation across countries.

A number of factors underlie the decision of young people to get involved in volunteer work as well as the degree to which they will benefit from it. These also vary sharply by gender. Several are relevant to the subsequent discussion:

- **Educational attainment and its interaction with family income and gender:** In countries at all levels of economic development, the participation of young people in volunteer work typically increases with educational attainment (O'Higgins, 2020). This may reflect several underlying drivers, such as family income; more highly educated young people – particularly in lower income countries – will, on average, come from better-off families. Family income is likely to affect young people's participation in voluntary work through its permissive effect; young people from better-off families will be better able to afford to do unpaid work. There is also evidence that the work-related benefits of volunteering increase with education. This in itself may affect the decision to volunteer in the first place. If volunteering is likely to enhance a young person's employment prospects, this provides an additional incentive to engage in it. Direct evidence on the impact of income on the decision to volunteer also suggests that the motivations underlying volunteering are quite different for women and men. For example, whereas for women family income has been found to have a negative effect on the decision to volunteer, for males the impact is positive (Downward, Hallmann and Raschiute, 2020). In part, the authors attribute this difference to the fact that men are more likely than women to see volunteering as instrumental to their careers, rather than simply something which is of value in itself.
- **Not in employment, education or training (NEET) status:**⁶ The relationship between participation in volunteer work and whether a young person is classified as NEET depends conjointly on the specific type of NEET status as well as on that person's gender. There are many different reasons

⁴ According to the estimates (downloaded on 28 January 2022) available in the [ILOSTAT database](#), the share of young people aged 15–24 engaged in direct volunteering exceeded that of adults aged 25–64 in only 29 per cent of reporting countries; the corresponding figure for organization-based volunteering was 53 per cent.

⁵ Specifically, in 78 per cent of countries, women are more likely than men to engage in direct volunteering, while in 53 per cent of countries women are more likely than men to engage in organization-based volunteer work. As noted below, women are more likely to engage in unpaid care work, which also partly explains this difference.

⁶ Reducing the share of young people with this status is the main Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicator (8.6.1) for tracking progress on improving youth employment prospects.

to be NEET. However, members of this group may broadly be divided into two categories. The first are considered “active”, that is, unemployed and actively seeking work. The second are “inactive” NEETs, or those not actively seeking work.⁷ Among young men, the association between NEET status and participation in volunteering varies across countries, but not systematically. Young, inactive female NEETs, by contrast, are invariably less likely to participate in volunteering than active (unemployed) female NEETs. Young women who are inactive NEETs are usually undertaking family care work, as referenced in Table 1 (ILO, 2019). In other words, unpaid care work within the family and outside of it (included in volunteer work) are, to some extent, alternative uses of time. This provides a plausible explanation as to why young female inactive NEETs are, on average, less likely to participate in unpaid care work and other forms of voluntary work outside the family. This also aligns with evidence on female part-time work and volunteering (Taniguchi, 2006) as well as evidence on gender differences in volunteer participation (Downward, Hallmann and Rasciute, 2020).

2.3 How can (and does) volunteering contribute to young people’s labour market success?

Volunteering has the potential to provide a range of benefits at both the societal (UNV, 2021) and individual levels. For a society, volunteering may promote equality and inclusiveness, fostering social cohesion and community resilience. As well, it can provide a community with services that would otherwise be absent. At the individual level, volunteering can enhance the lives of beneficiaries and volunteers. Volunteers may, for example, experience better physical and mental health and well-being, although such improvements have been found to be more pronounced among older volunteers (for example, Fiorillo and Nappo, 2017; Griep et al., 2014; Luoh and Herzog, 2002; Meier and Stutzer, 2008; Van Willigen, 2000; Wilson and Musick, 1999).

Of direct relevance here, volunteering programmes can also enhance the labour market prospects of individual volunteers. Indeed, volunteering programmes, especially for the young, are often specifically aimed at increasing the employability of participants, typically alongside other objectives. Examples of this type of programme studied by UNV include the National Youth Volunteering Programme in Burundi (Uwintwaza, 2017); the National Volunteer Corps for Young Graduates in Lesotho (Nuwakora, 2015); the National Youth Volunteer Service Project in Liberia (Guimaraes Matos and Zidi-Aporeigah, 2008); the University Volunteer Scheme for Youth Empowerment and Development in Papua New Guinea (Chao and Shapiro, 2013); the UNV Asia Youth Volunteer Exchange Programme in Tanzania and Zambia (Ittig, 2016); and the Uganda Graduate Volunteer Scheme.⁸

Literature on the impacts of volunteering on individual labour market outcomes has focused on three mechanisms through which volunteering can enhance individual employment prospects (Bruno and Fiorillo 2016):

1. acquisition of work-related skills and experience
2. development of social capital, particularly via social networks
3. signalling to employers the presumptive possession of desirable work-related competencies

There is evidence to support all three of these mechanisms operating in volunteering (Wilson, Mantovan and Sauer 2020). There is also some evidence that volunteering can improve physical and mental well-being, which can itself contribute in a general way to success on the labour market (Corden and Sainsbury, 2005).

⁷ The distinction between these two types of NEET is important; reducing inactive NEETs is both a more challenging – but arguably a more important – policy goal.

⁸ <https://mglsd.go.ug/the-uganda-graduate-volunteer-scheme/>.

These same factors also typically underlie initiatives that are more directly related to employment, such as ALMPs and internships.⁹ Volunteering initiatives may have multiple purposes. Yet the broader literature on the impact of these integration mechanisms on labour market outcomes offers lessons in identifying the elements that may affect the ability of volunteer programmes to promote the employability of young people.

