

Enhancement of employability skills among NEETs

ANALYSIS OF THE INITIATIVE 'PROGRAMA INTEGRAL DE CUALIFICACIÓN Y EMPLEO, PICE' IMPLEMENTED BY THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE IN BURGOS, SPAIN

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IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE PROJECT 'LOST MILLENNIALS – TRANSNATIONAL RESEARCH NETWORK FOR THE EVALUATION OF INITIATIVES TARGETING 25+ NEETS'

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Project summary:

The project ‘Lost Millennials’ focuses on a regularly neglected group of the generation of Millennials: young people aged 25-29 neither in employment or education and training (25+ NEETs). This generation started their working life shortly after the economic crisis of 2008, perceiving uncertainty and lack of security for work and well-being, they are more likely to be inactive or in precarious jobs. The main objective of the project is to contribute to the successful integration of 25+ NEETs to the labour market through increasing knowledge on the effects of employment initiatives on 25+ NEETs, building capacity of stakeholders to perform impact studies and thus improving the quality of labour market interventions. This objective will be achieved through the creation of the transnational research network which will share know-how and good practices, the evaluations of governmental and community-based initiatives targeting 25+ NEETs, as well as the engagement of stakeholders to increase the policy-relevance of project results.

For more information, please visit our [website](#), contact us on lm.leadpartner@hetfa.hu and follow our social media ([Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#)).

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Implemented by:



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1. Introduction and context

1.1 Introduction

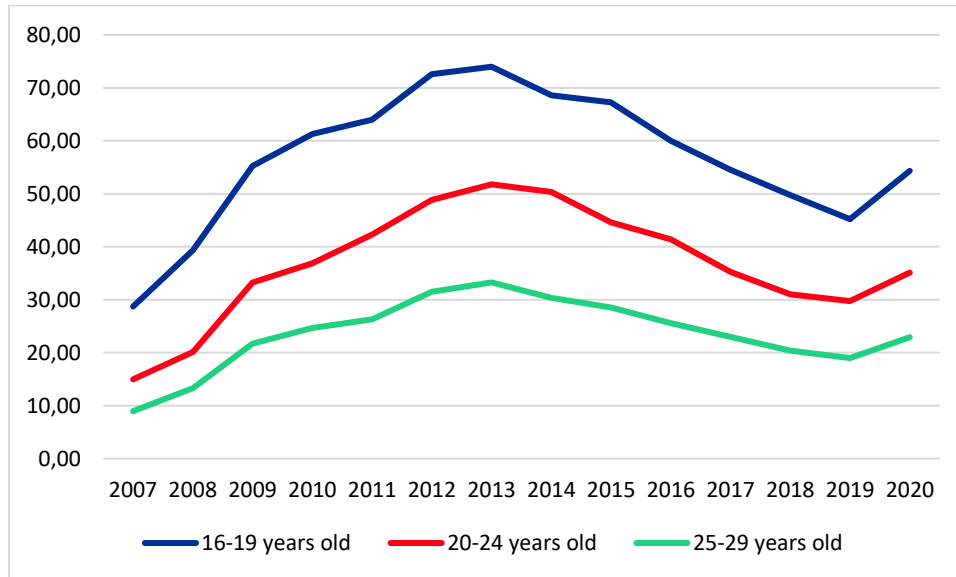
The main purpose of this report is the evaluation of the Comprehensive Qualification and Employment Programme (*Programa Integral de Cualificación y Empleo – PICE* from now on). PICE is a programme designed by the Spanish Chamber of Commerce as one of the instruments of the National Youth Guarantee System to implement the Youth Employment Operational Programme (*Programa Operativo de Empleo Juvenil, POEJ*). Despite being designed at a national level, PICE is implemented at a local level and the focus of our evaluation is the implementation of PICE in Burgos. We have chosen to evaluate PICE because of its target group (as it also reaches 25+NEETs), and because of its importance regarding geographic coverage and budget.

This report comprises six chapters. Chapter 1.2. provides an overview of the context of Spain and its labour market situation regarding young people and NEETs. Chapter 1.3. provides an overview of the context of PICE as an instrument within the POEJ's framework, designed by the Spanish Chamber of Commerce and implemented by the Chamber of Commerce of Burgos, a city located in the Region of Castilla y León. Chapter 2 presents the timeframe, scope, and target group of PICE. It also presents the activities carried out within PICE and how they are adapted to the local level in Burgos. Chapter 3 comprises the descriptive statistics regarding PICE at a national level as well as in PICE in Burgos. Chapter 4 describes the methodology framework to collect the data analysed to evaluate PICE. Chapter 5 presents the answers to evaluation questions related to the relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, and impact of PICE. The final chapter draws conclusions based on the analysis carried out in this report.

1.2 Spanish context

Although the crisis of 2008 implied a severe decline in the Spanish economy as a whole and had a major impact on employment (Serrano Pascual & Martín Martín, 2017; Holleran, 2018), the economic downturn was particularly hard for young people (Eurofound, 2016; Serrano Pascual & Martín Martín, 2017). As such, whereas the general unemployment rate rose from 8.23 in 2007 to its peak of 26.09 in 2013, the unemployment rate for young people (16-24 years old) reached 55.06 in 2013. Based on the different age ranges, those who fared worse were those between 16 and 19 years old, for whom the unemployment rate reached the shocking figure of 79.08, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Evolution of unemployment rate for young people based on different age ranges.



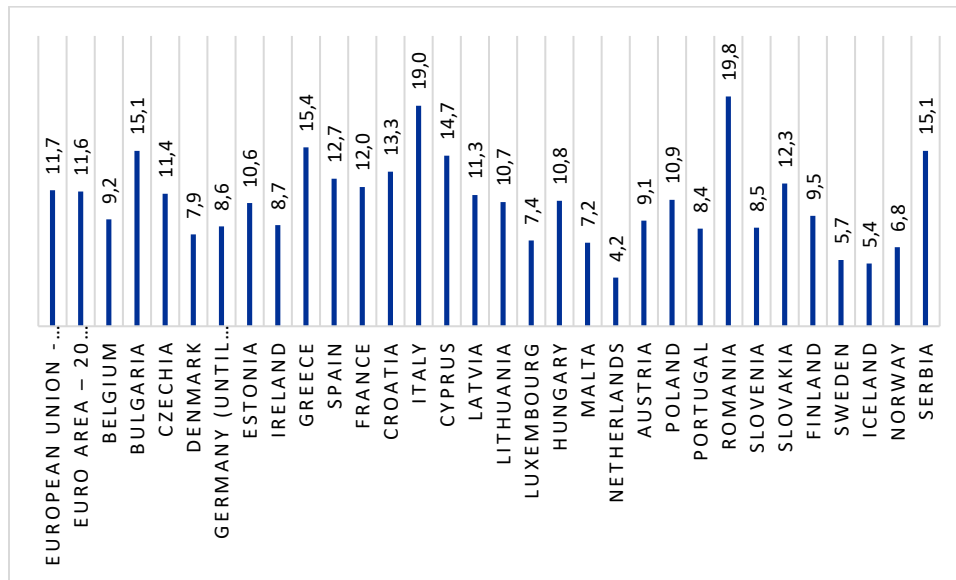
Source: Own elaboration based on data from INE (2023).

