



GOVERNMENT  
OF MALTA



## Evaluation of the Youth Guarantee (2.0)

2014-2020

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2023

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# Executive Summary

The Youth Guarantee 2.0 is a project funded by the ESF under the 2014-2020 Programming Period with a budget of circa €6 million. Two main interventions under this project are the SEC Preventive Classes (SEC PC) and the NEET Activation Scheme (NAS), for which, €1 million and €4 million were allocated, respectively. By the end of 2021, 3,708 participants were supported through the SEC PC and 830 were supported through the NAS.

The Ministry responsible for European Funds triggered an evaluation to understand what has been achieved by public funds with the aim to inform future policy design within the context of these interventions. The evaluation is based on the following criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and impact.

A theory-based evaluation approach of the two interventions complemented with a counterfactual impact evaluation (CIE) was adopted. This is built on two important building blocks:

- (a) the reconstruction of the Theory of Change (ToC) for each intervention based on scoping interviews and desk research; and
- (b) the testing of the ToC through a counterfactual analysis, based on data provided by the National Statistical Office (NSO), as well as qualitative methodologies, such as interviews and focus groups with different people involved in the management and implementation of the interventions, including participants.

Within the ToC, mechanisms that were expected to produce the anticipated effect on participants were identified and mapped out together with the outputs and context of the intervention.

## Brief description of the interventions

In **SEC PC**, the teachers provide 5 weeks of summer revision classes to secondary school students who failed to pass the SEC examination in May with the aim to improve their result in the September examination sitting. The aim of the support is to increase the chances of participation in further education or in entering the labour market. It relies on a combination of *Better learning environment mechanism* (smaller classes, individual approach, better match of teacher-student), *Drilling mechanism* (focus on the content of the test makes preparation feasible) and *Ultimatum mechanism* (failing at September exams seen as serious risk motivator). The intervention assumes that good teachers are engaged and that the cause of problems in May can be addressed by the revision classes.

**NAS** provides participants with a combination of profiling assessment, professional services (such as mentoring psychologists, psychotherapists, education guidance services, and social workers), training and work exposure/further education to sustainably help participants to access and retain a job or engage in further education. Mechanisms expected in the intervention include *Facilitating access to employment* (different form of support which brings them closer to the labour market), *Hands on experience* (a different learning approach to formal education), *Personal attention* (moving away from a one-size-fits-all approach), *Increase of social capital* (provides a network of different professionals working collaboratively together), and *Financial incentive* (to entice participation and commitment).

## Methodology

To address the evaluation questions (EQs), desk analysis on resources provided by the Managing Authority / Contracting Authority / National Statistics Office as well as on resources found online (such as NSO and Eurostat websites) was done. This was complemented by field work carried out in the form of individual interviews with participants (through a customer journey approach) and focus groups with the relevant actors of the SEC PC and the NAS, including the teachers and the participants of the SEC PC; and the professionals, employers, and participants of the NAS.

## Research findings

Research findings indicate that for the **SEC PC**, participants generally pertain to two different categories:

- (a) the *Easier Group* – individuals who narrowly failed the May exams, typically not getting the required grades in one or two subjects maybe because of underestimation, or some short-term distraction that prevented them from preparing well; and
- (b) the *Challenging Group* – individuals with more complex issues, long term and deep education deficits and failing more than two subjects.

Overall, between 2016 and 2018, out of the 1,911 students that applied to the SEC intervention, 1,399 (73.2%) belonged to the *Easier Group* and the remaining 512 (26.8%) to the *Challenging Group*.

Results indicate that whilst the SEC PC are effective for the *Easier Group*, they were less so for individuals within the *Challenging Group*. Within the former category, students are more driven to succeed and therefore are interested in these classes. In the latter category, there is a degree of disengagement as students often have learning difficulties (some even struggle with literacy despite noting from literature and interviews with responsible authorities that the education system has measures in place to provide extra support for those that need it) that cannot be addressed within 5 weeks. In addition, the mechanisms of the intervention do not provide effective help to those students having longer term wellbeing issues (e.g. *offering extra classes won't help me if I have to take care of sick parents instead of studying, or if I grew up in a pathological environment for a long time and the absence of nurturing conditions left me with deep educational hinderances*), which could have contributed towards attaining the undesirable results in the May examination sitting.