Indeed, evidence regarding the causal impacts of participation in volunteer work on subsequent labour market experiences is relatively limited. This is especially true when trying to understand the mechanisms underlying those impacts. In part, the paucity of the evidence depends on the numerous forms that volunteering activities can take, as well as the variety of objectives underlying volunteering. But it also depends on the relatively small number of studies seeking to identify the causal impact of volunteering work on labour market outcomes, very few of which examine the role of specific features of specific volunteering experiences.

This is starting to change, and the UNV/ILO partnership on the measurement of volunteer work represents a step towards augmenting the information base. As well as reviewing the existing literature, O'Higgins (2020) used microdata developed through the partnership to analyse the relationship between volunteering programmes and the labour market experience of young people in a range of countries, both developed and developing.

The purpose in this section is to identify, as far as possible, some of the lessons learned from the analyses that have been undertaken, particularly concerning the types of individual and above all the specific individual characteristics that are likely to enhance the effectiveness of volunteering as a labour market integration mechanism for young people. This review is complemented in the next section, which seeks to identify relevant lessons from the findings of the ALMP impact evaluation literature and the less-extensive analyses of the effects of internships on the labour market prospects of young people.

In any event, the existing evidence confirms that volunteering often improves participants' chances of finding employment and/or increases their wages, albeit with much variation in the observed outcomes across countries and circumstances.

2.3.1 What do we know about the relationship between volunteering and subsequent labour market experiences?

1. **Labour market outcomes:** Outcomes vary, but the bulk of the evidence suggests that participation in voluntary work is, more often than not, associated with positive labour market outcomes;¹⁰ volunteering is associated with an increased likelihood of finding work and higher subsequent wages, particularly in high-income countries (Baert and Vujčić, 2017; Bruno and Fiorillo, 2016; Cozzi, Mantovan and Sauer, 2017; Eberl and Krug, 2021; Hackl, Halla and Pruckner, 2007; Kamerāde and Paine, 2014; O'Higgins, 2020; Paine, McKay and Moro, 2013; Pronteau and Wolff, 2006; Spera et al., 2013; UNV, 2017; Wilson, Mantovan and Sauer, 2020).
2. **Gender:** Evidence on the differential impacts by gender is mixed. For example, the cross-country and longitudinal analyses for various countries on the impact of youth volunteering undertaken

⁹ Again, while the emphasis of the goals of these initiatives tends to be stated in terms of the three labour-market-related mechanisms listed, there is increasing recognition of the importance of mental and physical well-being as a determinant of labour market success, as well as being a positive (negative) consequence of (un)employment, and in some cases, also of interventions to support the transition of young people to employment (Wang et al., 2021).

¹⁰ Some caution is needed here. Relatively few studies have managed to convincingly identify causality – that is, it is not always clear whether participation in volunteering causes the positive outcomes, or whether these measured "effects" actually result from other factors conjointly influencing both participation in volunteering and the labour market outcome(s) of interest (O'Higgins, 2020). The studies listed here have typically sought a way to identify causality, except for Kamerāde and Paine (2014), which is based on a review of the relevant literature and UNV (2017), which is a descriptive study.

by O'Higgins (2020) suggest that the impact of volunteering on young women's employment prospects is marginally more pronounced than for young men. Similarly, Baert and Vujić (2017), in their experiment on job applications, find that women obtain a slightly larger benefit than men; on a related note, Cozzi, Mantovan and Sauer (2017) find that volunteering is associated with a slightly higher wage premium among men than women. In all cases, the effects are rather small. But perhaps more importantly, there are various factors driving these outcomes – gender differences in the type of volunteering work undertaken, for example, as well as differences in the way such work is perceived by young women and men. Downward, Hallmann and Rasciute (2020), among others, find that men see volunteering more instrumentally as a means to enhance their employment prospects and as complementary to other work. For women, volunteering instead substitutes for work-related activities. These issues will be further considered below.

3. **Labour market status of volunteers:** Longitudinal evidence from the United Kingdom, suggests that, although young NEETs are much less likely to participate in volunteering than those in education or employment, the greatest improvements in subsequent employment prospects are found among unemployed NEETs. Volunteering has little or no impact on inactive NEETs. This is driven by the results for young women and, consistent with the previous point, is plausibly linked to the greater likelihood that females will not be looking because they are engaged in unpaid family care work. Underlying these outcomes are gender differences in the attitudes towards volunteer work and the differing types of volunteering undertaken by women and men.
4. **Other participant characteristics:** Evidence shows that volunteering initiatives tend to offer the greatest benefit to those from advantaged backgrounds. Volunteer work may be especially effective in boosting the employment prospects of the more well-educated volunteers (O'Higgins, 2020) and those in professional occupations (Wilson, Mantovan and Sauer, 2020).
5. **Context and specifics:** Overall, the results across countries and situations reveals notable variety, which suggests that the specific details of volunteering activities in specific circumstances affect the outcomes. The evidence clearly suggests, for example, that social norms affect the different types of volunteer work engaged in by young women as compared to young men. Indeed, as already observed, females are more likely than males to engage in unpaid care work (ILO, 2018).

2.3.2 What role is played by the characteristics of the volunteering experience?

The initial considerations outlined above, supported by the great variety in the results reported in the literature, along with some of their features – such as the role of the intersection between gender and type of volunteering – all point towards the importance of the specifics of volunteering experiences in determining outcomes.