These enormous rates of youth unemployment operated as a powerful instrument of precariousness within the Spanish labour market (Serrano Pascual & Martín Martín, 2017) and led Spanish youth to some struggles that seemed to belong to the generation of their parents or even grandparents: troubles with mortgage payments, evictions, and international migration to find a job (Holleran, 2018). Moreover, after some recovery after 2016 when youth employment rates decreased, atypical employment became the typical way of accessing the labour market for young people (Oliveira et al, 2011; Serrano Pascual & Martín Martín, 2017). Indeed, Spanish youth are much more likely to have short-term contracts or part-time jobs than their European peers (Serrano Pascual & Martín Martín, 2017).

In addition to these problems related to the high youth unemployment rate, Spain has usually presented one of the highest rates of young people in the NEET situation among the EU countries, as shown in Figure 2 (Eurostat, 2022). Based on this situation and following the recommendations from the EU (Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013), Spain approved the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan in 2014 and the implementation of the Youth Guarantee System in 2016, which is still in force (Delgado-García et al., 2022). The Youth Guarantee started targeting only NEETs between 16 and 24 years old. However, since 2015, when Law 25/2015 (of July 28, on the second chance mechanism, reduction of the financial burden and other social measures) was approved, the upper age limit for young people to be registered in the Youth Guarantee System was increased from 24 to 29 years old (Strecker et al., 2021; Delgado-García et al., 2022). However, this upper limit only operates once provided the condition that the unemployment rate for this group is equal to or greater than 20 percent. In 2022 the unemployment

rate was 30.7 for people between 16 and 24 years old and 23.3 for people between 16 and 29 years old (Ministry of Labour and Social Economy, 2022). Therefore, the upper limit is still 29 years old for the Youth Guarantee actions (Delgado-García et al., 2022).

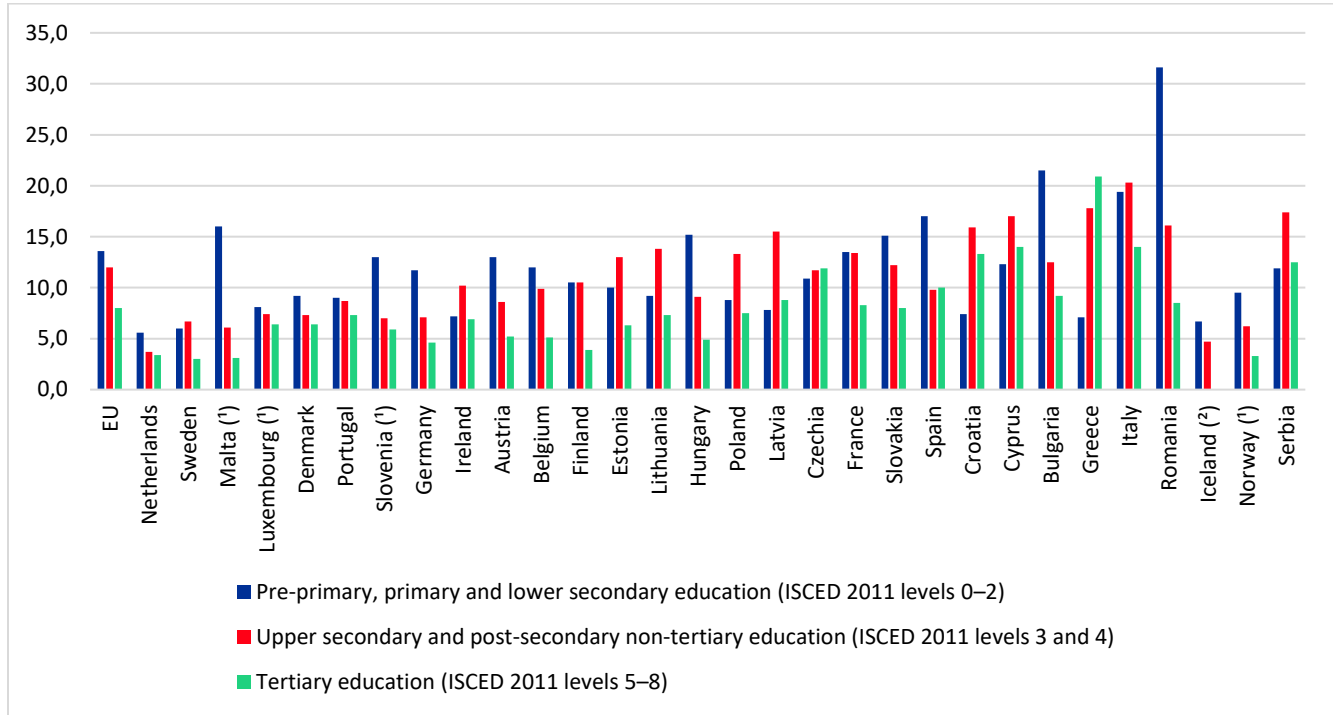
Figure 2. NEET rate for people between 15 and 29 years old among EU countries



Source: own elaboration based on Eurostat (2022).

One of the reasons behind this high youth unemployment and NEET rates in Spain relates to its training structure. This training structure in comparison with other countries is biased downwards and upwards: although there is a high number of NEETs with a low level of educational attainment, there is also a high number of overqualified people concerning the work they carry out (see Figure 3). Furthermore, the Millennial generation, which is also referred to by the literature as the ‘lost generation’ is considered the most highly qualified in Spanish history (Holleran, 2018; Serrano Pascual & Martín Martín, 2017). Spain has the highest rate of over-qualification among EU countries (36%) for the age group 20-64, and one of the highest rates of over-qualification for young people (37.2% of Spanish people aged 20-34 are overqualified) (Eurostat, 2023)). This over-qualification rate refers to the “people with tertiary education employed in occupations that do not require such a high level of education, as a percentage of all employed people with tertiary education” (Eurostat, 2023). Other European countries base their young labour force on the intermediate group with upper secondary and vocational degrees, while Spain presents a smaller group of young people with intermediate qualifications (Delgado-García et al., 2022).

Figure 3. NEETs (aged 15–29) by educational attainment level



(¹) ISCED 2011 levels 5-8: low reliability.