The counterfactual analysis revealed that the SEC classes from 2016 to 2018 had a net positive effect on the probability of passing the SEC exam in September with an MQF Level 3. Participation in SEC classes increases the probability of passing the September exams with an MQF Level 3 by 9.7 pp for Maths, 9.8 pp for English, 13.2 pp for Maltese and up to 18.9 pp for Physics exams. This positive effect seems to be driven by the *Easier Group*, among which higher success rates are observed. The significance of the problem of *Challenging group* is growing, as between 2015 and 2021 there is a growing share of students who fail Paper B in May, who decide not to try again in September or who fail again in September. This could be due to some deeper changes in the society where the situations that negatively affect the education performance may be expanding.

The campaign attracting students to participate was considered very good and multi-channelled. Jobsplus adopts a strong communication campaign using different approaches, including direct contact with the target group via text messages and emails. The participants that were contacted also confirmed that there is a good outreach programme. However, the campaign attracts only part of

potential participants, which share has dropped between 2016 and 2018. A decline in the share of students who register for September exams after failing in the May sitting was also registered.

In terms of efficiency, the SEC process is considered rather efficient with a few bottlenecks. One relates to teachers dropping out at the last minute, which creates challenges for Jobplus to run the classes. The second relates to the availability of rooms with air-conditioning. Unfortunately, the latter is not always possible as a good number of schools with these facilities are not easily accessible via public transportation and those that are, then are in demand, especially from other organisations which require similar facilities. Hybrid classes are still being held which creates some challenges for the teachers, whilst the administrative burden to complete Annex 1 to the ESF regulation was raised, though also acknowledged as a mandatory requirement by law.

In the case of the **NAS**, results indicated that the intervention creates a viable opportunity for those that, for one reason or another, find it difficult to land and retain a job. No candidate profiles were found to be specifically not fitting for the NAS from the point of departure since over the course of the intervention behavioural changes were noted. It was also noted that job coaches and mentors play a crucial role, whilst the handing-over of participants between professionals providing support within the scheme, does not prove to be effective and beneficial, as participants have to repeat their own story to each specialist (telling a story of being in a difficult situation is typically painful, having to do so may deter further participation) and in the whole system it consumes a lot of time to "tell a story and to listen to the story". The training aspect brought along mixed experiences and opinions as whilst it was considered beneficial for some, it was considered unnecessary for others. The completion rate of NAS is limited, in 2016-2018 more participants dropped-out or never showed-up than successfully completed the scheme. The personal reason leading to dropout is unknown, however, the high rate could be attributable to a mix of factors, including the possibility that participants found a job and the existence of other competing schemes. Professionals within the NAS note that the scheme still adds value to those not completing the support as it opens new channels of opportunities, exposure, and contacts.

The findings of the counterfactual analysis indicate that, on average, between 2016 and 2018, the NAS has supported and encouraged treated young NEET people in Malta to resume studying/training. Notwithstanding, qualitative research notes that success stories related to employability are present, which were encountered during the individual interviews with participants and in the focus groups with employers. In terms of education/training, the intervention increases the probability of being in education/training within the four weeks after the intervention by about 12pp. The positive impact of the intervention on the probability of being in education holds also in the medium term when the status in June 2020 is considered as an outcome. Nevertheless, the positive impact of NAS is not homogeneously generated among participants. In fact, the impact of the NAS affects males and females differently, as males benefit more from the intervention than females, though this same conclusion was not reached by the qualitative research as positive effects of the intervention could not be linked to gender but more to the family context of the individual. Effect on employment is positive for older participants (born 1991-5), but negative for younger ones (born 2001-5). This might link to the fact that older NAS participants are more willing to search for a job after the intervention rather than resume studying.

In terms of implementation, the NAS was commended for the hands-on-experience, which is considered critical for participants to land a job. It also helps the participants to build relationships. Personal attention is also provided as the intervention brings together different specialists to support different individuals in their journey. On the other hand, participants and specialists, considered the

NAS as too structured and not flexible enough to meet the different needs of the participants, especially when it comes to training, which for some was not considered necessary. Interviewed participants also noted that they were not aware of training options to choose from and that the delivery was not considered as engaging for some.

In terms of the process, the NAS was also considered to be rather efficient with some bottlenecks. One revolves around the handing over of participants, which is not appreciated by the participants as they do not like sharing their story several times. The second refers to the matching system of participants with available vacancies as employers do not consider it structured enough. Another challenge related to the duration of the work exposure, where in some cases the window was considered as too short to get to know the abilities and aptitudes of the participants. Lack of financial compensation to the employers was also raised as a concern, considering that NAS participation requires time to invest in the individual.