6. **Duration and frequency:** The duration of specific volunteer programmes along with the frequency of the volunteering experience for those participating over a longer time both appear to be important. Evidence suggests that too much or too little volunteering can damage later employment prospects. The ideal appears to be medium intensity with too much or too little volunteering being damaging to later employment prospects (Eberl and Krug, 2021; Ellis Paine et al., 2013; Hirst, 2001).
7. **Volunteering for different organizations:** A number of studies find that volunteering for more than one organization increases the labour market benefits of volunteering. For example, Hackl, Halla and Pruckner (2007) find that volunteering for a second organization nearly doubles the wage benefits. Similarly, Baert and Vujić (2017) find additional labour market benefits accruing from more than one organization.

8. **Type of volunteering organization (and its interaction with gender):** In many countries, stark gender differences emerge in the types of volunteering activities undertaken by women and men, which are sometimes also reflected in subsequent labour-market-related outcomes. It is rare for such differences to be considered explicitly in causal analyses. But in their study of organization-based volunteering, Day and Devlin (1997, 1998) found that volunteer work related to the economy, such as for tourist associations, led to positive and comparable returns for men and women. Similarly, volunteering in sports-related organizations and for international and/or environmental organizations produces positive benefits for both sexes. On the other hand, participation in volunteer work for religious organizations yields negative labour market returns to women but not to men. This is especially important since women are much more likely than men to participate in this form of volunteering. In this case, it is plausible to suggest that it is the strong “preference” for religious volunteering among women which is being measured rather than the impact of volunteering per se. This is somewhat similar to the issue of volunteer care work, which is also far more likely to be undertaken by women. Clearly, more analysis is needed on the types of volunteering – and in particular on the intersection between gender and type of volunteer work.

3. YOUTH LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION MECHANISMS: ACTIVE LABOUR MARKET PROGRAMMES AND INTERNSHIPS

To further inform our understanding of the potential of volunteer initiatives to promote youth employment, it is useful to also draw upon the substantial evaluation evidence bases that have been developed with respect to other forms of integration mechanisms. In particular, there is a lot of evidence regarding the impact ALMPs have on young people's subsequent labour market experiences, as well as growing evidence on the impact of internship programmes. Both types of interventions, on occasion, share some characteristics with volunteering initiatives.¹¹

3.1 Active labour market programmes for young people

ALMPs are typically publicly funded programmes that aim to improve the employment prospects of participants. Usually these involve one or more of the following elements:

- employment services and job search assistance
- subsidized employment
- skills training
- entrepreneurship support and training

Among these, the second element and, to some extent, the third element are most relevant to the effectiveness of volunteering as a labour market integration mechanism. *Subsidized employment* takes one of two primary forms: (a) employment on public projects (public employment programmes or PEPs) such as infrastructure construction, socially useful work, etc.; and (b) employment with private employers via wage subsidies. *Skills training* typically involves either on- or off-the-job training for the purpose of providing young people with job-related skills and competencies.¹² Volunteering programmes may, indeed, be included among ALMPs under one or other of these categories.

ALMPs can serve a variety of functions centred around promoting the employment prospects – or, more generally, the employability – of participants. There were nine findings on the effectiveness of these programmes to volunteering as a youth labour market integration mechanism.

1. Comprehensive interventions for young people:

Comprehensive programmes involve some combination of subsidized employment, training, self-employment support, guidance and counselling, and possibly other elements. They have a long history in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries and, above all, in the United States of America (USA). In Europe, as well as in Latin America and the Caribbean, such

¹¹ There is also growing evidence on the impact of apprenticeships and other forms of technical and vocational education and training (TVET). But these longer-term, more structured types of interventions with specific learning/competency acquisition objectives are rather different in scope and character and are not explicitly considered here.

¹² The distinction between the terms "skills" and "competencies" can be a little nebulous. Competency is typically defined as "knowledge, skills and attitudes" (or attributes), so skills are effectively a subset. But the terms are often used interchangeably. The interested reader is referred to the ILO manual on competency-based training, which provides an introduction to this topic (ILO, 2020b).

programmes have achieved substantial success. Perhaps the prime example of this type of intervention currently operating is the Youth Guarantee (YG) initially implemented in all European Union countries in 2014 and subsequently revamped and relaunched in July 2020. The YG is a broad-based youth employment programme that goes beyond traditional active labour market interventions. It implies the basic commitment by Member States to provide young people with an offer of employment, education or training within four months of them becoming NEET.

Relevance to volunteering: This supports the idea that volunteering programmes could be included as a potentially useful option in more comprehensive labour market interventions for the young.

The Youth Guarantee Programme of the European Union

The YG is a broad-based youth employment programme that goes beyond traditional active labour market interventions. It implies a basic commitment by European Union Member States to provide young people with an offer of employment, education or training within four months of them becoming NEET.

The renewed programme, launched in July 2020 six years after the initial version, includes the same basic commitment to young people, providing an educational, training or employment offer within four months of becoming NEET. But the revised programme aims to be more inclusive than the earlier one in several ways:

- The age range was extended to include all those from 15–29 years of age.
- It extends its outreach directly to include youth from more vulnerable groups, such as racial and ethnic minorities, those who have disabilities, and those living in rural, remote or disadvantaged urban areas.

Evaluation findings are rare for the YG, partly because traditional impact evaluation approaches are not easily applicable to such a large-scale and wide-ranging initiative. However, between 2013 and 2019, NEET rates in the European Union fell continuously from 13.0 per cent to 10.2 per cent. Clearly this was not just due to the introduction of the YG, but there is little doubt that the labour market gains for young people in the European Union since 2014 are – at least partly – attributable to the introduction of the programme. Moreover, implementation of the YG brought with it a number of other beneficial effects for young people, public employment services, firms and the economy as a whole.