(²) ISCED 2011 levels 5-8: not available due to very low reliability.

Source: Own elaboration based on Eurostat (2022a).

In this vein, the Spanish Government has set the increase of the percentage of active population with a medium level of qualification as one of its priorities, as explained in the grounds of the Organic Law 3/2020 of 29 December 2020 on Education. To do so, as well as boost the Vocational Educational Training system, the government aims to reskill and upskill the workforce to reach an adequate balance between the training levels of the young people and the human capital and competencies demanded by the labour market (Delgado-García et al., 2022).

Regarding gender, Spain presents one of the lowest gender gaps in 25+ NEET rates of EU countries (Koller et al., 2022). This gender gap may be due to differences in childcare or access to jobs in industries with greater precariousness (Vancea & Utzet, 2018), but given its low level, it is not a priority in the implementation of measures for youth unemployment or NEETs.

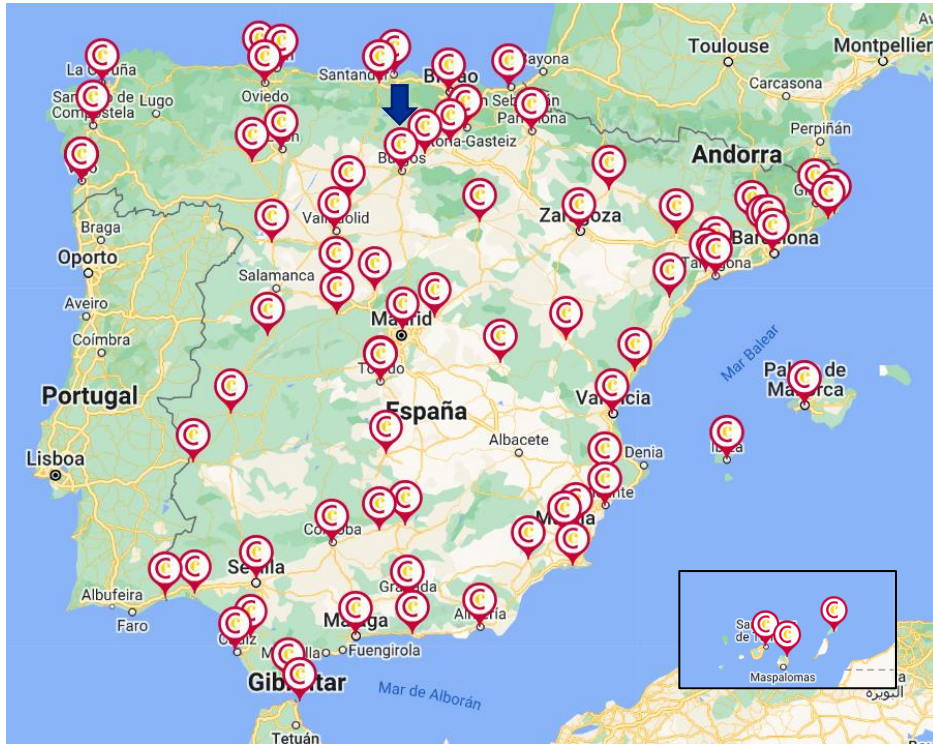
1.3 Context of the initiative

In this context of high youth unemployment, high NEET rate and a training structure biased towards very low or very high educational attainment levels, the Comprehensive Qualification and Employment Programme (*Programa Integral de Cualificación y Empleo*, PICE) emerges as one of the instruments to tackle these problems.

PICE is a programme designed by the Spanish Chamber of Commerce as one of the instruments to implement the Youth Employment Operational Programme (*Programa Operativo de Empleo Juvenil*, POEJ) 2014-2020. The Spanish Central Government in coordination with the Autonomous Communities (NUTS2-level regions), the social agents, and other stakeholders approved in 2014 the POEJ to implement the Youth Employment Initiative and define the National Youth Guarantee System. The POEJ was designed to raise funds from the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI). From the initial plan 2014-2020, this POEJ has been renewed by adding additional budget and rounds to be executed such as the one planned for 2021-2027. The POEJ creates a common framework to design initiatives and programs targeting young people and NEETs. These initiatives and programs are designed by the Intermediate Organisations based on POEJ's framework and can be implemented by these Intermediate Organisations themselves or by Beneficiary Organisations (Delgado-García et al., 2023).

The Spanish Chamber of Commerce is one the Intermediate Organisations and, as such, it designed PICE to improve qualifications and employability and to promote self-employment among young people (aged 16-29 years old). The Spanish Chamber of Commerce is an Intermediate Organisation defined at a national level by the POEJ and it operates through a network of Chambers of Commerce placed in different cities in Spain, which are the ones that implement PICE (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Map of the Chambers of Commerce placed in different cities in Spain.



Source: Spanish Chamber of Commerce (2023).

Our analysis focuses on the local level and more specifically on the implementation of PICE in the city of Burgos. Burgos is placed in the region of Castilla y León, one of the regions with the lowest youth unemployment rate (26.7 for people aged 15-24 years old and 21.4 for people aged 15-29 years old; Eurostat, 2023a) and NEET rate (11.5 for people aged 15-29 years old; Eurostat 2023b) in Spain. Indeed, Burgos has also a low youth unemployment rate compared to the Spanish average (15.08 in Burgos vs. 21.03 in Spain for people aged 15-24 years old; INE, 2023a). However, Castilla y León is one of the regions that loses a young population, who are migrating to other regions. Prior literature points out that this migration to other regions generates multiple problems for Castilla y León related not only to the depopulation but also to the migration of a young and generally qualified workforce (Valero-Matas, 2018).

2. The design of the initiative

The PICE programme was **launched in 2015** with an initial forecast to last until 2017, but its timeframe has been updated and extended in successive rounds (see Figure 5). It is **currently expected to be extended until 2027**, by the timeframe for the national strategy to combat youth unemployment and the high rate of NEETs, the Youth Guarantee Plus Plan 2021-2027 of decent work for young people.

Figure 5. Timeframe of the PICE programme



As explained in Chapter 1, PICE is part of the National Youth Guarantee System which means that the participants in this programme need to be registered in Youth Guarantee before starting the programme. Indeed, the requirements to take part in PICE are the same as those requirements established by the National Youth Guarantee System (Spanish Chamber of Commerce, 2023a; SEPE, 2022):

- Registering in the online registration of the Ministry of Labour and Social Economy.
- Having Spanish nationality or, being citizens of the Union or the state party of the European Economic Agreement or in Switzerland or holding a permit to reside in Spain, necessary to work, as well as unaccompanied minors provide accreditation of regional child protection services that individually justified the access, through the registration to activities or programmes of education or training that are of benefit to them.
- Being registered as a resident in any location of the Spanish territory.
- Having more than 16 years old or less than 30 at the time to apply for registration.
- Not having worked on the calendar day preceding the date of submission.
- Not having received training on the calendar day preceding the date of submission.
- Not having received training actions on the calendar day preceding the date of submission.
- Signing a statement that expresses an interest in participating in the national Youth Guarantee, acquiring a commitment to active participation in the proceedings being conducted in the framework of the Youth Guarantee. In the case of persons seeking employment, it is sufficient to register in the public employment services.

