Impact Evaluation of the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) - Experimental and / or innovative projects at the national or regional level and funded by the YEI between 2014 and 2017: Evaluation synthesis

The evaluation objectives

The impact evaluation of the YEI has been subdivided into 6 public contracts. This evaluation aimed at:

❖ Broadening knowledge of the YEI's intervention logic in France and precisely analyzing its implementation and effects;
❖ Assessing the impact of the YEI in France;
❖ Constituting a basis for further reflection on the evolution of the EU social cohesion strategy and European Social Funds (ESF).
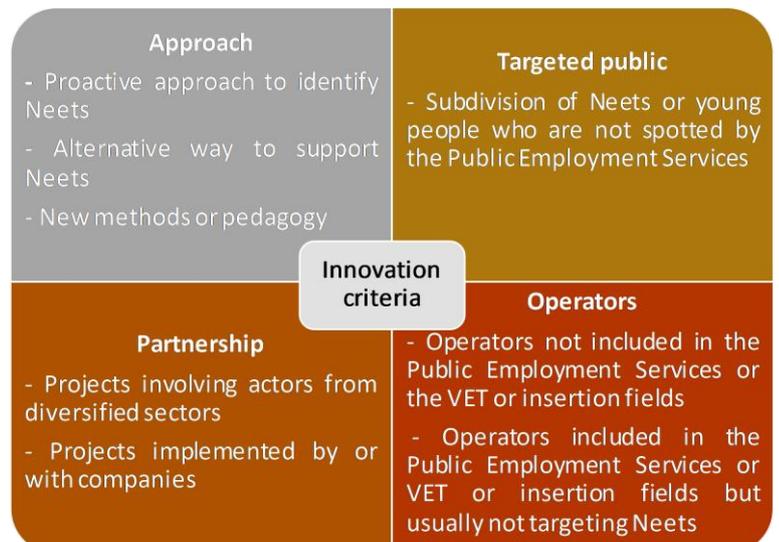
The evaluation undertaken by the evaluation consultancy Itinere Conseil was specifically about innovation. The objectives were to:

❖ Describe innovative dimensions of the projects funded by the YEI;
❖ Understand in which ways does it complement the existing norms;
❖ Assess the effectiveness and efficiency of innovative projects;
❖ Highlight the factors which can hold back or help the emergence, development and sustainability of these projects.

What definition of the « innovation » concept?

At the beginning of the evaluation, the concept of "innovation" has been defined thanks to several steps:

❖ An analysis of the scientific works on the topic (literature search);
❖ The definition of « innovation » criteria;
❖ The compilation of several innovative projects identified thanks to the 8 innovation criteria previously determined;
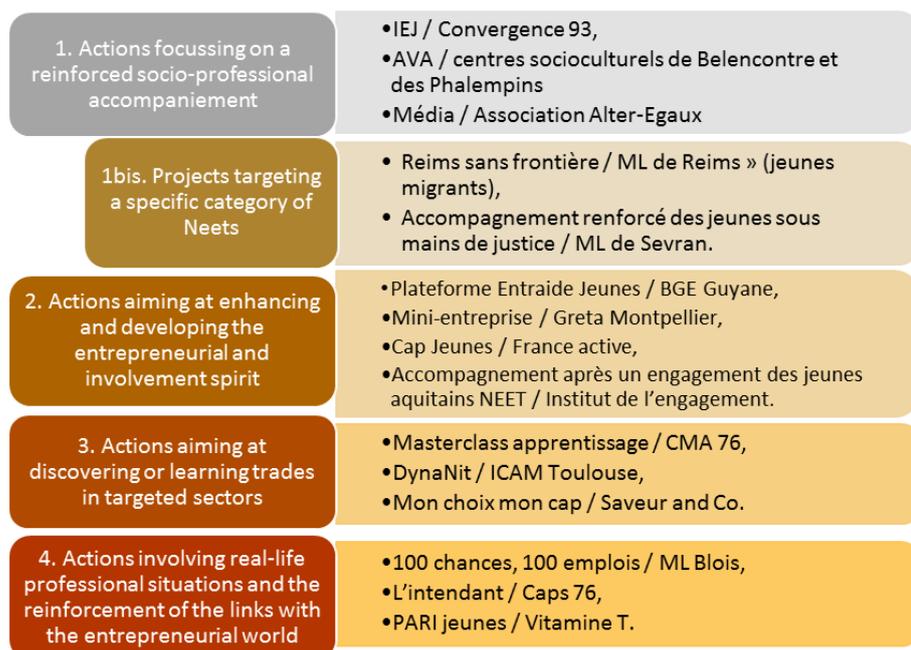❖ Then, the evaluation team selected 15 innovative projects and classified them according to 4 dimensions:

Approach	**Targeted public**
- Proactive approach to identify Neets - Alternative way to support Neets - New methods or pedagogy	- Subdivision of Neets or young people who are not spotted by the Public Employment Services
Partnership	**Operators**
- Projects involving actors from diversified sectors - Projects implemented by or with companies	- Operators not included in the Public Employment Services or the VET or insertion fields - Operators included in the Public Employment Services or VET or insertion fields but usually not targeting Neets

(center: Innovation criteria)

The methodological approach

15 case studies *conducted at the scale of projects identified as innovative or experimental*

At the beginning of the evaluation, 15 projects funded by the YEI and considered as innovative or experimental have been selected. Then, the evaluation team achieved an in-depth case study for each of them. The case-studies aimed at understanding the projects' outcomes and the factors which can hold back or help the emergence and development of innovation. They involved qualitative methods and a cross analysis (data and documentary analysis; 162 interviews with the projects' stakeholders: project leaders, partners, beneficiaries, managing authorities).

For the analysis, the 15 selected projects have been classified into 4 main types - the first type includes a sub-category.

The 15 selected projects were classified into 4 categories according to their main object:

Category	Projects
1. Actions focussing on a reinforced socio-professional accompaniement	• IEJ / Convergence 93, • AVA / centres socioculturels de Belencontre et des Phalempins • Média / Association Alter-Egaux
1bis. Projects targeting a specific category of Neets	• Reims sans frontière / ML de Reims » (jeunes migrants), • Accompagnement renforcé des jeunes sous mains de justice / ML de Sevran.
2. Actions aiming at enhancing and developing the entrepreneurial and involvement spirit	• Plateforme Entraide Jeunes / BGE Guyane, • Mini-entreprise / Greta Montpellier, • Cap Jeunes / France active, • Accompagnement après un engagement des jeunes aquitains NEET / Institut de l'engagement.
3. Actions aiming at discovering or learning trades in targeted sectors	• Masterclass apprentissage / CMA 76, • DynaNit / ICAM Toulouse, • Mon choix mon cap / Saveur and Co.
4. Actions involving real-life professional situations and the reinforcement of the links with the entrepreneurial world	• 100 chances, 100 emplois / ML Blois, • L'intendant / Caps 76, • PARI jeunes / Vitamine T.

The capacity of the YEI to enhance, support and spread experimentations

Social innovation is part of the social investment strategy of the European Union. Through the measures that had been adopted, the EU intends to strengthen people's skills and capacities and support them to participate fully in employment and social life[1]. However, **social innovation is not included as a priority goal of the YEI.** The only precision we can find in the national operational programme is that projects should pay a specific attention to the principle of stimulating innovation. The EU guidance documents (EU regulations, operational programs) do not specify what results are expected in terms of innovation. Innovation does not represent a priority goal for the French General Directorate for employment and vocational training[2] neither. For the DGEFP, the priority was to quickly programme the actions in order to deal with the structural unemployment. These elements had an impact on how innovation has been grasped in the frame of the YEI.

❖ *The concept of innovation considered in different ways by managing authorities and project leaders*

As a consequence of the weak structuration of the concept of "innovation", this concept has been considered in different ways by managing authorities and project leaders. The YEI has sometimes been incorporated by managing authorities as a tool to enhance the emergence and/ or consolidation of innovations but managing authorities had different practices. Some of them used the YEI as **a medium to renew practices and attract new project leaders**. However, few of them specifically mentioned innovation in their calls for projects and any of them defined what innovation is. Managing authorities mention the gap between the frame given by the calls for projects and the support for experimental or innovative projects. This can be explained by the very short time lapse left to answer the calls for projects – which was an obstacle to imagine innovative projects – but also by the imperative to programme the funds which did not encourage managing authorities to involve project leaders not familiar with the management of European funds. Nevertheless, considering the 15 project leaders met for the evaluation, **the YEI has been decisive for the creation and structuration of innovative projects** (for 9 of them out of 15). This funding has been fundamental for some projects to come true and for others to be better organized.
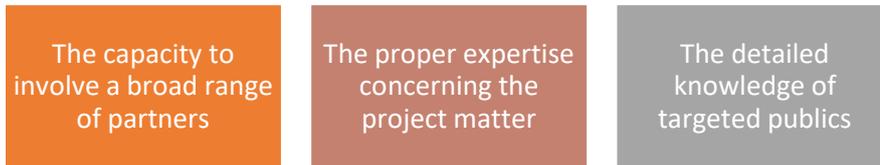
❖ *Little space for innovative projects*

According to the programming strategies scheduled by managing authorities and because other actions already existed on the territory, **innovative projects have come across some difficulties**, in particular to access young NEETs. A **competitive climate** between the studied projects and other projects targeting the same publics, in particular the Youth Guarantee, has been identified. This competitive climate is **not specific to the studied innovative projects** but is a recurrent problem of the French policy for integration of young people. Because of this competitive climate partnerships were sometimes difficult, in particular with the Missions Locales.

