

# IS 2022 THE EUROPEAN YEAR OF YOUTH FOR REAL?

*Labour market participation of young people in the EU during the post-covid era: facts and challenges*

---

Author: Alessandra Frassetto

---

## INDEX

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	3
<b>I. SETTING THE CONTEXT</b> .....	4
I.I Youth labour market participation before and after Covid-19 .....	4
I.II EU policy background .....	5
<b>II. TRENDS AND CHALLENGES OF THE CURRENT LABOUR MARKET</b> .....	8
II.I Youth transitions to employment and the role of education .....	8
II.II Skills and training .....	8
II.III Young people in NEET situation .....	11
<b>III. A GLANCE TO THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN YOUTH</b> .....	13
<b>SOURCES</b> .....	15



## ABSTRACT

Covid-19 crisis appeared to have revolutionized employers and employees' working lives, leading to systemic changes, both positive and negative. In particular, the pandemic severely affected the labour market around the world impacting on young people more than other age groups. This paper is focused on present and future generations. Young workers, young students, recent graduates, young people in NEET<sup>1</sup> situation and vulnerable ones: the employment losses they faced translated into a long-term inactivity since the pandemic outbreak in 2020. Data speaks out: according to the International Labour Organization, the global employment loss between 2019 and 2020 was estimated at 8.7% for young people, compared with 3.7% for adults. This short paper will set out the EU policy context in the framework of 2022, which has been designated by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen as the European Year of Youth:

*"[...] From climate to social to digital, young people are at the heart of our policymaking and political priorities. We vow to listen to them, as we are doing in the Conference on the Future of Europe, and we want to work together to shape the future of the European Union. A Union that is stronger if it embraces the aspirations of our young people - grounded in values and bold in action."<sup>2</sup>*

A glance to the strategies adopted at the EU level will be accompanied by evidence-based analysis about the youth labour market before and after the coronavirus pandemic. Highlights on main trends and challenges will be subsequently introduced with respect to the new labour market emerging in the post-covid era: where are these challenges to be identified? If not promptly tackled, can they be forecasted in order to be better prepared when they show up? These questions will lead us to the role education systems can play in the framework settled, taking into consideration specific aspects: skills and training, the possibility for schools and training centres to accompany students to the employment world through a labour market-oriented approach in the last stages of the education. Last but not least, attention will be also given to a critical category in the context: young people in NEET situation.

In a highly dynamic and competitive labour market, investing in people and their skills and competences is key, especially when disruptions such as the crisis emerged from COVID-19 are likely to occur. Which are the possible responses for unemployment and the future labour force? At the same time, which are the next steps in the EU-level policy framework?

---

<sup>1</sup> The acronym NEET stands for *Not in Employment, Education or Training*.

<sup>2</sup> European Commission, *Commission kick-starts work to make 2022 the European Year of Youth*, Press Release, (October 2021) [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_21\\_5226](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_5226)

## I. SETTING THE CONTEXT

### I.1. The youth labour market before and after COVID-19

An effective instrument used to understand labour market dynamics is the unemployment rate. It is an important indicator of both social and economic dimensions: for instance, a rise in unemployment normally results in a loss of income for individuals, increased pressure with respect to government spending on social benefits and a reduction in tax revenue. From an economic perspective, unemployment may be viewed as “**unused labour capacity**.”<sup>3</sup> What if this unused labour capacity has to do with young people?

The aftermath of the 2008-2013 crisis made the EU unemployment rate reaching alarming levels, soaring to even higher degrees in some Member States and revealing how vulnerable young people can be to economic recession, compared to other age groups. During that period, the overall youth unemployment rate amounted to 40% in many EU countries, hitting young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) with a share of 16% of the entire EU population aged 15-29 in the EU. Therefore, it is intuitively understandable how this scenario led to economic and social disruptions, cutting youth outside the labour market and education, with a loss costing €53 billion a year.<sup>4</sup> With the COVID-19 pandemic, discrepancies and inequalities were encountered in both the education and employment areas, being strictly interconnected. Those who were in education or training at the time of the pandemic saw their schooling interrupted, often needing to catch up, while recent graduates not always found employment. Furthermore, many of those who were in employment experienced a job loss. If compared, the 2008-2013 and the pandemic crisis appear to present some similarities in trends: is history repeating itself? To what extent the pandemic affected young people and which have been the most effective solutions? Can existing measures being further reinforced to give a boost to the economic and social recovery? Before providing answers to these questions, it can be appropriate to briefly investigate and compare the labour market setting in the pre- and post-covid era, relying on scientific evidence.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) identified three main reasons in relation to the issue at stake, two of which are essential for our assessment:

- Young people constitute a relevant segment of all new job seekers.
- Young people are easier and cheaper to fire and are to be found in less protected forms of employment or in general terms of social protection measures.<sup>5</sup>

Youth is that portion of population that has been hit the hardest by the 2008 economic and financial crisis with the unemployment rate of people under 25 in the EU peaking at almost 25% in early 2013 and levels of more than 50% in Greece and Spain. This trend had

<sup>3</sup> Eurostat, *Unemployment statistics*, (March 2022) [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Unemployment\\_statistics#Youth\\_unemployment](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Unemployment_statistics#Youth_unemployment)

<sup>4</sup> M. Mascherini, E. Sándor, *Is history repeating itself? The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on youth*, Eurofound, (May 2020) <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/blog/is-history-repeating-itself-the-impact-of-the-covid-19-crisis-on-youth>

<sup>5</sup> International Labour Organization, *An update on the youth labour market impact of the COVID-19 crisis*, (June 2021) [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_emp/documents/briefingnote/wcms\\_795479.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/briefingnote/wcms_795479.pdf)

dropped to a record low of around 14% in 2019, but the coronavirus pandemic pushed it up to 18.2% in 2021. However, slight signs of improvement have been recently observed, with youth unemployment down to 17.3% in May 2021.

Youth unemployment rates, EU and EA, seasonally adjusted, January 2008 - April 2022

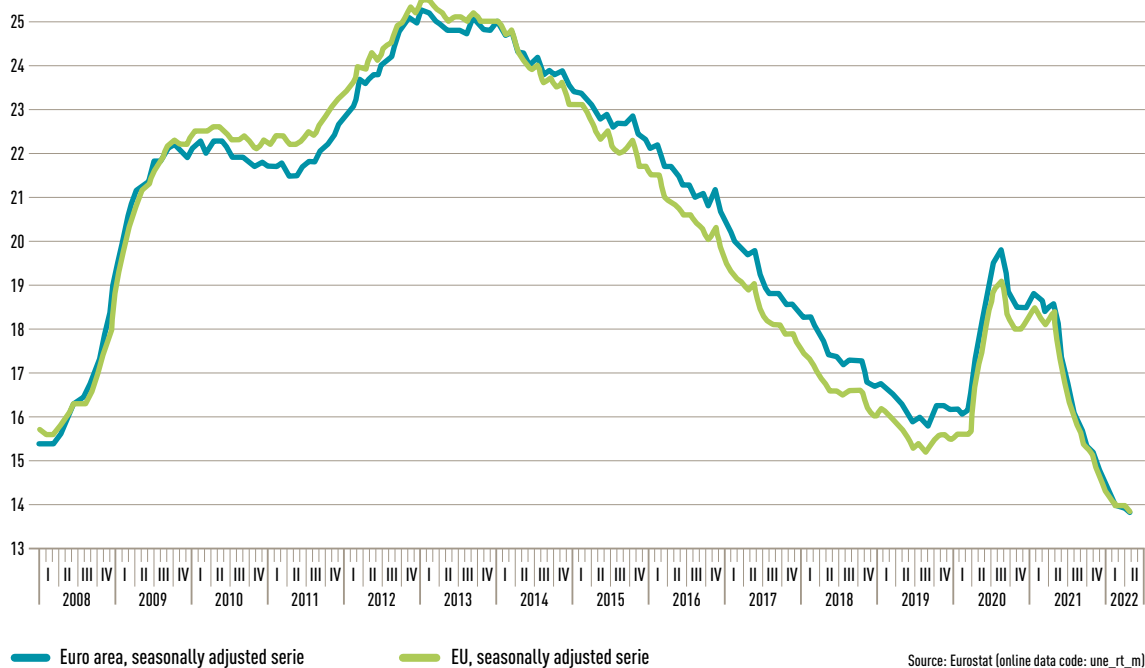


Figure 1: Eurostat, Youth unemployment statistics, April 2022

As the graph above shows, in April 2022, the youth unemployment rate was 13.9 % both in the EU and in the euro area: compared with the previous year, youth unemployment decreased by 685 thousand units in the EU and by 555 thousand in the euro area.