To sum up, the **target group** for PICE is comprised of people older than 16 and younger than 30 years old with Spanish nationality, residence permit, or accreditation from the regional services, registered as residents in Spain, and neither in employment nor in education and training (NEETs).

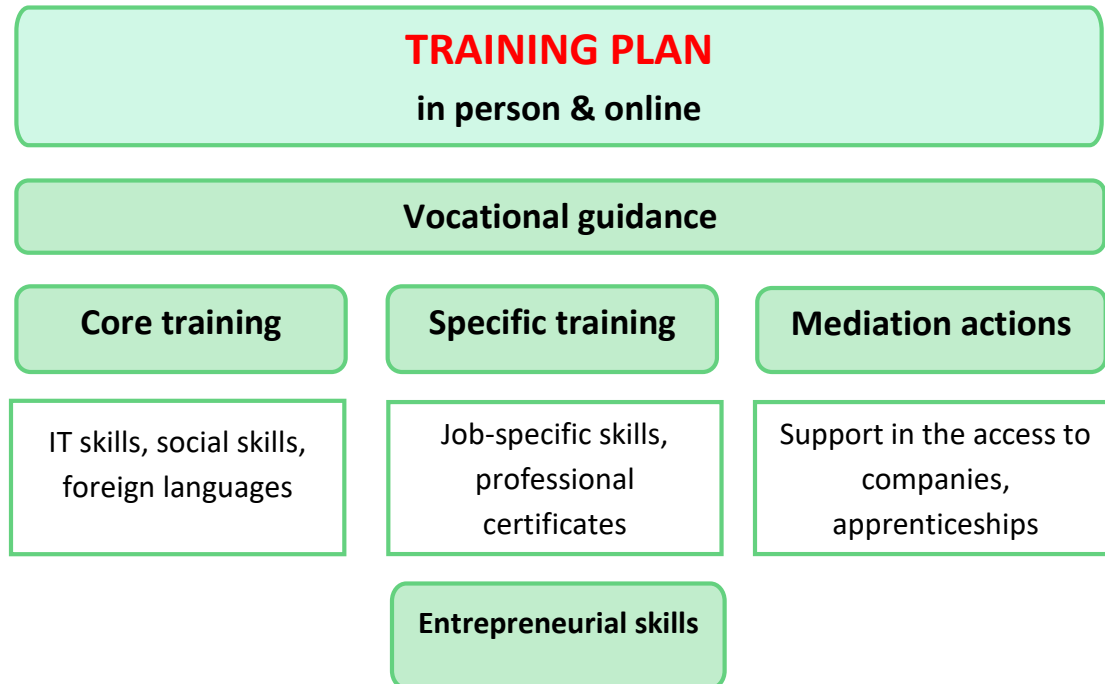
Regarding the **scope**, PICE is a programme designed by the Spanish Chamber of Commerce at a national level. PICE is, nevertheless, implemented at a local level by the Chambers of Commerce of the different cities of Spain. As clarified by the responsibility for coordinating PICE at a national level, of the 85 chambers of commerce existing in Spain, 70 are implementing PICE at a local level. This evaluation is **focused on the implementation of PICE at a local level by the Chamber of Commerce in Burgos.**

PICE aims to improve the employability of young people through **two main measures**: the training plan and the mobility plan. The **Training Plan** is made up of different actions that complete a training itinerary of approximately 150 hours (see Figure 6). This itinerary consists of different types of actions (Spanish Chamber of Commerce, 2023a):

- 1) Vocational guidance: this action aims to detect the needs for the prospective career of the young participants based on their work experience and educational attainment.
- 2) Core training: basic training in a) IT and digital skills, b) personal skills (self-motivation techniques) social and employability skills (improve in selection processes, learn to submit a self-application), and c) foreign languages (basic language competencies, mainly English).
- 3) Specific training: Training aimed at the accreditation of skills and obtaining professional certificates, as well as specific training in a niche of employment according to the demand of the labour market (e.g., license to become a forklift operator for the sector of logistics and transport, or certificate in food handling for the sector of hospitality). This training may also be focused on acquiring entrepreneurial skills to become self-employed or create a new venture.
- 4) Mediation actions: Only some participants need to take part in this last stage and be guided through mediation actions. These actions are based on helping participants in arranging interviews and visits to companies. Depending on the availability of companies willing to collaborate and the sectors of the training, the action may involve apprenticeships.

The Training Plan of the PICE Programme can be taught in person or online. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the possibility of doing core and specific training online was established and this online modality continues to be part of the plan.

Figure 6. Actions of the Training Plan of the PICE Programme



Source: own elaboration based on Spanish Chamber of Commerce (2023a)

In addition, the Training Plan of PICE includes economic support for companies that hire participants in the Programme. Participating companies can benefit from an incentive of up to 4,950 euros, which allows them to save labour costs. They will also receive accompaniment and advice for the integration of the young person in the position.

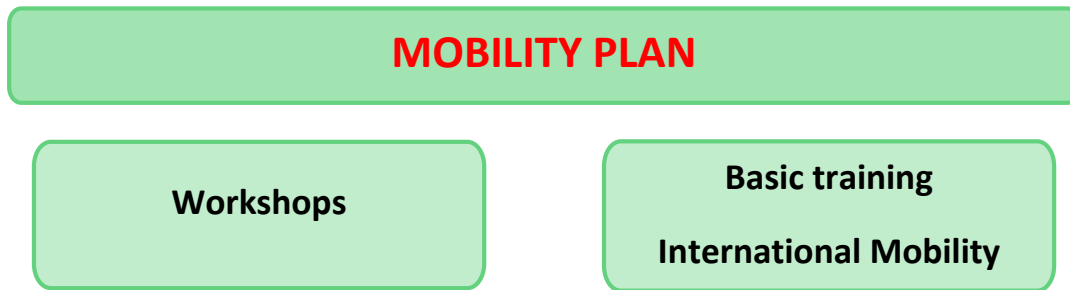
Given the large differences among the Spanish regions and cities regarding youth unemployment and NEET rates, as well as their differences in the demands of the labour market (see Chapter 1), the Spanish Chamber of Commerce only designs the general framework for the training plan. The Chambers of Commerce at a local level — the managerial staff of PICE — have the flexibility to adapt the itinerary of the training plan on a case-by-case basis. Accordingly, the specific focus of the training is defined by the Chambers of Commerce at a local level after analysing the specific demands of the labour market. Burgos is an industrial city with many companies in the car manufacturing, logistics and transportation sectors (FAE, 2022; Europapress, 2020; Diario de Burgos, 2015). Accordingly, PICE Burgos has launched most of its editions focusing on becoming an operator for the sector of logistics and transport (Chamber of Commerce of Burgos, 2023). Another characteristic of the implementation of PICE in Burgos is that the training and support to create a new venture is not provided within PICE, as the Chamber of Commerce

in Burgos has a specific section focused on entrepreneurship and the young people and NEETs interested in starting a new business receive training and attention in this different section.

