

Evaluation practices assessing the impacts of initiatives targeting 25+ NEETs

COUNTRY REPORT – SPAIN

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NETWORK FOR THE EVALUATION OF INITIATIVES
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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

In Spain, the main driving force behind programs and initiatives aimed at NEETs is the European Union. As it happens in most EU members, in Spain the European Social Fund (ESF) has operated since the structural funds reform in the 80's as the main tool to promote and implement programs and initiatives (Graziano, 2012). As well as the funding from the ESF, the approval of the Youth Employment Initiative and the Youth Guarantee in 2013 provided an important incentive to enhance youth employment policies and actions in Spain, especially at regional and local levels. As a result, Spain approved in 2014 the Youth Employment Operational Programme (POEJ) (2014-2020; extended until 2023), which establishes a common framework for the programs targeting youth people and NEETs and channels the EU financing from the ESF and the YEI. The POEJ targets people older than 16 and younger than 30 years old and, although there are no specific actions aimed at 25+ NEETs, these 25+ NEETs are included within POEJ's target group.

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 labour 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 Organisations.

The EU has also been the primary engine for the evaluations of all operational programs in Spain (i.e., Operational Programme for Employment, Training and Education, POEFE; Operational Programme for Social Inclusion and the Social Economy, POISES; Operational Programme for Technical Assistance, POAT; Youth Employment Operational Programme, POEJ). Indeed, The POEJ's Managing Authority is the Subdirectorate General for Management and Evaluation of the ESF (*Subdirección General de Programación y Evaluación del Fondo Social Europeo*) of the UAFSE (Spain's Administrative Unit for the European Social Fund, *Unidad Administradora del Fondo Social Europeo*). Moreover, the National Strategic Evaluation Plan, which is designed by the UAFSE and establishes the common principles to evaluate all operational programs, has also been developed based on the EU-level regulatory framework for evaluations (UAFSE, 2016).

Focusing on the POEJ, this program was approved with the requirement that it should incorporate an evaluation plan. Further, as stipulated in art. 114.1 of Regulation (EU) 1303/2013, the evaluation plan should be submitted no later than one year after the adoption of the program. Accordingly, Spain

developed an evaluation plan, the ‘Specific Evaluation Plan for the Youth Employment Operational Programme’, in 2016 (UAFSE, 2016a). This plan established the evaluations that should be carried out during the reporting period:

- Evaluation of the objectives/results of the Priorities of the POEJ for the 2017 Interim Evaluation
- Evaluation of the objectives/results of the Priorities of the POEJ for the 2019 Interim Evaluation
- Second evaluation of the objectives/results of the Youth Employment Initiative (Priority axis 5 of Operational Programme for Youth Employment). Planned for 2018
- Summary of the conclusions of the evaluations for the reporting period. Planned for December 2022

In addition, the Specific Evaluation Plan for the Youth Employment Operational Programme established the evaluation of the communication plans for the POEJ. This plan also established that all these evaluations of the objectives, results, conclusions, and communications must be necessarily done externally, and these external evaluators must be selected through public procurement procedures.

2. General information of evaluation practices

The abovementioned ‘Specific Evaluation Plan for the Youth Employment Operational Programme’ met its objectives regarding the planned evaluations. Therefore, the POEJ (2014-2020) was evaluated in 2017 and 2019 through two interim evaluations assessing the objectives and results of Axis 1 and the whole program respectively. Another evaluation was carried out in 2018 to evaluate POEJ’s Axis 5 and thus assess the objectives and results of the channelled funds from the YEI. In the Specific Evaluation Plan for the Youth Employment Operational Programme in 2016 there was another external evaluation planned for December 2022 to summarize the conclusions of the evaluations for the reporting period. However, given that the POEJ has been extended until 2023, the final report summarizing the objectives and results might be delayed.

Whereas all external evaluations of the POEJ planned so far have been carried out as planned, lower-level programs or initiatives have not usually been subject to external evaluation. In most of the cases the organisations in charge of implementing programs (Intermediate Organisations themselves or Beneficiary Organisations¹) assess their own results in terms of participants and program tracking and report these results to the managing authority of the POEJ, the UAFSE.