2. Training plus employment subsidies:

In general, programmes that impart some degree of training are more effective than subsidized employment *per se*. While this is one of the more robust findings in the literature, the relative usefulness of the elements may depend on the business cycle. One nuance is that wage subsidies appear to be more effective in the short run, and training programmes – of sufficient duration and quality – tend to have a more significant impact over the longer run (Card et al. 2010, 2018).

Relevance to volunteering: The key here is skills acquisition. Acquiring general albeit job-related skills during volunteering, which are of more general usefulness in their subsequent labour market experiences, is likely to be of key importance.

3. Programme duration:

Programmes need to be of sufficient duration to have a significant effect (O'Higgins, 2017, ch. 4). This finding has also emerged from recent analyses of internship programmes (O'Higgins and Pinedo, 2021). Programme duration seems to be a key factor in driving the effectiveness of ALMPs in Latin America and the Caribbean (ILO, 2016). This also is consistent with the positive association between the duration and/or frequency of volunteer activities and subsequent labour market experiences.

Relevance to volunteering: Again, this concerns skills acquisition; in order to learn useful things, young people need to spend a certain amount of time in a particular activity for the benefits to be realized and skills acquired.

4. On-the-job training alone:

This appears to be more effective than *off-the-job training*, perhaps partly because on-the-job training involves direct contact with employers.

Relevance to volunteering: This speaks to the relevance of the skills acquired during volunteering, which will obviously vary with the type of volunteering experience.

5. On- and off-the-job training combined:

Also consistent with the hypothesis above, training programmes that combine off- and on-the-job training have universally been found to be more effective than those exclusively providing only off- or on-the-job training (e.g., Kluve et al., 2017).

Relevance to volunteering: This also suggests a role for off-the-job training in order to prepare young volunteers for their roles; such training is likely to both increase young people's effectiveness as volunteers and also allow them to build competencies during their period of volunteering, which may be of use in the wider labour market.

6. Business cycle:

There is general agreement that training programmes appear to be less useful in times of recession, particularly when compared with employment subsidies. Training programmes perform better when they are instituted during periods of economic expansion (Betcherman et al., 2004; Røed and Raum, 2006; McVicar and Podivinsky, 2010). Following this view, during a recession more emphasis should be put on employment subsidies and other measures aimed at creating temporary employment opportunities and providing income support. Once economies start to return to positive economic growth, then training may also play a more constructive role in supporting recovery.¹³ More general macroeconomic studies also support the idea that ALMPs as a whole can mitigate the negative employment effects of a recession (Bassanini and Duval, 2006; Ebell & O'Higgins, 2016). This is all the more the case with substantial comprehensive programmes like the European YG, which also acts as an automatic stabilizer; given its nature, expenditure on such programmes will increase as the numbers of young NEET rise in response to worsening economic conditions. A second element of relevance here, central to the purpose of the YG,

¹³ Kluve (2010) and Card et al. (2018), on the other hand, find that ALMPs as a whole work better when unemployment is higher, although the marginal effect is fairly small. The suggested explanation is that during a recession, the candidate pool for programmes will be of a higher average quality since greater numbers of better-qualified young people will not find employment in these circumstances. That is, it is not that programmes are more effective during recessions, but rather that the composition of potential programme participants changes.

is the maintenance of labour market attachment among those not finding employment during times of low aggregate demand. In current circumstances, with especially large falls (and relatively slow recovery) in youth employment in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and with most of the exit from youth employment resulting in increased inactivity rather than higher youth unemployment rates, maintenance of labour market attachment and outreach are of central importance (ILO, 2021a, 2021c).

Relevance to volunteering: This provides some support for the inclusion of volunteering programmes as part of a more general package of measures to support young people, including during times of recession. While the absence of income support means that the fiscal multipliers will be relatively weak for volunteering, undertaking real activities of some worth – to both the individual and the broader community – may play a significant positive role in the maintenance of the motivation and labour market attachment of young people.

7. Targeting:

Betcherman et al. (2007) and Kluge et al. (2017) find that programmes that target *disadvantaged* youth seem to be more effective than programmes targeting youth as a whole. The result confirms the more general finding of several reviews – going back to the relatively early analysis of Fay (1996) – that targeted programmes are more effective.

Relevance to volunteering: This supports both the notion that volunteering programmes should account for the potential participant pool and that appropriately designed interventions should consider how volunteering initiatives can usefully motivate, in particular, specific groups of young people who face particular disadvantages in the labour market.

8. Duration of the impact:

The meta-analyses undertaken by Card et al. (2010, 2018) and by Kluge et al. (2017) look specifically at the issue of when evaluations are undertaken. They find that this is an important characteristic in determining estimated effects. In particular, over the medium term (two to three years after programme participation), job-training programmes are found to be particularly successful. Longer programmes, which appear to be less effective than short programmes when looking at immediate impacts, are found to have significant positive effects in the medium term. This speaks to the durability of the gains from training versus subsidized employment. As well, it reflects the importance of the acquisition by individuals of characteristics of lasting benefit during participation in such initiatives.

Relevance to volunteering: Once again, this relates to the benefits of the acquisition of characteristics that can be of lasting worth in the labour market – soft skills, commitment and similar abilities, that may be strengthened during appropriately designed volunteering initiatives are likely to be of more lasting worth in terms of their support to young people's longer-term labour market integration.