The second main measure from PICE is the **Mobility Plan** (Spanish Chamber of Commerce, 2023b). This plan involves actions that promote the transnational mobility of the participants in the territory of the European Union (see Figure 7):

- Workshops: that aim to inform participants about the opportunities and tools that young people can access to move abroad.
- International Mobility: this action includes a) basic training in foreign languages and employment skills and b) international internship or training contracts (with a grant to move abroad for some months).

Figure 7. Actions of the Mobility Plan of the PICE Programme



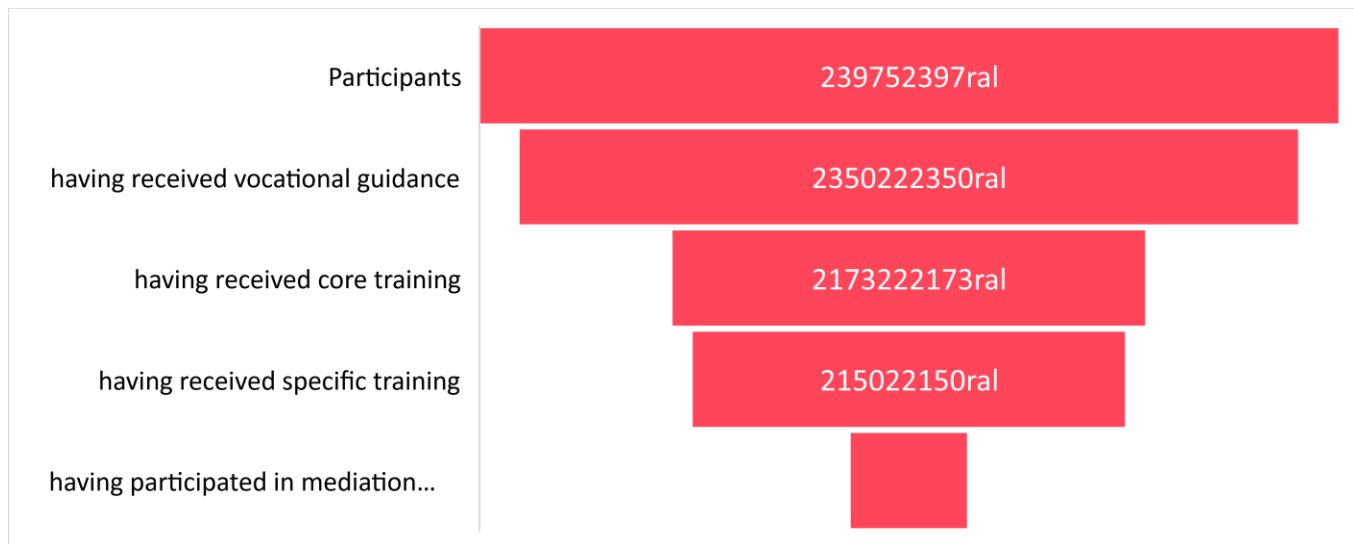
Source: own elaboration based on Spanish Chamber of Commerce (2023b)

The mobility plan also began in 2015 at a national level and was implemented that year at a local level in Burgos. These activities of the mobility plan ceased after the pandemic. Currently, the mobility plan is not being carried out in Burgos because of organizational reasons, but the managerial staff explained their intentions to resume it in 2024.

3. Descriptive statistics

Every year the Spanish Chamber of Commerce updates its statistics on the results of PICE. The most recent ones are those corresponding to August 2022, which show the following data at a national level about how PICE has worked since 2015 regarding the different stages of the training plan (see Figure 8):

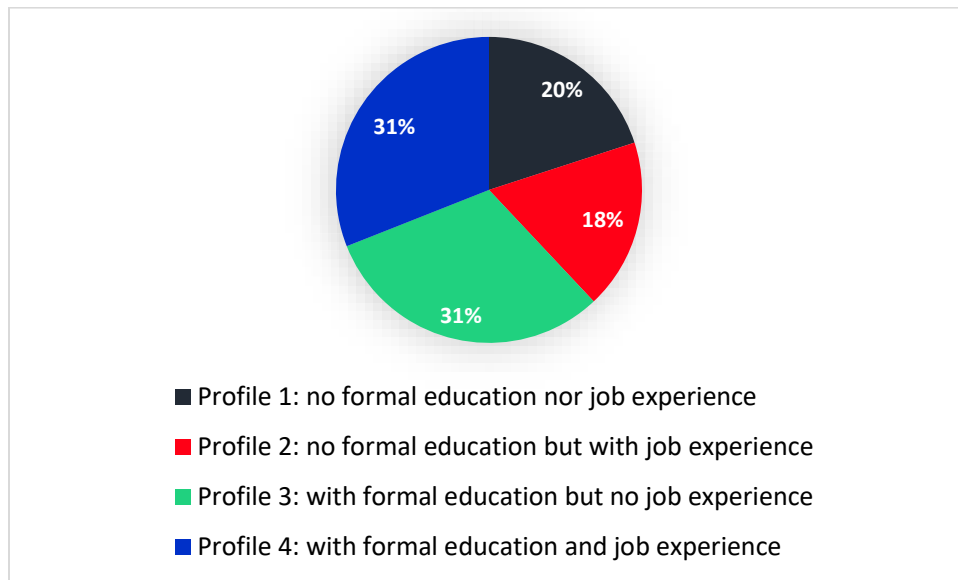
Figure 8. Distribution of participants along the different phases of the PICE programme (national level)



Source: own elaboration based on Spanish Chamber of Commerce (2023c)

In addition, the Spanish Chamber of Commerce classifies participants in PICE at a national level according to four profiles: NEETs with no formal education nor job experience, NEETs with no formal education but with job experience, NEETs with formal education but with no job experience, and NEETs with formal education and job experience (see Figure 9).