¹ The decentralized model of state in Spain implies the existence of numerous bodies at national, regional and even local level responsible for implementing programs and initiatives all over the country. The POEJ establishes three main types of bodies: 1) Intermediate Organisations: 17 Autonomous Communities (regions) and 2) Autonomous Cities: Andalucía, Aragón,

The POEJ’s evaluation reports are available in UAFSE’s website (UAFSE, 2022), and they are easily accessible. However, the multiplicity of programs and initiatives implemented in Spain by numerous institutions—under the framework of the POEJ, 41,375 projects were executed by 34 institutions until the end of 2020 (UAFSE, 2021)—together with the lack of external evaluation of most of these lower-level programs, makes it very difficult to access to their results. To provide a general view of this enormous number of programs and initiatives carried out by different institutions, the POEJ selects the most remarkable national-level and regional-level programs, which are the only ones disclosed in the evaluation and execution reports for the whole POEJ. Based on this selection of the POEJ, we have reported the evaluation of seven programs by using the details included in the Interim Evaluation Reports and the Executive Reports of the POEJ. We have also used the website of the implementing organisations, which in some cases elaborate a factsheet with a summary of the results of the specific program. Table 1 includes the details of the three evaluations of the POEJ as well as the seven lower-level programs.

Table 1. List of selected programs in Spain by evaluation’s name, date, and links.

Program evaluated	Name of evaluation	Date of evaluation	Link to evaluation outputs
Operational Program for Youth Employment (POEJ), <i>Axis 1. Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility</i>	Interim Evaluation of the Operational Programme for Youth Employment (POEJ) 2017	July 2017. It evaluates actions executed in the Axis 1 of the POEJ before 31 December 2016	https://www.mites.gob.es/uafse/es/evaluaciones/informes/poej/index.htm https://www.mites.gob.es/uafse/ficheros/evaluacion/informes/poej/execsummary_2017_POEJ.pdf

Principado de Asturias, Canarias, Cantabria, Castilla-La Mancha, Castilla y León, Cataluña, Ceuta, Comunidad Valenciana, Extremadura, Galicia, Islas Baleares, La Rioja, Comunidad de Madrid, Melilla, Región de Murcia, Navarra, País Vasco.

2) National-level bodies (Intermediate Organisations) that implement the programs by themselves: State Research Agency (AEI), Chamber of Spain, Superior Council of Scientific Investigations, General Directorate for Regional and Local Cooperation, La Caixa Foundation, EOI Foundation, INCYDE Foundation, ONCE Foundation, RED.ES, National Public Employment Service (SEPE).

3) Beneficiary Organizations that implement the initiatives collaborating with Intermediate Organisations: Spanish Red Cross, Action Against Hunger Foundation, ONCE Foundation, Roma Secretariat Foundation, YMCA.

Youth Employment Initiative (Priority Axis 5 of Operational Programme for Youth Employment, POEJ)	Second ² evaluation of the Youth Employment Initiative (Priority axis 5 of Operational Programme for Youth Employment)	December 2018. It evaluates actions included in the Axis 5 of POEJ until December of 2017	https://www.fresnoconsulding.es/publicaciones/ii_evaluation_of_the_youth_employment_initiative.html
Operational Program for Youth Employment (POEJ)	Second Evaluation of the Youth Employment Operational Programme (POEJ) 2019	June 2019. It evaluates actions included in the POEJ between 1 January 2017 and 31 December 2018	https://www.mites.gob.es/uafse/es/evaluaciones/informes/poej/index.htm https://www.mites.gob.es/uafse/ficheros/evaluacion/informes/poej/execsummary_2019_POEJ.pdf
PULSA Employment, Activation program, orientation and support for Young People	Good practices reported to Youth Guarantee – Knowledge centre	2018	https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1327 https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=18450&langId=en
	Execution Report of the Operational Program for Youth Employment	2018	https://www.mites.gob.es/uafse/es/properativos/poej/index.htm https://www.mites.gob.es/uafse/ficheros/properativos/poej/iae/iae2018_poej.pdf
Training Program for Youth Employment in the Digital Economy (Formación en Economía Digital)	Report of best practices for actions cofinanced with the European social fund	2019	https://www.mites.gob.es/uafse/es/buenas_practicas/poej/index.htm
	Execution Report of the Operational Program for Youth Employment	2018	https://www.mites.gob.es/uafse/ficheros/buenas_practicas/poej/2019-garantia_juvenil.pdf

² The first evaluation of the YEI implementation is not included in this analysis as it was an internal evaluation carried out by the Managing Authority (González Gago, 2017) and thus was not included among the external evaluations planned in the ‘Specific Evaluation Plan for the Youth Employment Operational Programme’.