## I.II. EU policy background

When it comes to unemployment, adult people can normally benefit from social protection measures at national level in order to avoid experiencing social exclusion and reach extreme poverty conditions, or at least to mitigate the negative impact. In the case of young people, having access to financial support for unemployment or for being outside the labour market is of vital importance not only for their wellbeing, but especially for their future and independency. Unemployment benefits are usually the most common means designed to provide income support, taking the form of unemployment insurance or unemployment assistance, with eligibility conditions varying across countries and reflecting into a lack of policy harmonization at the EU level. Moreover, unemployment assistance generally tends to be lower than of unemployment insurance and also being means-tested for ineligible individuals or for those not entitled to other forms of benefits.

One of the main obstacles to the obtainment of unemployment benefits is to be found in the requirement to have collected previous work history, which makes it difficult for young people with little or no work experience to gain access. Other related issues regard:

- The link between the duration of the benefit and the amount of time over which contributions have been paid.
- Benefits being often calculated on previous earnings on one side and the concentration of young people in low-paid jobs (if not in undeclared work).
- The receipt of unemployment benefits usually subject to strict conditions.
- Complexity of applicable rules, stricter rules for self-employed, difficulty in accessing information etc.<sup>6</sup>

Although employment and youth policies are under the responsibility in the hands of Member States, numerous and well documented initiatives have been launched at the EU level with the aim to complement national policies and contribute to the creation of a more *social Europe*. This support has to do with funding youth employment programmes, the improvement of quality of training and apprenticeships, education, job opportunities and volunteering projects.

Here follow some of the EU-level concrete initiatives for pushing youth employment and protection:

- **Youth Employment Support Package** consisting of:
  - A **reinforced Youth Guarantee**: launched in 2013, “the Youth Guarantee aims to ensuring people under the age of 25 get a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education”.<sup>7</sup> The Reinforced Youth Guarantee was launched in 2020. It covers young people aged 15-29 (raising the limit previously set at 25) and foresees the inclusion of vulnerable groups, such as minorities and young people with disabilities, the provision of tailored counselling, guidance and mentoring and the reflection on the needs of companies, providing skills required and short preparatory courses.
  - Improved vocational education and training
  - Renewed impetus for apprenticeships
  - Additional measures to support youth employment
- The **Youth Employment Initiative**: the EU’s tool designed for helping finance measures and programmes put in place by EU countries to carry out Youth Guarantee schemes, such as training, assistance for job seeking together with incentives for employers. In particular, this initiative supports EU regions where youth unemployment rate is above 25%.<sup>8</sup>
- **EU Skills Agenda**: a five-year plan to help individuals and businesses develop more and better skills and to put them to use.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> D. Ghailani, R. Peña-Casas, P. Ragazzoni, *Access to social protection for young people. An analysis of policies in 35 countries*, European Social Policy Network (ESPN), European Commission, (2021), pp.30-32, See <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1135>

<sup>7</sup> European Parliament, *Covid-19: how the EU fights youth unemployment*, (October 2020) <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20200709STO83004/covid-19-how-the-eu-fights-youth-unemployment>

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>9</sup> European Commission, *European Skills Agenda*, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223#:~:text=The%20European%20Skills%20Agenda%20is,in%20the%20European%20Green%20Deal>

- The establishment of a **European Education Area**: with its formal creation in 2017 and the first packages of measures adopted in 2018, the EEA aims at building a more resilient and inclusive education and training systems in the framework of the *European Pillar of Social Rights*.<sup>10</sup>
  - **International opportunities** such as:
  - **Erasmus+ programme**
  - **European Solidarity Corps**<sup>11</sup>
  - **ALMA (Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve)**: the brand new initiative launched by the European Commission to be formally implemented in the months to come, aiming at offering disadvantaged young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) the opportunity to embark on a work-related learning experience in another EU Member State.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> European Commission, *European Education Area explained*, <https://education.ec.europa.eu/about/eea-explained>