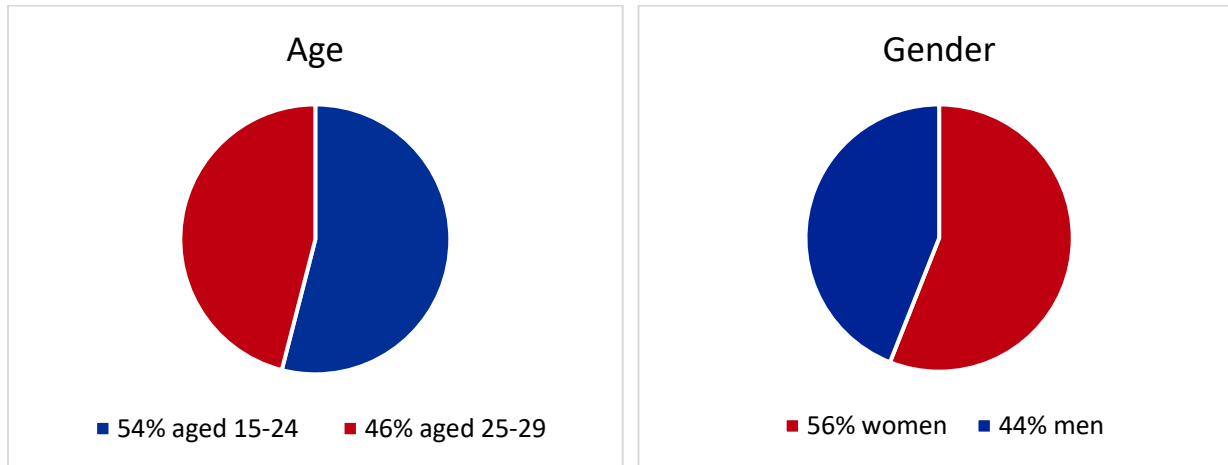
Figure 9. Classification of participants according to their educational attainment and job experience (national level)



Source: own elaboration

At a local level in Burgos, 1,115 NEETs have participated in PICE since the start of the programme in 2015. Of these 1,115 participants, 46% are between 25 and 29 years old and 56% are women (see Figure 9). Regarding this gender distribution, the managerial staff implementing PICE in Burgos clarified that although the main percentage of participants in PICE are women, women take part mainly in the online part of the Training Plan and the Mobility Plan, which are those less adapted to the local labour market. As mentioned, the in-person part of the Training Plan in Burgos is focused on sectors such as logistics and transportation, traditionally considered male-dominated occupations (Nixon, 2009; Bishop et al., 2009), which can be affected by the reluctance from the participants to enter these kinds of sectors based on their gender stereotypes (Nixon, 2009). We confirmed this information with the responsible for coordinating PICE at a national level who explained that, even if the program is not focused on combating gender biases, it does try to ensure that the percentages of participation are similar between men and women (the reported percentages are 48% men and 52% women in the online training plan and 40% men and 60% women in the mobility plan at a national level respectively). Focusing on the educational attainment of the participants in Burgos, the managerial staff explained that PICE Burgos is polarised with participants with a higher education degree and participants who dropped school before finishing compulsory education.

Figure 10. Basic descriptive statistics in PICE at a local level in Burgos



Regarding the budget of PICE at a national level, the Training Plan has a budget of 35 million euros per year while the Mobility Plan has a budget of 2 million euros per year. Focusing on Burgos, the current budget for the Training Plan is €220,110.00 (which has increased from €130,000 in 2019). The last budget for the Mobility Plan in 2020 in Burgos was €120,120. Of this budget, the ESF finances 91,89% while the national funding consists of 8,11%.

4. Description of methodology

Based on the training previously received within the framework of the Lost Millennials project, we used an exploratory qualitative research design. This research design was defined by following Mukumbang et al. (2016) and thus using two methods of data collection: document analysis and semi-structured in-depth interviews with PICE implementors.

We started our research by conducting a **document analysis** of the operating guides at both national and local levels aimed at future participants of the programme. We also reviewed the information brochures on the training offered along the different editions of PICE in Burgos. This first document review allowed us to obtain basic information on how the intervention worked, who was the target group and actors participating in the implementation. After this first round of document analysis, we conducted a new document review focusing on the transparency sections of the Spanish Chamber of Commerce and the Chamber of Commerce of Burgos (Spanish Chamber of Commerce, 2023c, 2023d; Chamber of Commerce of Burgos, 2023a), where the public can access to information about how public funds are being executed – with documents such as the Manual of Procedures for the Management of European Funds (*Manual de procedimientos de la Camara Oficial de Comercio, Industria, Servicios Y*

Navegación de España para proyectos cofinanciados por Fondos Europeos Estructurales y de inversión (FEDER y FSE) or every year's agreements on subsidies' allocation. This second document review allowed us to obtain information on budget and outcomes.

To triangulate all the previous data from document analysis and to get further details on the PICE programme, we designed a guide for the **semi-structured in-depth interviews with a) managerial staff at a local level in Burgos and b) one of the programme designers and coordinators at a national level**. The interviews with the managerial staff implementing PICE in Burgos (2 managers) lasted one hour and 30 minutes and one hour and 10 minutes and were conducted face-to-face discussing both the Training and the Mobility Plan of PICE respectively. The interview with the responsible for designing and coordinating PICE activities at a national level lasted 55 minutes and was conducted online.

According to Adams (2015), a thematic analysis was adopted to code the interviews with the managerial staff and the programme designer and coordinator. We prepared a full transcript of the interviews as a basis for our analysis in which we coded the main themes associated with the key evaluation questions as well as with the ICAMO model (intervention, context, actors, mechanisms, and outcomes) (Mukumbang et al., 2016; Jonsson & Goicolea, 2020).

We cannot conclude this chapter without considering the limitations that need to be taken into account when interpreting the results of this report. The first limitation relates to only having the vision of the implementers and not the perspective of the participants. This limitation was mainly due to the unavailability of the participants and job-site trainers to set a focus group. Future research on this matter might include the perspective of participants and trainers. Another limitation relates to the difficulties when evaluating because of being a third party that is not one of the funders nor one member of the program itself. Before deciding to evaluate PICE, we considered some more initiatives for evaluation that were not willing to collaborate. This reluctance of some initiatives to be evaluated leads to another limitation of these reports related to the success bias, as those initiatives or programmes more willing to collaborate are those that are obtaining positive results as it happens with PICE.

5. Evaluation questions

5.1 Relevance

We can consider PICE as a relevant programme as its objectives of improving the employability of young people and NEETs are consistent with the Spanish context. PICE was born in 2015 in the context of high youth unemployment and NEET rates. Despite having improved slightly, these rates are still over the EU average and the training structure of Spain still suffers from a bias towards underqualification and overqualification. Moreover, the relevance of PICE in Burgos also corresponds to the situation at the

local and regional level since Castilla y León is one of the regions that loses more young population migrating to other regions.