Access Program (Programa Acceder)	Assessment of results and impact of the Access Program 2000-2020	2000-2019	https://www.gitanos.org/upload_priv/07/74/Resultados%20Acceder_20%20A%C3%91OS_informe%20final.pdf
You can with Compulsory Secondary Education (Puedes con ESO)	Factsheet with some results of the program	2021	https://www.ymca.es/act-ualidad/empleo/resultados-de-nuestros-programas-de-empleo-para-la-juventud
Training Program in Alternation with the Employment of Innovation and Talent (PIT) of the region of Extremadura in 2017-2018	Second Evaluation of the Youth Employment Operational Programme (POEJ)	June 2019	https://www.mites.gob.es/uafse/es/evaluaciones/informes/poej/index.htm https://www.mites.gob.es/uafse/ficheros/evaluacion/informes/poej/execsummary_2019_POEJ.pdf
Programme TLN Mobilicat 2017 in Catalonia	Second Evaluation of the Youth Employment Operational Programme (POEJ)	June 2019	https://www.mites.gob.es/uafse/es/evaluaciones/informes/poej/index.htm https://www.mites.gob.es/uafse/ficheros/evaluacion/informes/poej/execsummary_2019_POEJ.pdf

Source: authors' own compilation

3. Characteristics of evaluation practices

As explained in chapter 2, only the POEJ is subject to an evaluation of its objectives and results as such. The lower-level programmes report their results to the managing authority of the POEJ, the UAFSE. This evaluation of the POEJ is the result of the Specific Evaluation Plan for the Youth Employment Operational Programme which, in turn, also comes from the commitment to the European authorities. The Specific Evaluation Plan for the Youth Employment Operational Programme also established the selection and award criteria for the tenders in the public procurement process to designate the evaluators. These criteria also established the method that the tenders were expected to follow in order to evaluate the results of the POEJ in their mid-term and final evaluations. 'The measurement of the results/impact may be carried out through the following tools, depending on the availability of the information: 1) Research based on secondary sources: to confirm whether the trends observed from the POEJ can be contrasted with other data (other research, databases, official statistics, etc); 2) Comparative analysis: comparing the results observed with the results of other projects or policies with similar characteristics; 3)

Interviews and discussion groups/focus groups: through questions to a representative sample of agents involved' (UAFSE, 2016a, p.17). Besides the method that potential evaluators had to follow, this specific plan established the period for each interim evaluation and the budget to carry out the abovementioned methodology. In this way, it established a period of 9 months to make the first evaluation of the POEJ in 2017 and 12 months for the second evaluation in 2019.

Another problem relates to the huge number of actions and implementing institutions relates to the decentralized model of state in Spain. Every Autonomous Community (region) has its own operational program to budget the ESF funds that they receive from the Spanish central government. Unlike the operational programs at a national-level, which refer to the specific areas and groups they target (e.g., Operational Programme for Social Inclusion and the Social Economy, POISES; Youth Employment Operational Programme, POEJ) the regional-level operational programs refer to all actions carried out by each Autonomous Community (e.g., Operational Programme from the Autonomous Community of Castilla y León). These regional Operational Programmes establish priority axes (e.g., employment, inclusion), but do not refer to youth explicitly in their priority axes nor their objectives, which makes very difficult to analyse their impact on youth employment nor NEETs/25+ NEETs.

3.1 Methodology of evaluation practices

The 'Interim Evaluation of the Operational Programme for Youth Employment 2017', which evaluated the axis 1 of the POEJ, used a sample of 6 out of 33 bodies in charge of implementing the actions (response rate of 18%). To collect the data on this sample they used the following evaluation methods:

- a) Implementation Analysis. Through a questionnaire they collected the information from each Intermediate and Beneficiary Organizations (the actions can be implemented by the Beneficiary Organisations or by the Intermediate Organisations themselves) about the level of execution, implementation, financing, execution dates, compliance by region, and compliance with productivity and results indicators. The indicator data is completed with the information extracted from the Annual Program Execution Report.
- b) Online questionnaire with 28 questions addressed to Intermediate Organizations.
- c) Qualitative Analysis. Based on in-depth interviews. Based on the results of the execution data, implementation, financing, and productivity and result indicators, and after processing the answers of the online questionnaire, personal interviews were carried out with the Intermediate and Beneficiary Organizations taking part in the evaluation, collecting their opinions and experiences in relation to the elements of the evaluation.
- d) Workshops. Two workshops were held to present the conclusions of previous analysis to Intermediate and Beneficiary Organizations. All their suggestions on how to address the problems and the main issues related to the management of actions were collected.