<sup>11</sup> See [https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity/mission\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity/mission_en)

<sup>12</sup> Read more about the ALMA initiative <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1549&langId=en>

## II. HIGHLIGHTS OF TRENDS AND CHALLENGES OF THE CURRENT LABOUR MARKET

### II.I. Youth transitions to employment and the role of education

A general decline in labour market engagement among young people is also partly due to the fact that young people spend more years in education compared to previous generations, which helps ensuring that the future labour force will be better skilled and capable to adapt to transformations the world of work is bringing about by modern technologies. At the same time, shortcomings concerning the issue at stake can be identified, beyond policy-related issues, in specific areas of our societies such as the education system in general. Figures on youth unemployment show that in some national contexts, current education systems appear not to adequately prepare young people for the future (often due to lack of resources or projects implementation), especially when it comes to make the jump into the employment world. It is important that an institution like the school makes sure that the transition from education to work is smooth and also able to highlight the risks of being neither in employment nor in education or training, thus intervening at an earlier stage: how? Or rather, how to avoid the majority of the young population falling into a situation of labour market exclusion? Education (schools, vocational education and training centres, universities etc.) must be observed as a **multifaceted** and **multifunctional system**, beyond its role of provider of general knowledge and hard skills. It must function as **promoter of integral human development** of the young persons, preparing them to **participate** and **actively contribute to life in society and democracy**. In doing so, in order to avoid triggering frustration, discouragement and subsequent disengagement among youth, education systems should be better equipped to establish solid connections with the labour markets: job placement offices, tutoring and mentoring and targeted initiatives such as seminars, job fairs and skills assessment can serve as effective instruments in the hands of education systems and its stakeholders.

### II.II. Skills and training

“The persistently high share of young people who are neither in employment nor in education or training in the EU may mean that employers recruiting in EU labour markets have a wide choice of potential candidates, although the high share may reflect labour market mismatches, for example geographically or in terms of skills. Some employers criticise the **lack of basic skills** that some young people have when they leave the education system, as well as their under-developed life skills (**communication** and **presentational skills, ability to work in a team, problem-solving skills**), or their lack of work experience and knowledge in relation to their chosen profession. With a surplus of labour, employers may prefer to recruit young people who have completed a tertiary level of education or an apprenticeship.”

Eurostat, *Statistics on young people neither in employment nor in education or training* (May 2022)



In highly dynamic and competitive current labour markets, investing in people's skills and competences is undoubtedly a key priority. But which skills and for which jobs? This question is central in national, European and international debates. **Adjusting** and **anticipating changes** that affect our economies and societies and, therefore the labour market, is of the outmost importance for policy makers today.

Skills and training are two critical aspects walking hand-in-hand and complementing each other in both employment and education. Current education systems appear to be lacking in training experience to be offered in curricula: deficiency of skills and training will come with a consequent mismatch between demand and supply in the labour market. Notably, a gap has been identified between what enterprises demand and what the labour market is capable to offer.

In this perspective, it is to be positively welcomed the series of recommendations emerged by the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) that concluded on 9th May 2022. In the European Citizens' Panel 1 Recommendations "*Stronger economy, social justice and jobs / Education, culture, youth and sport / Digital transformation*" skills and training have been mentioned several times, providing wide room for reflecting on possible solutions:

- **Soft skills:** also conceived as *individual skills*<sup>13</sup>, CoFoE recommendations highlighted the need to have soft skills integrated in all the courses in curricula in schools, with the added value of a possible cooperation with social workers and psychologists and the organization of cultural and extra-curricular event such as exchanges. Moreover, we should start to conceive soft skills as, first of all, *basic skills* to be complemented with the digital ones. Secondly, in the perspective of a social Europe, they should be seen as a mean to combat and prevent mental issues on one side and mutual understanding and inclusion on the other, fostering the thinking from the perspective of the others.
- **Digital skills:** schools, VET centres and universities must provide digital training to be boosted with skills assessment and official certifications recognized in the EU. At the same time, guaranteeing at the EU level specific digital training aimed at **up-skilling** and **re-skilling** both for newcomers in the world of employment and for workers to remain competitive in the labour market.<sup>14</sup>
- **Green skills:** Cedefop defined in 2012 green skills as "the knowledge, abilities, values and attitudes needed to live in, develop and support a sustainable and resource-efficient society"<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, it also identified the needs for educational institutions and firms to gear up to provide new skills for the new occupations and sectors emerging from the green economy, retraining and realigning skills in sectors that will decline as a result.<sup>16</sup>
- Future-proof jobs and skills training for the green and energy transition are among the benefits identified by the **European Green Deal** (EGD). More specifically, it is the **European Climate Pact** (launched by the European Commission and part of the EGD itself) that is helping the EU to meet its goal to be the first climate-neutral