## Recommendations

The main recommendations to the different stakeholders are presented below:

### MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE SEC PREVENTIVE CLASSES

Title	Description
Information on participants	<p>Explore options to provide information on education history and challenges of participants with educators before / at the start of the classes so that the teachers can prepare and service the students better. This can either be through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the sharing of education track level records for students in public schools by the Ministry of Education, subject to participant consent;</li> <li>expansion of the SEC application form to include fields that can capture information as to whether the participant was supported by a Learning Support Educator during formal schooling; and / or as to whether the participant is willing to share additional information with the SEC educator.</li> </ul>
Availability of teachers	<p>Explore options to organise better the pool of teachers available to deliver the SEC classes to improve on last minute cancellations. Considerations could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The use of historical data to provide a degree of certainty to teachers when they express interest in April;</li> <li>To reconsider the approach to try and give at least some teaching hours to every teacher that applies to deliver classes under the SEC PC and explore the option to meet the maximum hours requested by some of the teachers that apply, implying that less teachers will be engaged on the intervention. Jobsplus can consider running an experiment to this effect in one location.</li> </ul>
Continue in the efforts of having a high-quality communication campaign	<p>The Campaign mechanism is perceived as robust with participants welcoming its multichannel character and consider it as good and suitable. Effort of Jobsplus to prepare attractive campaign is undeniable and should be continued.</p>
Hybrid classes	<p>To avoid using hybrid (on-line + off-line) classes. If on-line classes are desirable for some participants, specific "on-line only" class should be created.</p>
Air-conditioning	<p>The use of air-conditioned rooms should be prioritised, when they are in locations accessible via public transportation, whilst discussions should be held with the Ministry of Education to prioritise the use of these facilities for public services, rather than for third parties which is creating competition and limited availability for the running of SEC classes in more comfortable facilities.</p>
Annex 1 to the ESF Regulation	<p>To explore the possibility to collect the obligatory data on Annex 1 to the ESF Regulation at application stage, through the online portal, rather than during or at the end of the classes. This would also facilitate data management and exportation to the MA.</p>

## MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NEET ACTIVATION SCHEME

Title	Description
<b>Improve the customisation of the intervention</b>	Increase further the scheme's customisation to individual needs/features, especially by assessing the applicability of the training phase on a case-by-case basis. In some cases, the training phase could be proposed following the work exposure when the participant is more aware about his/her gaps. In case of work exposure, the possibility to extend (or limit) the work placement should be explored.
<b>Limit handovers of participants</b>	Streamline the case-management and avoid handing-over of participants between different professionals to the level of a single professional that takes the role of a case manager, who ropes in different specialists, when necessary.
<b>Delivery of training in a more engaging way</b>	The training needs to be more engaging, fun, diversified and should cater to different types of youths. A participatory approach for training is recommended.
<b>Financially compensate employers</b>	Assess the possibility to financial compensate employers for taking the participants on board, whilst considering any State Aid implications.
<b>Improved matching process</b>	Create a better system to match candidates with employers, possibly through an online platform to facilitate the process.
<b>Add some community / peer group elements into the intervention</b>	Consider the possibility to add some regular meetings between participants for mutual motivation and identification of solutions to common problems.

## MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS COVERING BOTH INTERVENTIONS

Title	Description
<b>Upstream intervention</b>	Both schemes require some form of upstream intervention to effectively support the <i>Challenging Group</i> within the SEC and the NEETs within the NAS before their problems become too serious. The problems of the <i>Challenging Group</i> or NEETs are difficult to solve at the stage where the SEC and NAS intervene. There is visible awareness of the problem and consequently is included in policy documents showing that a degree of effort is being done capturing both past, current and future initiatives. Nonetheless, it is recommended that further action is taken that works upstream in the lives of the <i>Challenging Group</i> or NEETs to prevent their disadvantage from occurring much earlier in the education system.
<b>Monitoring system</b>	The MA should consider laying down a monitoring system enabling the assessment of the schemes (by linking the indicators to the schemes' intervention logic) and ensure adequate data collection and availability by establishing in advance agreements with different data providers. For schemes supporting individuals' education/employability, it is critical to track their situation over the years (some years before/after the intervention) and their participation across different public support schemes.
<b>Develop relations of accountability for learning</b>	Apart from the usual accountability for compliance (respecting the rules) and accountability for performance (spending, indicators) the MA should also nurture the culture of learning with Beneficiaries. For continuous improvement of the interventions it is necessary to openly discuss current problems, uncertainties and risks as well as be able to experiment with various settings of the policy.