The 'second evaluation of the Youth Employment Initiative', which refers to the axis 5 of the POEJ, in 2018 used a larger sample than the evaluation of 2017. Specifically, evaluators designed their sampling frame combining different methods and including the following participants:

- 1) Focus group number 1 with 7 national-level Intermediate Organisations (that also implement initiatives by themselves such as Chamber of Spain), 4 Beneficiary Organisations (e.g., Red Cross Spain) and 3 key actors on youth employment (e.g., Confederation of Employers and Industries of Spain (CEOE))
- 2) Focus group number 2 with 10 representatives of regional-level Intermediate Organisations.
- 3) 9 interviews of representatives of regional-level, national-level Intermediate Organisations and Beneficiary Organisations.
- 4) Survey to 27 Intermediate Organisations (87%) and 3 Beneficiary Organisations (10% of total).
- 5) Survey to 1,294 young people participating in the YEI selected actions in Spain.
- 6) Linked database from the Information System of the Public Employment Services, National Youth Guarantee System, and General Treasury of the Social Security with 609,804 data from young people.

Therefore, they used both quantitative and qualitative methods that they report as the following ones:

Qualitative techniques:

- a) Documentary analysis
- b) Focus group with Intermediate and beneficiary organisations and other key actors (e.g., trade unions)
- c) Personal interviews with Intermediate and beneficiary organisations.
- d) Case studies

Quantitative techniques:

- a) Survey to Intermediate and Beneficiary Organizations
- b) Survey of young people participating in the YEI
- c) Counterfactual analysis (CIE)
- d) Statistical analysis and indicators with a linked database from the Information System of the Public Employment Services, National Youth Guarantee System and General Treasury of the Social Security

The 'Second Evaluation of the Youth Employment Operational Programme (POEJ)' in 2019 also considered the recipients of the actions as well as the implementing organisations. The number of young

people and organisations taking part in the evaluation sample, and thus the response rates, were the following ones:

- Response rate of 74% in interviews with Intermediate Organisations (17 out of the 23 organisations with operations in Axis 1 and/or in Axis 8 in the 2017-2018 period).
- Response rate of 100% in the survey among Intermediate and Beneficiary Organisations in charge of implementing operations in Axis 1 and/or in Axis 8 in the 2017-2018 period.
- Response rate of 73.3% in the survey among the Intermediate and Beneficiary Organizations that have not started to implement operations in Axis 1 and of 50% among those that have not started operations in Axis 8.
- Response rate of the 8.2% in the survey among the recipients of the 5 actions selected to be evaluated (313 respondents out of 3824 in the 5 selected actions).
- 14 people attended to the discussion table (8 people representing intermediate organisations, 2 people representing beneficiary organisations and 4 social agents).

To collect the data on this sample, evaluators used the following evaluation methods:

- a) Interviews with representatives of the Intermediate and Beneficiary Organisations with operations in Axis 1 and/or in Axis 8 in the period 2017-2018.
- b) Survey of Intermediate and Beneficiary Organisations with operations in Axis 1 and/or in Axis 8 in the 2017-2018 period.
- c) Survey of Intermediate and Beneficiary Organisations that have not started operations in Axis 1 and/or in Axis 8 despite having a financial allocation.
- d) Survey of the recipients of the operations.
- e) Discussion table with representatives of Intermediate and Beneficiary Organisations and other social agents.

The rest of programs (national-level and regional-level ones) that we have mentioned did not use these evaluation methods. Indeed, they did not specify the methods they use and only report their results to allow the evaluators of POEJ to create some indicators about general results such as the number of people reached and the deviations regarding the initial budget from the POEJ. Only a few programs go one step further and report the percentage of job offers or insertion rate. For instance, the program PULSA Employment administered a questionnaire among its 1,570 direct beneficiaries and found that the 41% got a job (i.e., probationary, temporary, or fixed-term job). The program 'You can with Compulsory Secondary Education' administered a questionnaire among the 256 participants who finished the whole program (63% of 406 people who started this program). Of the 256 participants that finished the program, 45% got further qualification, 25% got access to formal education in higher levels,

39% got a job or traineeship offer for a short period of time and only 7% got employed. As an exception, the program 'Acceder', implemented by the Roma Secretariat Foundation, explains its evaluation methods, and has their own evaluation. This evaluation comprises of 14 interviews to agents implementing the program, 7 focus groups, a phone survey of 400 participants, and an online survey administered among the public administrations in charge.

3.2 Types of evaluations and their results

As explained in previous chapters, the three evaluations of the POEJ that have been done so far are external evaluations, as planned in the Specific Evaluation Plan for the Youth Employment Operational Programme.