<sup>13</sup> Referred in the recommendations as *critical thinking, result-oriented, dialogue, resilience* etc.

<sup>14</sup> Conference on the Future of Europe, European Citizens' Panel 1: "Stronger economy, social justice and jobs / Education, culture, youth and sport / Digital transformation" Recommendations (2021)

<sup>15</sup> OECD & CEDEFOP, *Greener Skills and Jobs – Highlights*, (n.d. no date) [https://www.oecd.org/cfe/lead/Greener%20skills\\_Highlights%20WEB.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/cfe/lead/Greener%20skills_Highlights%20WEB.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*

continent in the world by 2050: this transition towards climate-neutrality requires fundamental changes in a wide range of sectors and usually at a grassroots level. In fact, the green transition foresees the **creation of new jobs** and the replacement and redefinition of others through the **promotion and support of green employment**, the **skilling and reskilling of workers** and the ability to anticipate changes in workplaces of the future. In this sense, the European Climate Pact needs to encourage businesses, organisations, stakeholders and local authorities to get involved in existing EU programs and initiatives with the aim to:

- **Support programmes for education institutions seeking to develop courses on environmental and climate impacts.**
- **Train teachers, bridge education with science, develop green skills and competences, raise awareness, and change behaviours, through the Education for Climate Coalition.**
- **Link up with the Erasmus+ and other similar programmes with the aim to provide opportunities to develop green skills and partnership projects.**
- **Promote the active inclusion of jobseekers through the Just Transition Mechanism.**

As pointed out in the first section of the paper, during the coronavirus pandemic young people not only experienced interruption in schooling, but also in training, with traineeships offers completely frozen due to economic damages within enterprises and general restrictions for the containment of the virus. Together with digital skills concerns, reflections emerged with respect to the necessity of ensuring quality training resilient enough to overcome future crisis.

Throughout the Conference on the Future of Europe citizens spoke out:

*“We recommend that in case of a serious crisis (e.g. health crisis, war, etc.) well prepared plans with detailed scenarios are ready to deploy in a flexible way to minimise the impact on our youngsters in their studies, vocational training, mental wellbeing etc. By impact we mean: higher cost of studying or training, obliged prolongation of studies, internships that could not be carried out, increase of mental health problems. The scripts have to be rolled out to minimise the impact on youngsters and their transition to the labour market.*

*We recommend this because the position of the youngsters is very vulnerable in times of crisis.”*

Conference on the Future of Europe, European Citizens’ Panel 1:  
“Stronger economy, social justice and jobs / Education, culture, youth and sport / Digital transformation” Recommendations (2021)

In a nutshell, education systems should take bolder action for promoting and guaranteeing quality trainings striving for:

- equip the students with a hands-on practical experience aimed at complementing theoretical knowledge with practical transversal skills and competences so that they will have a solid basis entering the labour market.
- Provide an overview about future career prospects, with the objective to understand which is the future path they will walk through in terms of studies continuation or employment.

### II.III. Young people in NEET situation

We previously acknowledged that statistics for employment and unemployment have traditionally been used to describe labour markets dynamics, providing data on people who have jobs and those who are actively looking for one. However, when it comes to labour market participation of young people, we must take into account the distinction between:

- a substantial portion of young people still involved in the education system (school, college, university, other higher education establishment or training).
- a group of young people **neither in employment** (unemployed or outside the labour force), **nor in education or training**.