9. Public employment (public works) programmes:

Public employment programmes (PEPs), sometimes known as public works programmes, subsidize employment that offers social and/or economic value to the community. These consistently have been found to be relatively ineffective in terms of their post-programme impact on the employment chances of participants. There are a number of reasons why this is the case. First, they are more accurately seen as an income-support mechanism rather than a programme that seeks to reintegrate participants into the labour market. Second, participation in such programmes in some countries is restricted to the least

employable members of the unemployed, so participation can carry a stigma. Consequently, participants signal to prospective employers that they belong to this group and are unlikely to be very productive employees – the so-called “stigma effect”. Although typical of PEPs, this type of effect can arise in different circumstances and for different reasons. This is particularly true if, for example, receiving social benefits is contingent on programme participation and therefore less than voluntary. For this reason, participation in certain programmes can act as a negative signal on the labour market.

Relevance to volunteering: There are two relevant issues here. First, as noted above, the aims of volunteering may be much broader than simply enhancing the employment prospects of participants. Second, there is a key issue regarding the signal that participation in an activity or programme provides to prospective employers. Participation in volunteer activities and programmes that are known to be voluntary and/or of high quality are more likely to carry that positive signal. Programmes that, for example, are a condition for receiving (say) social benefits are more likely to provide a negative signal.

3.2 Internship

The internship, which is rapidly becoming an integral part of young people’s school-to-work transition, is another mechanism to integrate young people into the labour market. Though originating in high-income countries, internships are increasingly common in low- and middle-income countries. Data – and evaluation evidence – is much rarer for internships than for ALMPs. But in the USA, it is estimated that at least 60 per cent of students in each graduating class since 2013 participated in an internship¹⁴, amounting to around 300,000 students per year.

One issue that immediately arises is the lack of a clear consensus as to what constitutes an internship, or even whether that is the correct name. Internships are often referred to as traineeships – although the latter term in some national contexts is used to describe rather more formalized training arrangements. Generally speaking, internships are considered one form of work-based learning and more specifically, “an internship... [is an] ...arrangement for the performance of work within a business or organization which is primarily intended to provide experience, skills and/or contacts that will assist the worker in obtaining employment or other work opportunities in the future... [but which does not seek in a] ...structured way to provide all the skills needed for a particular occupation,” (Stewart et al. 2021, p. 3).

Internships are typically further divided into three subcategories (Stewart, 2021):

1. placements associated with formal education or training programmes run by authorized institutions or providers
2. periods of work experience associated with ALMPs
3. everything else: that is, open-market internships

3.2.1 Paid versus unpaid internships:

An important distinction to be made, with direct relevance to volunteering, is whether internships offer participants payment.¹⁵ This has been important in determining outcomes and is at the centre of the debate on the effectiveness of internships as an integration device.

¹⁴ <https://www.internships.com/career-advice/basics/internships-by-the-numbers>.

¹⁵ Some care is needed here. “Paid” internships typically include those that involve the payment of a stipend to cover interns’ living expenses. This differs slightly from how the term is applied to volunteer work.

One very clear finding to emerge from the literature on such programmes is that paid internships help participants more than unpaid ones, as paid internships clearly provide them with better post-internship labour market outcomes.

Why are paid internships better? O'Higgins and Pinedo (2021) have examined this issue. They find several reasons:

- The fact of being paid, more than the size of payment, seems to be of utmost importance. A substantial difference in effectiveness exists between paid and unpaid internships. Increasing internship stipends does have a positive impact on post-internship outcomes, but that impact is less pronounced than the difference between paid and unpaid internships. This suggests that it is not so much payment per se that determines the outcome – although this can be important for a number of other reasons. Rather, it is what comes with payment – structure, for example – that is key here.
- The authors also find that other elements of internships are also important in attaining positive post-internship outcomes. Those include having a mentor; obtaining certification of the internship; performing tasks that are akin to real work; having health insurance; and being of sufficient duration. This supports the idea that the internship's structure, including the presence of certain key elements, is critically important.

More generally, there have been complementary findings of relevance to volunteer programmes:

- Evidence supports the notion that voluntary educational internships are more effective than mandatory ones (Weiss et al., 2014).

This area – like volunteering as a labour market integration mechanism itself – has thus far been under-investigated. Stewart et al. (2021) is one of the first scholarly studies to examine internships and their regulation in a serious, systematic fashion, although more articles and papers on the subject are beginning to emerge.¹⁶

Relevance to volunteering: The key point here is that it is the existence of structure, and its appropriateness, that drives impact. Related to this, for programmes of any type to have some lasting impact on the labour market prospects of participants, it is important that they contribute to the acquisition of characteristics and competencies that offer long-lasting value to young people in navigating their way into the labour market. This applies to specific skills, behavioural/soft competencies, and outlook and understanding. Contact with the world of work in itself will provide information to individuals – as well as contacts and information to prospective employers – about young people themselves.

A second, related point is that some specific design features and characteristics are conducive to better post-internship outcomes. Mentorship, certification, insurance coverage, performing real tasks and internship duration all appear to boost the impact of an internship on employment prospects. Well-structured programmes, containing certain key elements, are central to enhancing the effectiveness of an internship as an integration device. Inter alia, this strengthens the positive signalling effects of such programmes.

¹⁶ See, for example, the papers cited in Stewart et al. (2021).

4. CONCLUSION: TOWARDS VOLUNTEER PROGRAMMES THAT BETTER SUPPORT THE SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION

In this final section, the implications of the findings reported above are summarized so as to provide indications regarding the design of volunteering programmes in order to enhance their value in supporting young people's transition to decent work.