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[1] Source : https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1044&langId=fr
[2] Délégation générale à l'emploi et à la formation professionnelle (DGEFP).

To increase their accessibility to young NEETs, some of the project leaders managed to create a partnership network with a broad range of partners. They worked in synergy with these partners in order to identify young NEETs who were not spotted before. Some favorable factors have been identified:

The capacity to involve a broad range of partners	The proper expertise concerning the project matter	The detailed knowledge of targeted publics

❖ *Innovative projects do not split up with the existing norms*

Among the studied projects, innovation is mainly represented through the approaches adopted by project leaders to support young people. Nevertheless, these approaches are not radically different from the existing norms but they propose some improvements (means to recruit young people, accountability and empowerment of the NEETs' regarding their individual project, intensity of the accompaniment, companies' involvement in the projects…). Some projects also take advantage of solutions from other fields (special education, sports coaching, vocational training and integration…). All in all, **these innovations can be called « incremental » and take on different forms.** The following figure presents the various forms of innovations. The attributes of innovation are frequently combined but, depending on the type of actions, they won't appear with the same intensity.
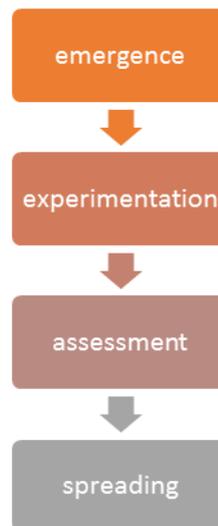
Various attributes of innovation implemented in the studied projects

❖ *A partial implementation of the social innovation process*

Most of the studied projects consisted in implementing a new experimentation or duplicating a project already experimented on another territory. However, **managing authorities and project leaders did not have a reflection on how the approach could be appropriated or diffused.** The YEI monitoring does not include expansion and efficient duplication. According to the goals set up by the European Commission, managing authorities focused on the results at the end of the projects (in terms of access to employment or VET) rather than on positive action patterns or favorable / unfavorable factors for integration (i.e.: other obstacles to access employment, capacity to work in network and legitimacy of the project leader, capacity to spot and involve young people, support from local policies…). But **the interest of innovation would be strengthened if we are able to draw useful lessons to improve actions or policies for the integration of young people**. Such a reflection on the sustainability of the projects which had proved they work well has not been launched so far.

Social innovation process

emergence

experimentation

assessment

spreading

The capacity of innovative projects funded by the YEI to spot and support young people alienated from the workplace

❖ *The heterogeneity of NEETs scarcely taken into account in the projects*

The concept of « NEET » encompasses various situations, from graduate young people who are temporally alienated from employment to young people who early dropped out of school. Young people might have been unemployed for a short or a long time, they might have renounced to search for a job, withdrawn from the labor force to care for children or deal with health problems alienating them from the workplace. **These various situations had not been taken into account in innovative or experimental projects** except for few of them – the same observation can be made for other projects planned in the frame of the YEI. Project leaders declared their project was targeting « young NEETs » but sometimes specified one age group. Only 2 out of the 15 studied projects were specifically targeting a subdivision of young NEETs (young people who have come up before the courts and newcomer young people / see category 1). Analysis of the projects' outcomes clearly show the necessity to have a detailed knowledge of the situations on which the intervention focusses in order to maximize its impact.

All in all, most of the participants involved in the studied projects are alienated from the workplace or VET. In other words, they accumulate several social difficulties holding them back from social or vocational integration. 5 projects were supporting young people who were more likely to find a job.