The first of these evaluations, the 'Interim Evaluation of the Operational Programme for Youth Employment 2017' was carried out by KPMG. The conclusions from this evaluation suggest that the implementation of the actions during the first years of the POEJ were rather unsuccessful. For instance, 8 out of 10 Intermediate Bodies encountered difficulties in implementing the Programme. Two thirds of the entities (2 out of the 6 interviewed Intermediate Bodies) indicated that there had been some degree of duplication between the activities carried out in the framework of the Operational Programme and other actions. Moreover, two thirds of the entities did not identify substantial socio-economic changes in the recipients. However, those that detected changes consider that the actions should continue over time to be effective. The evaluators made three recommendations to the implementing organisations: 1) the pace of implementation of the actions should improve; 2) they should incorporate Data Analytics to the monitoring and evaluation of actions; 3) the commitment to evaluation by Intermediate Bodies should be higher.

The second evaluation of the POEJ, the 'Second evaluation of the Youth Employment Initiative (Priority axis 5 of Operational Programme for Youth Employment)', was carried out by Fresno Consulting Group and Universidad Complutense de Madrid. The conclusions from this evaluation suggest that the implementation of the actions under the YEI were rather successful in terms of participation and insertion in the labour market. Despite this success, the evaluators recommend increasing the efforts to reach the young people who are not registered in the YG and specially those of low education attainment. The evaluators highlight that this situation of lower motivation and participation is aggravated in the case of women due to gender inequalities and in rural areas. They also recommend intensifying efforts to reduce school dropout and to promote more dual actions, especially those training actions that are linked to positions of work. They point to a mismatch between the training actions and the market needs, which requires a greater effort from public bodies to adapt the training offers to the needs of companies, and to the job offers of the different productive sectors, avoiding a certain tendency to accumulate prolonged training actions with little impact on employability. The evaluators also

recommend reducing the administrative burden as well as improving the coordination among institutions, especially at a regional level.

The third evaluation planned within the POEJ framework is the ‘Second Evaluation of the Youth Employment Operational Programme (POEJ)’ Carried out by Arenal Grupo Consultor S.L. The conclusions of this analysis suggest that the implementation of the POEJ was rather successful as some of the problems were reduced and that some progresses were made from the challenges set in 2014 and in previous evaluations. The recommendations from the evaluators take a similar direction than the ones from the previous evaluation. This evaluation also recommends achieving a greater participation of young people in its actions. It also recommends increasing the number and scope of initiatives aimed at vulnerable groups. Another recommendation relates to directing funds mainly to self-employment and work experience initiatives, due to their greater impact on helping young people get into work. Finally, among the recommendations about how to improve the implementation of the POEJ, they recommend creating a coordination mechanism for initiatives in each region to avoid overlaps between the Intermediate and the Beneficiary Organisations.

4. Conclusions

As has been argued throughout the whole report, the European Union is the main driving force behind the programs and initiatives aimed at youth and NEETs in Spain. Indeed, the POEJ, which is the Operational Program that articulates all actions aimed at young people and NEETs was approved to fulfill the commitment to the European Union regarding the channelling of the ESF. By the same commitment, the managing authority for the ESF in Spain developed an evaluation plan for this POEJ (UAFSE, 2016a). Despite some specific evaluations, Spain had less of a tradition of evaluation—that was also the case among the southern and central EU nations before the structural funds reform in 1988 (Díaz-Puente et al., 2008). The reforms introducing the structural funds led to the institutionalization of evaluation, particularly in the southern and central EU nations (including Spain) (Díaz-Puente et al., 2008). The culture of evaluation in Spain mainly derives from the EU, and therefore it is difficult to think that the periodic external evaluations of the POEJ would have been carried out without the obligation of evaluation that came together with the structural funds. Actually, we have not been able to find any other external evaluations besides the POEJ’s ones. By searching on the website of implementing institutions, we have only found internal reports on participation and monitoring, even though there are other important programs targeting youth and NEETs that should also be evaluated.

In addition, as argued in chapter 3, another problem related to the evaluation is the short period given to the evaluators to carry them out. Given the enormous number of programs and initiatives implemented by multiple institutions at national and regional level, and given the short period that the

evaluators have, they must stick to the selection of a few actions as representative or select a small number of good practices. Once again, we believe that the POEJ's evaluation should be more extensive in order to assess in detail a greater number of actions—for instance, the 'Second Evaluation of the Youth Employment Operational Programme (POEJ)' in 2019 administered a survey exclusively among the participants in the 5 selected actions.

Another problem that has also been mentioned has to do with the decentralized model of the State in Spain. As well as the national operational programs, the Autonomous Communities develop their own regional operational programs that also operate as a framework for actions targeting unemployed and vulnerable people. However, these regional programs have different priority axes than the national operational programs (for instance they define quality of employment rather than youth employment as one of its priorities). For this reason, it is very difficult to know the impact of these regional operational programs on youth and even more difficult in the case of NEETs and 25+ NEETs.

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