Participation in volunteer work can have measurable impacts on a number of characteristics that are directly or indirectly related to young people's successful transition to employment. It can impart hard and soft skills, as well as signal the possession of the same to employers. It may – but not necessarily will – raise self-esteem, especially among the unemployed. This analysis brings together evidence about the impact of volunteering and other forms of labour market integration on subsequent employability and employment prospects. In doing so, it identifies some key features of volunteering initiatives that are likely to subsequently produce better labour market outcomes among young people.

Ultimately, to better support the school-to-work transition, the volunteering experience should foster the acquisition of skills with lasting value, contribute to the development of competencies, and nurture the cultivation of contacts expected to benefit volunteers over the longer term.

Despite the sparsity of the existing evidence, there are a number of relevant findings:

1. **Duration (and/or frequency):** Consistent across the different forms of initiatives is the finding that, up to a certain point, the benefits of the experience increase with its duration. This also applies when participation in volunteering occurs on a part-time basis. In other words, the experience needs to have sufficient duration for significant changes to occur – for example, in terms of the competencies acquired. When young people have experience working with multiple volunteer organizations, the usefulness of volunteering as a labour market integration mechanism appears to be enhanced.
2. **Subject matter/area:** The technical area in which volunteering experiences occur affects the extent to which initiatives have an impact. The impact from serving with volunteer organizations in tourism and sports, for example, differs from that resulting from international volunteering experiences.
3. **Training content:** Analogously, ALMPs appear to be more effective when they combine subsidized employment in private firms with training. Similar assertions have been made with regard to volunteering; although the evidence is a little weaker here, there appears to be widespread agreement, including among volunteers themselves, that experiences imparting real-world skills along with contact with potential employers is especially useful.

All of these findings suggest that the content, form and area of volunteering is important inasmuch as they all influence the relevance of the competencies acquired for young people's subsequent working lives.

Some further elements also merit mention.

4. **Structure:** the structure of labour market programmes – and of volunteering initiatives – can be of great importance. Volunteering is unpaid by definition, although a small stipend to cover costs may often be included. By the same token, unpaid internships are relatively common and these often do not provide interns with experiences of lasting worth. However, an important feature underlying this finding concerns the existence of an appropriate structure. Well-structured internships involving mentoring, certification and so on do provide more lasting benefits; typically, this type of internship

is also a paid internship. The key point here is that volunteering initiatives need some care in design to ensure that they involve the provision of something useful to both the recipient of the services as well as to the volunteer. Volunteer work is not just unpaid work.

5. **Voluntary:** Voluntary work is, by definition, voluntary. However, ALMPs often include elements that lessen the voluntariness of participation, for example, where access to social benefits is conditional on participation in a programme. Participation on such programmes may carry some stigma, particularly if such participation signals an inability to obtain a “real” job opportunity. This issue can apply in many circumstances but can be counteracted by ensuring that volunteer programmes are of high quality imparting an experience of worth to volunteers – as well as to the community – through developing competencies and social capital.

These last two points highlight the importance of developing and maintaining high quality initiatives to promote volunteering as a labour market integration device. To achieve subsequent labour market success, young volunteers should acquire the attitude, outlook, skills, competencies and social capital that will be of value to them later on. These traits can range from increased self-esteem to more formally recognized vocational skills. The evidence shows that volunteering often – but not always – improves the employment prospects of young volunteers. To be of value, the experience must impart something of lasting benefit to the volunteer. This can be achieved in many ways and is of key importance in the design of volunteering initiatives.

Understanding of the many dimensions of this topic remains incomplete. The effectiveness of voluntary initiatives operating in different sectors of the economy, for example, is much under-studied. More generally, very few voluntary initiatives have been subject to rigorous post-programme impact evaluation. The motivation for writing this paper stems in part from the lack of an evidence base as regards volunteer programmes. This is beginning to change, but much more needs to be understood in order to support the development of programmes that are useful to both the communities they serve as well as to the volunteers themselves. Three areas are especially fruitful for additional study. They include the specific content of the volunteer programmes that are most useful; the extent to which volunteer programmes help less advantaged and less well-educated participants; and how to make volunteer programmes more effective in encouraging the labour market participation and success among young women – especially young NEET women.

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APPENDIX A: GUIDANCE NOTE ON THE DESIGN OF VOLUNTEERING PROGRAMMES WITH A VIEW TO PROMOTING THE ENTRY OF YOUNG PEOPLE INTO WORK.

Volunteer work has been recognized as crucial for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs. Recent research undertaken by UNV and ILO in partnership for the measurement of volunteer work has firmly established that such work can positively contribute to subsequent labour market outcomes for young volunteers. Based on this research, the Guidance Note identifies some key elements of volunteer programmes that contribute to their effectiveness as a labour market integration device.¹⁷

Participation in volunteer work can have measurable impacts on a number of characteristics that are directly or indirectly related to young people's successful transition to employment. It can impart hard and soft skills, as well as signal the possession of the same to employers. It can – but not necessarily does – raise self-esteem, especially among the unemployed. This note identifies some key features of volunteering initiatives that are likely to provide young people with better subsequent labour market outcomes.