Projects' targets are more or less targeting specific participants and publics:
Illustration of targeting discrepancies among different projects

Mission Locale Intercommunale de Sevran Tremblay Villepinte	"Alter égaux" Association "Média" Project	Institut de l'engagement, accompagnement après un engagement des jeunes aquitains NEET dans leur parcours professionnel
• Young people who have come up before the courts.	• Low skilled / qualified young people. • Young people who were monitered by child welfare or under legal protection for youth and minors. • Illiterate young people or early school leavers • Young people monitored by penitentiary integration and probation services. • Young people with children. • Homeless young people.	• Young people who have completing their secondary education (for most of them) • planning to enter a graduating training, to create their own business or to find a job • And who were involved in a program (i.e. : European Voluntary Service, Civil Service civique, Volunteering for International Solidarity...) and acquired an experience they can value

❖ *Detection methods should be adapted to young NEETs' peculiarities*

As for all the projects funded by the YEI (see Lot n°1 – Rapport final, KPMG – Quadrant Conseil, 2018), young NEETs' peculiarities towards employment (motivation, behavior, unfavorable factors) had not been anticipated enough. As a result, this could have emphasized recruiting difficulties and sometimes led to adapt the detection and supporting methods initially imagined. These adaptations sometimes led to innovative processes but were not valorized in the YEI monitoring (they were not funded). Capitalization from these experiences would be a great contribution to the policy for integration of young people.

Only one-half of the project leaders implemented an innovative and proactive approach to detect young NEETs combining field actions and a partnership detection method using a vast range of media. For the second half, this dimension was not included and detection was essentially realized by the Missions Locales and partner from employment services. When the detecting process was not efficient enough, some slight innovations emerged.

A proactive approach to detect NEETs: 6 projects	An evolution of the detection dimension during the implementation: 2 projects	A detection process not anticipated enough: 7 projets
• Proactivity from the project leader • Partenarial detection based on several media • Field actions • **Innovative approach**	• Pragmatic approach to face recruiting difficulties • Young people designed as ambassadors, « move torwards » approach… • **Slight innovations**	• Traditional detection (Missions Locales ; employment services) • **Not innovative**

The capacity of innovative projects funded by the YEI to implement efficient approaches

❖ *Positive exit rates fluctuating according to the initial situation of the young NEETs*

Projects targeting young people more likely to find a job ensure better outcomes in terms of positive exit rates than the average projects funded by the YEI. Most of the time, these young people take advantage of a better social environment and their self-esteem and self-confidence are more developed. At the opposite, projects targeting young people alienated from the workplace show fluctuating outcomes from the one to the other in terms of positive exit rates: some projects get considerably better outcomes than the average while other get average outcomes. **The declared outcomes significantly vary depending on the initial situation of the participants**. With a similar positive exit rate, we can notice that young people more likely to find a job will tend to access a job at the end of the action while young people alienated from the workplace are more likely to find a VET solution.

❖ *Proximity with the entrepreneurial world and companies: an efficient factor for the implemented approaches*

Outcomes will also depend on approaches adopted by project leaders. Some interventions particularly fit with the needs of young people more likely to find a job while they show limits for young people alienated from the workplace. Two kinds of approaches ensuring good outcomes whatever the initial situation of the NEET can be identified:

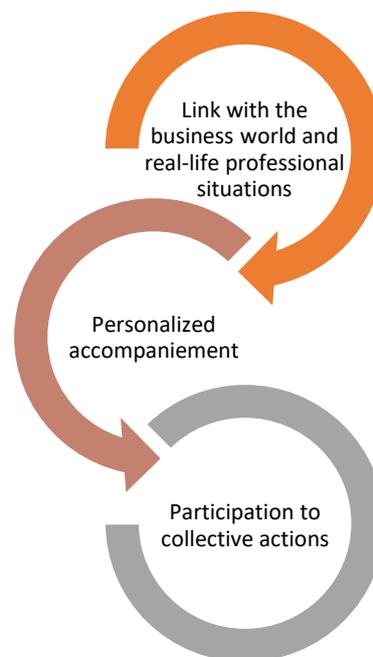| Projects focusing on learning the specific skills of a profession	Projects relying on the reinforcement of the links with the business world
• For young people alienated from the workplace • These projects set up a quality framework and important dedicated ressources • These projects imply an upstream work on the NEET's project to match with his vocational ambitions	• Efficient for young people alienated or young people more likely to find a job • They offer the possibility to multiply concrete experiences and real-life professional situations

For some young people, it is sometimes necessary to combine these approaches with an individualized accompaniment focusing on the removal of other obstacles. However, most of the time the accompaniment during the first months of employment or VET is not effective even though it has been proved that the continuity of the support during the first months of work or training is very efficient to secure career paths.

❖ *Positive outcomes in terms of motivation, acquisition of self-confidence and networking*

Among the main positive outcomes identified by young people met during the case-studies, several dimensions are recurring: **the link with companies or professionals, an individualized and reinforced support** which allows a trusting relationship with the adviser, adapted to the participant's needs, and **collective actions**. The combination of these three dimensions seems to emphasize positive social and vocational integration for the participants.