In addition, as stated by the interviewees, PICE is relevant as it aims to match the employability skills of young people with the demands of the labour market. PICE is in line with recent strategies on education such as the Strategic Plan for Vocational Training that aims to “reach an adequate balance between the levels of training of citizens and the qualification needs of the human capital of the labour market” (Spanish Government, 2023). Accordingly, PICE Burgos focuses on providing training in sectors with high demand for employment such as transport or installation and maintenance (Infoempleo & Adecco, 2020), which are also the main sectors in the local economy (FAE, 2022; Europapress, 2020; Diario de Burgos, 2015).

5.2 Coherence

As explained in Chapter 1.3., the Youth Employment Operational Programme (*Programa Operativo de Empleo Juvenil*, POEJ) establishes a common framework from which the programs that are financed by the ESF are developed, as is the case for PICE. Among the investment priorities established by the ESF, the POEJ focuses on 3 axes:

- Axis 1. Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility for young people.
- Axis 5: Sustainable integration in the labor market of young people who do not have a job and do not participate in education or training systems, in particular in the context of the Youth Guarantee.
- Axis 8: Technical Assistance to Intermediate or Beneficiary Organizations.

These priorities established within the POEJ imply that all the programmes are defined under this POEJ's framework, and PICE is therefore consistent with those focused on axes 1 and 5. Furthermore, the Spanish Chamber of Commerce implements other programs financed by the ESF, in this case under the framework of the Operational Programme for Employment, Training and Education (POEFE) rather than under the POEJ's one. Despite not targeting young people, these programmes belonging to the POEFE have a similar implementation and accountability framework with ESF indicators. In this vein, the interviewees explained as an example of the consistency of PICE that the design of the program for the unemployed over 45 years of age (45+ Programme) has been based on the implementation of PICE.

5.3 Effectiveness

PICE does not have its evaluation. When the Spanish Chamber of Commerce explains its evaluation processes, it refers to the evaluation of the entire POEJ (Spanish Chamber of Commerce, 2023d).

Regarding the fulfilment of indicators, the Spanish Chamber of Commerce again refers to higher-level operational programmes and the Manual of Procedures for the Management of European Funds (*Manual de procedimientos de la Camara Oficial de Comercio, Industria, Servicios Y Navegación de España para proyectos cofinanciados por Fondos Europeos Estructurales y de inversión (FEDER y FSE)*) that establishes how to "articulate the participation of the Spanish Chamber of Commerce to contribute to the Evaluation of the Operational Program" (p.8). This means that the indicators for PICE and the conditions and percentages by which they are considered fulfilled are those established by the ESF for the evaluation of the POEJ as a whole. The responsible for PICE at a national level indicated in the interview that those indicators for the ESF are mainly productivity indicators referring to having reached the target group (e.g., total number of participants, participants under 25 years old, participants who complete the subsidized intervention). Some important indicators in terms of results at a national level relate to the percentage of participants who have found a job after six months and the percentage of participants who have resumed their studies, which, according to the interviewee are 40% and 20% respectively since the beginning of the programme in 2015. In 2022, of the 36,369 people between the ages of 16 and 29 who received training, 8,804 found a job (24,2%) (Spanish Chamber of Commerce, 2023e). These indicators need to be met for the renewal of financing and they are met.

Turning to the local level and Burgos, the productivity of the programme refers to the number and type of participants (of which we have provided the details in Chapter 3) and how many of them complete each activity (i.e., vocational guidance, core training, specific training, and mediation actions if required). Among the total of participants (1,115), interviewees in Burgos stated that 90% completed the training (core and specific) and 50,5% are not registered in the Youth Guarantee System anymore, which can be due to having gotten a job or having resumed studies or just to be over 30 and thus not being included into the target group of Youth Guarantee beneficiaries anymore.

Given the complicated situation regarding youth unemployment and NEET rates (see Chapter 1.3.), we can conclude that these results can be considered successful. Indeed, PICE at a national level has been considered a good practice because of its good results as well as for its collaboration with the business sector (UAFSE, Administrative Unit for the European Social Fund, 2019).

5.4 Efficiency

We have not found any publication about the budget for the Training Plan of PICE by resource items (managerial staff, on-the-job trainers, online training). However, based on the annual budget of 35 million euros reported by the interviewee for the Training Plan at a national level and the number of participants in PICE in 2022, we estimate an average cost per participant in recent years of approx. 962 euros.

Regarding the Mobility Plan, the call for expressions of interest for the development of the mobility plan at a local level (Spanish Chamber of Commerce, 2023f) establishes a cost for the management duties of approx. 766 euros per participant (92,000 euros for up to 120 participants), a cost for training of 450 euros per participant and an allowance for the mobility abroad of 2,500 euros per participant (adapted to the country of destination). Speaking about this allowance, the interviewees in Burgos shared with us the comments from some participants about these allowances not being enough for the standard of living in some countries.

At a national level, the interviewee stated that the budget from the POEJ is sufficient to develop the activities of PICE. This interviewee pointed out that Spain had an important role in the negotiations of the Youth Guarantee funds, as it was one of the bigger countries with a high level of high youth unemployment and NEETs. At a local level in Burgos, the interviewees (managerial staff) explained to us that they receive the budget every year based on productivity indicators (i.e., the number of participants that complete each phase) and they are prudent; they only apply for budget according to the indicators that they expect they will meet. However, we wonder if this excess of prudence when it comes to applying for the budget may be limiting and can leave some NEETs without the support they would need. As an example, these interviewees pointed out that since they are only two managers and they feel sometimes overwhelmed and unable to comply with the set objectives, they stopped offering the mobility plan of PICE in Burgos.

5.5 Sustainability

The Chambers of Commerce are not public administrations as such, they are legal persons governed by public law and configured as consultative and collaborative bodies for the public administrations, despite being subject to the private interests that they pursue. This means that they are subject to a different budget regime and need to be subsidised to carry out their activities. The main funder for PICE is the ESF (91.89%) and its national funding (8.11%) is also public. Within this national financing, there is the possibility of seeking co-financing (mainly at a local level). In this line, the interviewees from Burgos told us that they had foreseen this possibility and possible sources of funding.

In general, as explained by the interviewee at a national level, the sustainability of the execution of PICE is associated with financing from the ESF. Despite being still a necessary service for society (PICE has set the foundations for implementing the 45+ program), if the funding from the ESF was not available anymore and an alternative source of funding was not found, the continuity of PICE would be very difficult. Spain has structural unemployment, and it is still necessary to adapt skills to market demands through training programs such as PICE, but without ESF funding it would be very difficult to provide this kind of services.