Programme Objective: A key, albeit rather obvious, starting point is that the promotion of employability and the integration of young people into work should be among the stated objectives of the programme. The objectives should also be accompanied by an adequate framework for monitoring and evaluating the programme outcomes. Ideally this framework should include information on the post-programme destinations of young volunteers once they have completed the programme and a plan for an ongoing evaluation of the programme's impact. In addition to verifying the effectiveness of such programmes, this would also allow design modification during programme implementation and/or on the implementation of subsequent initiatives

Programme duration: One of the key findings in the literature on volunteer programmes as well as on ALMPs and internship initiatives is that programme duration must be neither too long nor too short. Programmes should last long enough to permit the development of skills and competencies but not so long as to substitute for regular employment. The evidence suggests a duration of 6–12 months as being ideal. For volunteering programmes taking place on a less than full-time basis, the frequency of participation needs to be similarly calibrated. That is, the experience needs to be of sufficient frequency and take place over a sufficient period of time for significant changes to occur.

Programme content: Volunteer work related to the economy, such as for tourist associations, lead to positive post-programme employment benefits for participants. Similarly, volunteering in sports-related and for international and/or environmental organizations also often enhances employment prospects.

Training versus work experience: Typically, youth employment programmes that combine some off-the-job skills with work-based experience have been found to be more effective. To promote the post-programme employment prospects of young participants, volunteer programmes need to combine the acquisition of skills and competencies both on and off the job in order to increase the likelihood that they will be of lasting worth in the labour market. The acquisition of both hard skills and also the more nebulous soft and social skills, such as commitment and motivation, may be strengthened during appropriately designed volunteering initiatives that will consequently promote young people's longer-term labour market integration. The appropriate combination will depend on the context and characteristics of the programme participant pool.

¹⁷ This note is based on the review and analyses contained in the main text along with those of O'Higgins (2020) and the papers referred to therein. The key elements identified here are relevant whether or not the promotion of youth employment is the primary, or a subsidiary, objective of the programme.

Payment: By their nature, volunteer programmes are unpaid; but overwhelming evidence shows that for internships, the payment of a stipend to cover participants' costs is an important element in enhancing the efficacy of such programmes to boost the subsequent employment prospects of participants. A key point here is that payment is associated with intervention structure. It is the existence of a formalized structure, and its appropriateness, that drives impact. The experience of internships shows the importance, for example, of mentorship in making such initiatives more effective. Volunteering initiatives need some care in design to ensure that they involve the provision of something useful to both the recipient of the services as well as to the volunteer. Volunteer work is not just unpaid work.

How voluntary are programmes? Voluntary work is, by definition, voluntary. However, programmes aimed at promoting the employment prospects of participants – including programmes involving “voluntary work” – often also include elements that lessen the voluntariness of participation. One example of this is access to social benefits conditional on participation. This may carry with it some stigma attached to participation itself, particularly if such participation acts as an indicator that the person was unable to obtain a “real” job. This issue can apply in many circumstances; it can be counteracted by ensuring that voluntary programmes are of high quality and impart an experience of worth to volunteers – as well as to the community – through developing competencies and social capital.

Target groups: Appropriately targeted programmes tend to be more effective. There is a huge variety in the potential objectives, scope and content of volunteer programmes. Programme content needs to be tailored with the specific needs of the characteristics of the young people targeted by the intervention. Such characteristics include educational attainment and gender. Participation in organization-based volunteering typically increases with educational attainment, as do the beneficial effects of volunteer programmes on young people's post-programme employment prospects. Similarly, women often gain less from volunteer initiatives, in terms of subsequent employment opportunities, than do men. The evidence suggests that this depends more on the types of volunteer activities engaged in by women and men, rather than any intrinsic gender differences in the benefits of volunteering. Consequently, effective volunteer initiatives must consider a variety of factors:

- a. The specific needs and characteristics of the target group must be considered. For example, specific incentives could be offered to young women to participate in the more economically oriented initiatives, which tend to bring more positive post-programme outcomes.
- b. It is important to provide opportunities precisely to those who need them most. The precise identification of target groups will depend upon an examination of the economic context. But the goal should be to help redress – rather than exacerbate – the imbalances in job opportunities available to young people.

That is, volunteering programmes should consider the characteristics of the potential participant pool. It is also important that volunteering initiatives should, where possible, be targeted towards those who would benefit the most. For example, interventions can be designed to inspire young people who face significant disadvantages.

Additionality: Volunteer programmes need to consider the presence of other, related initiatives. In particular, it is important that such programmes contribute to the creation of additional opportunities rather than competing with and/or substituting for existing opportunities. This also applies to the support that the volunteering work is to provide for the beneficiaries. The goods and services provided should add to those already available. Targeting and conditionalities in the programme design can improve the efficiency of programmes by, inter alia, reducing dead weight and substitution losses – that is, by increasing additionality.

Monitoring and evaluation: The inclusion of monitoring and evaluation elements is of fundamental importance in order to provide evidence of the extent to which a programme has achieved its goals. Perhaps more importantly, such a review may point to useful modifications in programme design and implementation and suggest refinements to specific volunteering interventions that will better promote the integration of young people into work.¹⁸

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¹⁸ ILO (2018) provides extensive guidance on the implementation of monitoring and evaluation for youth employment initiatives.

APPENDIX B: GUIDANCE NOTE ON THE INTEGRATION OF VOLUNTEERING PROGRAMMES INTO NATIONAL YOUTH EMPLOYMENT STRATEGIES WITH A VIEW TO PROMOTING THE ENTRY OF YOUNG PEOPLE INTO WORK.