The acronym NEET stands for *not in employment, education or training* and is a concept that allowed policy makers to better address the disjunction between young people and the labour market, focusing on all those who find themselves outside of it and also capturing the modern school-to-work transition. More specifically, these young people may be subdivided into those who are actively looking for job opportunities and those who do not have a job, not actively seeking it (often owing to discouragement or because of ongoing studies completion). At the same time, NEET is a broad category that includes a heterogeneous population made up of both vulnerable and non-vulnerable young people that often experience disadvantages such as **low level of education, poverty, difficult family background** etc.<sup>17</sup>

Young people (aged 15-29) neither in employment nor in education and training, by sex, 2021

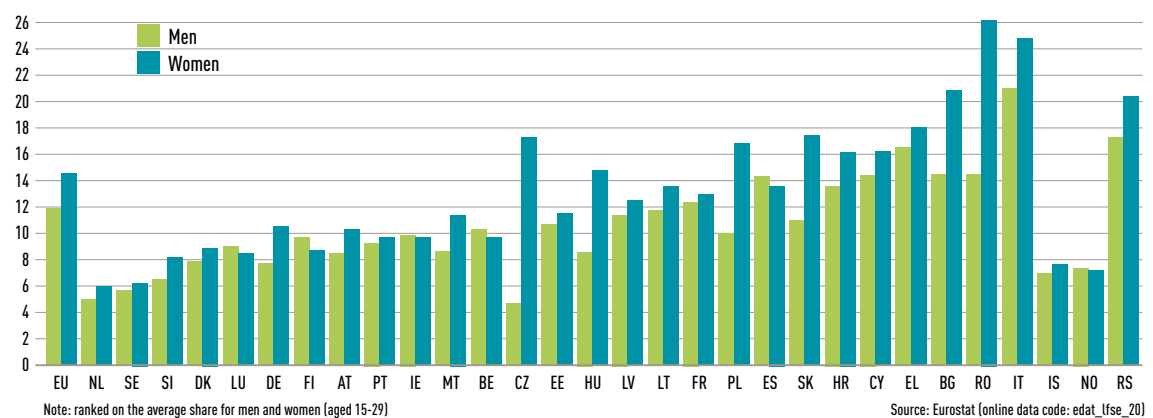


Figure 2: Eurostat, *Statistics on young people neither unemployment nor in education or training, May 2022*

According to Eurostat, in 2021 an average of 13,1% of young people in the EU aged between 15-29 was neither in employment, education and training. As the above graph suggests, picks of NEETs presence are registered in countries such as Italy (23,1%), Romania (20,45%) and Bulgaria (17,7%), whereas the most performing countries appear to be the Netherlands (5,5%) followed by Sweden Slovenia and so on. An alarming data is provided by Czech Republic, where a massive gap between men and women in NEET situation is displayed, respectively amounting to 4,8% and 17,3%.

As previously mentioned, young people in NEET situation often find themselves experiencing disadvantages such as low level of education, among others. The educational attainment

<sup>17</sup> Eurofound, *Who are the NEETs?*, (2017) <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/it/news/news-articles/who-are-the-neets>

is an aspect that Eurostat investigated as a parameter that potentially affects the share of young people in NEET situation in the EU. Therefore, three distinct levels of educational attainment were considered:

- **low level of education** (less than primary, primary or lower secondary level): ranging from 6.4 % of NEET presence in Sweden to 32.7 % in Romania in 2021.
- **medium level of education** (upper secondary or post-secondary): ranging from 4.2 % of NEETs in the Netherlands up to a peak of 24.9 % in Italy.
- **high level of education** (tertiary education): the lowest share of NEETs was 3.1 % in the Netherlands but a value as high as 26.8 % was reported in Greece.<sup>18</sup>

The heterogeneity of these trends is explained by the fact that education is an area of competence in the hands of national governments, leading to a lack of harmonization in policies related to school dropout or early school leaving, for instance.