Compared to other countries, Spain has a larger age range for recipients of the Youth Guarantee, which includes NEETs from 16 to 29 years of age. This extension of the benefits of the National Youth Guarantee System to young people over 25 years of age and under 30 will take place as long as their unemployment rate exceeds 20%. Given that the Lost Millennials' Project focuses on 25+NEETs, we include in our interview guide some questions to understand if PICE could be sustainable in case the unemployment rate for this age group was lower than 20%. The interviewee at a national level argued that their target group are young people registered in the National Youth Guarantee System. Therefore, if the unemployment rate for this group (25-29 aged people) falls below 20% the target group of PICE would be significantly reduced. This interviewee also referred to the new commitments of the Spanish government in terms of Youth Guarantee – Reinforced Youth Guarantee (European Commission, 2022) – and how he believes that the commitment with young people up to 30 will be reassured soon within the Spanish laws.

5.6 Impact

As PICE is still being implemented, it is difficult to foresee its impact. It is also difficult to compare the impact for participants with such different levels of qualification. According to the interviewees in Burgos, those with a higher education degree integrate more easily into the labour market once the economic crises have been overcome. We found it interesting that these interviewees do not perceive participants with a university degree as NEETs as they are considered as only temporarily unemployed because of the impact of economic crises. In the case of Spain, the financial crisis of 2008 was a key factor for the rising percentage of youth unemployment rates and therefore for the higher percentage of NEETs (Koller et al., 2022). During 2008, difficulties in labour market entry as well as dismissals and wage cuts were mainly concentrated in the group of young people (Villanueva & Cárdenas, 2021). Nevertheless, the duration of this impact was different depending on the educational attainment of young people. Once the economy started a new recovery pace, employers usually preferred recent graduates while for those with a low level of educational attainment or even early school leavers, the impact was higher even in these periods of new economic prosperity. This finding is in line with prior literature that points to low educational attainment as a risk factor for becoming NEET and staying longer in this NEET situation (Koller et al., 2022). Concerning the difficulties in analysing the impact among all participants of PICE due to the differences in their educational attainment, Burgos' interviewees explained that some participants– especially those with low educational attainment– would need new training to adapt to the market again. However, as these interviewees pointed out, for the time being, participants can only take part in PICE once.

Drawing on the theory of change (Global Evaluation Initiative, 2023) and on the framework of outcomes for young people (McNeil et al., 2012), we aim to identify the intended impact on young people, on

related communities, and society in general. First, and despite not including participants' perspectives, we can consider that PICE has long-term positive outcomes associated with the increased skills and knowledge of these participants who, as well as acquiring employability skills, start a successful transition to adulthood. As stated by interviewees at both national and local levels, PICE provides participants not only with job-specific competencies but also with transversal key competencies that can be used throughout their whole careers and different contexts in life. Second, all interviewees refer to the interpersonal positive outcomes of the program, related to stronger relationships with families and better connections with the community who perceive participation in PICE as a commitment not only to acquire a job but to become a responsible adult and citizen. Finally, PICE has an impact on society through the creation of a framework for future programs and initiatives (e.g., 45+ for unemployed people over 45 years old) to improve employability and integration, not only for youth but also to remove general barriers to access the labour market.

6. Conclusions

As it happens with the policies and the projects and initiatives targeting NEETs in Spain, the EU is the main driving force regarding funding and evaluation. Despite the recent approval of the reinforced Youth Guarantee and the long-term commitment from the EU regarding NEETs, we still miss a higher national commitment to this matter. We also perceive this dependency on the EU funding and evaluation requirements in PICE, as its effectiveness and sustainability mainly rely on the indicators and funding from the ESF. This focus on the criteria from the EU to analyse the results from all programmes within the POEJ, such as PICE, may leave aside specific conditions from Spain such as the temporary nature of the contracts. The temporary nature of work contracts is one of the main challenges and vulnerabilities of Spain (EURES-EC, 2022; OECD 2021) and PICE should take this temporary nature of job contracts into account; as some of the participants that found a job after the programme or even some of those who were working after 6 months, may have only found temporary jobs, and not be employed anymore.

Despite having some room for improvement, we can conclude that PICE is a successful programme as it is relevant to the Spanish context and coherent with other similar programmes aimed at young people. It is also useful as a basis for some other programmes aimed at other target groups (e.g., unemployed people over 45 years old). The positive impact of the job-specific training of PICE takes place mainly in the short-term and, given the difficulty of integrating some NEETs (such as early school leavers), they should be able to access PICE – or at least this job-specific training – more than once. Nevertheless, PICE has a long-term impact since its core training focuses on transversal skills.

This overall success of PICE relies on two key factors:

- Flexibility. At a national level, PICE only designs a basic framework that is implemented through different activities at a local level. This decentralized implementation allows local managers and field workers at each location to tailor the training to the local labour market and the profile of its participants. This is the case of Burgos, which provides training in sectors with a high demand for employment such as transport or logistics.
- Closeness to the business world. PICE aims to work hand in hand with companies to analyse not only what they currently need, but also what will happen in the future with the labour market. Accordingly, it also adapts the focus of its training to more innovative sectors. For instance, in Burgos, the Chamber of Commerce is preparing new editions of PICE focusing on jobs for the green energy industries.

In line with these remarks, we would like to propose some recommendations that may help not only PICE but also similar programmes targeting NEETS:

- Guaranteeing the sustainability of the activities included within PICE, which are very necessary for youth employment, with other sources of financing at a national level. In addition, we would recommend studying the effectiveness of the programme with evaluations beyond those required by the ESF and that are more adapted to the national reality (for instance considering the precariousness and the temporary nature of jobs).
- Cross-checking data with Public Employment Services to see what the long-term situation of the participants is (beyond the temporary contracts signed at the end of the programme and beyond their registration in the Youth Guarantee System once they turn 30 years old).
- Redefining the target group within the beneficiaries of the Youth Guarantee System. In the current implementation of PICE at a local level, the staff decides on a case-by-case basis what are the needs of each young person. Despite the advantages of this individualised implementation, we realized that the interviewees in Burgos did not refer to those with a higher education degree as NEETS. Indeed, in most of their reflections on the difficulties of entering the labour market, they did not include young people with higher education who are temporarily unemployed. It might be interesting in this case to analyse the different needs of NEETS (for instance people with higher education degrees vs. early school leavers) and consider the possibility of defining subprogrammes within PICE or even different target groups within the Youth Guarantee system.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, these conclusions should take into consideration some limitations related to only having the perspective of the implementers –future research should consider the opinion of the target group members– and to finding initiatives willing to collaborate in this evaluation, as these initiatives are more likely to have reached positive outcomes as it is the case for PICE.

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