Link with the business world and real-life professional situations

Personalized accompaniement

Participation to collective actions

❖ *A broad range of partners and the structuration of partnerships as favorable factors for innovation and the projects' success*

Most of the studied projects had developed a partnership network even if this network was more or less effective. These partnerships deal with 3 dimensions:

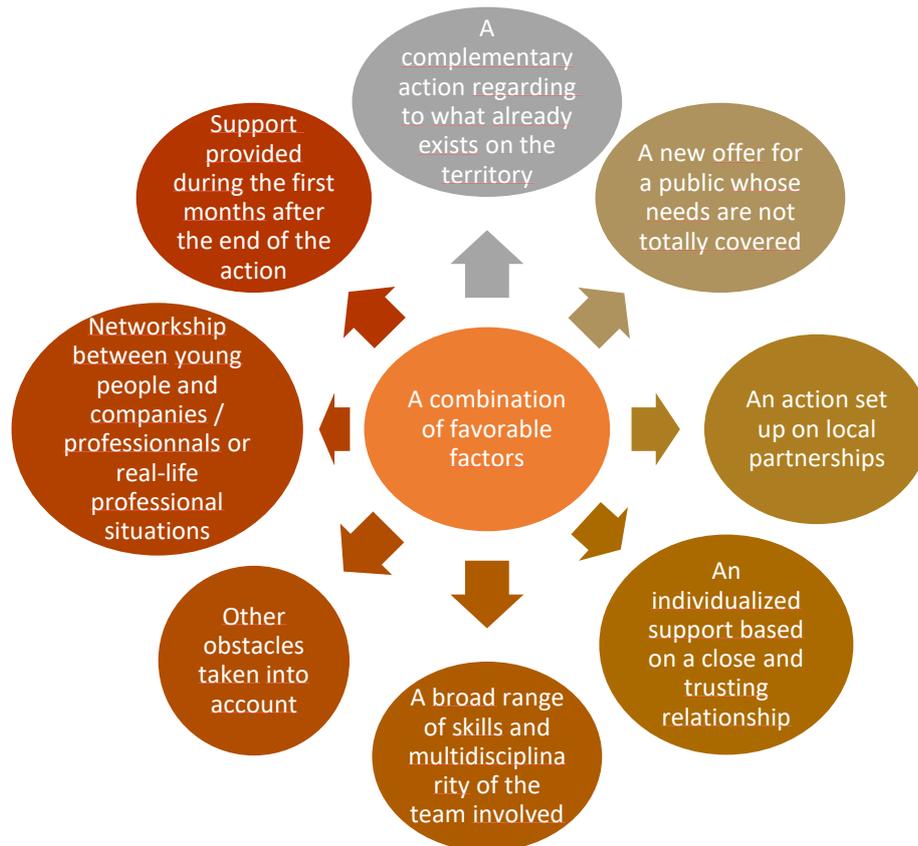| The use of other actors' skills and capacities	Partners who can potentielly direct young people towards the project	Partners from training organizations or companies for real-life professional situations

Partnerships with companies and the business world were particularly efficient for the success of innovative projects.

❖ *A combination of favorable factors for the success of innovative projects*

All in all, we can identify a combination of favorable factors for the success of innovative projects. These favorable factors rely on the specific approaches to support young people but also on other dimensions - which have sometimes been disregarded by some project leaders or managing authorities during the projects' appraisal - such as their position on the territory where they are located (inclusion in the local partnership network, capacity to bring an offer for uncovered needs, complementarity with what already exists…). The following figure presents the different favorable factors.

A combination of favorable factors for the projects' success

❖ *The future of the YEI projects: the necessity to draw lessons from the experience*

Among the studied projects, some of them will continue even though their results were limited while others won't last or will be reduced even if they appeared to be efficient. Thus, some of **the gains that could have been capitalized will be lost. This loss will minimize the YEI efficiency** and the strong commitment and important financial resources invested. Possibilities to sustain or duplicate the projects will depend on the project leaders' capacities to demonstrate the efficiency of their project and to find other stable sources of funding. It will also depend on orientations adopted by the managing authorities. However, the consideration of the lessons drawn from innovative projects by the managing authorities seems to be limited. It does not permit to constitute a basis for a more global reflection on changes that should be brought to integration policies. Projects leaders whose action has proved its interest could feel relatively isolated to value their project while it should have been interesting to diffuse their project to other operators. **The duplication of projects to a larger scale and other territories where project leaders are not active yet is still an issue at stake.**