Volunteer work has been recognized as crucial for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Recent research undertaken under the UNV and ILO partnership for the measurement of volunteer work has firmly established that volunteer work can contribute positively to subsequent labour market outcomes for young volunteers. Based on this research, this guidance note provides some indications on how to effectively integrate volunteer programmes into national youth employment strategies.¹⁹

The COVID-19 pandemic and its economic fallout have wreaked havoc on young people's transition to the labour market. Between 2019 and 2020 youth employment fell dramatically, much more so than did employment among older, more established workers. This was especially the case for those in developing and emerging countries and for young women (ILO, 2021). Two factors resulted in the disproportionate impact on young people. First, they were more affected by both lock-down measures and the concomitant negative economic shock. As well, they benefited significantly less from the fiscal response measures designed to mitigate employment and income losses among workers (O'Higgins, Verick and Elsheikhi, 2021). Evidence shows that in at least some countries, volunteering increased during the pandemic, especially among young people (Gallup, 2021; ILO, 2020).

Participation in volunteer work can have measurable impacts on a number of characteristics that are directly or indirectly related to young people's successful transition to employment. It can impart hard and soft skills and competencies and signal the possession of the same to employers. As such, volunteer programmes can be a useful element in a more comprehensive strategy to promote the integration of young people into employment. This guidance note offers some general principles concerning how this may best be achieved.

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Part of a comprehensive strategy: It has long been established that a comprehensive strategy comprising a range of actions is the most effective way to promote the integration of young people into the labour market. Comprehensive programmes involve some combination of subsidized employment, training, self-employment support, guidance and counselling, among other elements. They have a long history in OECD countries and, above all, in the United States. In Europe, as well as in Latin America and the Caribbean, such programmes have achieved substantial success. Perhaps the prime example of this type of intervention currently operating is the Youth Guarantee. Initially implemented in all European Union countries in 2014, it was subsequently revamped and relaunched in July 2020. The Youth Guarantee is a broad-based youth employment programme that goes beyond traditional active labour market interventions. It implies the basic commitment by Member States to provide young people with an offer of employment, education or training within four months of them becoming NEET.

¹⁹ This note is based on the review and analyses contained in the main text along with those of O'Higgins (2020) and the papers referred to therein.

²⁰ See also Appendix A: *UNV/ILO Guidance note 1 on the design of volunteering programmes with a view to promoting the entry of young people into work*, which provides more specific suggestions on the design features of effective volunteer programmes. More extensive general considerations on youth employment strategies as a whole, and youth employment initiatives in particular can be found in ILO (2018). The manual is especially focused on youth labour market diagnostics, monitoring and evaluation.

The Youth Guarantee Programme of the European Union

The Youth Guarantee is a broad-based youth employment programme that goes beyond traditional active labour market interventions. It implies the basic commitment by European Union Member States to provide young people with an offer of employment, education or training within four months of them becoming NEET.

The renewed programme, launched in July 2020 six years after the initial version, includes the same basic commitment to young people, providing an educational, training or employment offer within four months of becoming NEET. But the revised programme aims to be more inclusive than the earlier one in several ways:

- The age range was extended to include all those from 15–29 years of age.
- It extends its outreach directly to include youth from more vulnerable groups, such as racial and ethnic minorities, those who have disabilities, and those as well living in rural, remote or disadvantaged urban areas.

Evaluation findings are rare for the YG, partly because traditional impact evaluation approaches are not easily applicable to such a large-scale and wide-ranging initiative. However, between 2013 and 2019, NEET rates in the European Union fell continuously from 13.0 per cent to 10.2 per cent. Clearly this was not just due to the introduction of the YG, but there is little doubt that the labour market gains for young people in the European Union since 2014 are, at least, partly attributable to the introduction of the programme. Moreover, implementation of the YG brought with it a number of other beneficial effects for young people, public employment services, firms and the economy as a whole.

Programmes for volunteer work can be a useful component of such a comprehensive approach, but they obviously cannot substitute for it. Clearly a youth employment strategy should not rest entirely on such programmes, which can impart important skills and competencies, but which obviously cannot be expected to resolve all the obstacles faced by all young people entering the labour market.

Complementarities: The specific form and design of volunteer programmes to be included in a more general strategy also needs to account for the existence of potential complementarities between specific volunteering initiatives and the other elements of youth employment policy in a country, as well as more generally the labour market context and institutions in that country.²¹

Economic context: Thus, among other issues, the economic context is fundamental in determining the balance of options to offer. For example, should more emphasis be placed on job creation for young people through subsidized employment or on skills development? The evidence clearly suggests that programmes combining off-the-job training with work-based experience are the most effective. However, how exactly these should be combined needs to rest on an assessment of the labour market situation of young people in the specific context.

Labour market diagnostics: A key element in developing youth employment strategies is the diagnostic phase. Understanding the characteristics and context of youth labour markets is central to developing effective strategies. This is also important in order to understand how volunteer programmes may be appropriately included in the initiatives targeting young people.

²¹ See, for example, O'Higgins (2017) for evidence on various issues related to labour market policies and institutions relevant to the integration of young people, above-all in low- and middle-income countries.

Volunteering as a separate programme? Consideration needs to be given as to whether a specific volunteering initiative should be offered to young job-seekers as a stand-alone option or as one alternative among a number of possibilities. For example, time spent volunteering – for example one day per week – may be offered as part of a more general employment and training programme that also involves training in specific and general skills.

Monitoring and evaluation: The monitoring and evaluation of youth employment initiatives is an important element of any youth employment strategy. It can provide evidence on the extent to which specific initiatives are successful in promoting youth employment and, in particular, can be crucial in pointing to useful modifications in programme design and implementation. More generally, it may highlight how to refine the specific elements of youth employment strategies such as volunteering initiatives, and how they may best be combined to more effectively combat the obstacles young people face in obtaining and retaining good quality employment.

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