To conclude, we can reflect on two EU-wide phenomena:

- **Early school leaving:** according to Eurostat, “in 2021 the distribution between different labour market outcomes was as follows: 42.3 % of all early leavers were in employment, while 34.0 % were not employed but wanted to work, and the remaining 23.7 % were not employed and did not want to work.”<sup>19</sup> Early school leaving is an indicator that tells a lot about the socioeconomic context of a given geographic area, with a scenario which is usually twofold. In most difficult geographic areas (Southern regions of Italy and Spain, Greece, Eastern Europe countries), young people tend to abandon school to cope with economic-related necessities within their households. On the other hand, in high-income countries early school leaving can be explained by the fact that the national labour market offers more possibilities to start collecting working history.
- **Brain drain:** it refers to a socioeconomic phenomenon implying **the emigration of educated or professional individuals towards countries able of ensuring professional opportunities, higher salaries and better living conditions.** Exclusion from the national labour market usually spills over brain drain, with consequent socioeconomic and demographic disruptions in the countries left by those young people.

The out-migration of young graduates or highly educated workforce is determined also by the growing competition for talent and the limited capacity of national, regional and local contexts to create attractive conditions for young workers and future ones. Once again, local and regional authorities have to cope directly with the socio-economic effects caused by the significant loss of talent. Addressing these effects may require the formulation of appropriate policies and/or measures to retain, attract, or regain a highly educated workforce.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Eurostat, *Statistics on young people neither in employment nor in education or training*, (May 2022) [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Statistics\\_on\\_young\\_people\\_neither\\_in\\_employment\\_nor\\_in\\_education\\_or\\_training#To\\_what\\_extent\\_are\\_young\\_adults\\_neither\\_in\\_employment\\_nor\\_in\\_education\\_or\\_training.3F\\_The\\_transition\\_from\\_education\\_to\\_work](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Statistics_on_young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_or_training#To_what_extent_are_young_adults_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_or_training.3F_The_transition_from_education_to_work)

<sup>19</sup> Eurostat, *Early leavers from education and training*, (May 2022), [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Early\\_leavers\\_from\\_education\\_and\\_training#Do\\_early\\_leavers\\_have\\_a\\_job.3F\\_Analysis\\_by\\_the\\_individual.E2.80.99s\\_labour\\_status](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Early_leavers_from_education_and_training#Do_early_leavers_have_a_job.3F_Analysis_by_the_individual.E2.80.99s_labour_status)

<sup>20</sup> European Committee of the Regions, *Addressing brain drain: the local and regional dimension* (2018) <https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/studies/Documents/addressing-brain-drain/addressing-brain-drain.pdf>

### III. A GLANCE INTO THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN YOUTH

Looking at the general context, the first semester of the European Year of Youth we left behind witnessed to the conclusion of the French Presidency at the Council of the European Union and the inauguration of the Czech Presidency. Moreover, some concrete outputs have been produced: the conclusion of the **Conference on the Future of Europe** marked this first half of year with a very promising deliberative initiative, with the Citizens' Panels that provided an opportunity to reflect on some important challenges from a perspective closer to the needs of the European population. However, these panels can't be expected to simply replace the unique role of civil society organizations in the governance of the EU.

The title of this short research paper was intended to trigger a questioning mechanism on what are the challenges related to the scarcity of young people's participation to the European labour market and how Europe is showing itself resilient in its response. In light of what we understood being a deep-rooted problem in plenty of our societies, the serious intention to reach out to all groups of European youth, from the least to the most vulnerable, must be recognized.

As a matter of fact, the **ALMA programme** strives to be the strongest signal that will contribute to the *social Europe*, designed especially for young people in NEET situation. The formal implementation of ALMA is still on progress and what we know so far is that the programme will strive to help the most vulnerable young people to emerge from their conditions through a result-oriented approach: gaining experience and entering the labour market will be the final objectives. Despite the ambition of ALMA, we may ask ourselves to what extent young people in NEET situation or from vulnerable background are willing to take over the opportunities offered by the initiative. Following the remarks addressed by the organized civil society, many of these young people not only lack in familiarity with other countries' languages, but in most of the cases also possess a basic knowledge of their own mother-tongue, together with other obstacles that may emerge, for instance, of relational nature and so on. Moreover, if on the one hand ALMA is aimed at supporting professional mobility within the EU, on the other one it must be taken into account the risk of further fostering "brain drain" – as assessed previously – with a subsequent exacerbation of territorial inequalities in the EU (i.e. North-South and East-West gap). In light of these possible *side effects*, an impact assessment before and after the policy implementation and an ongoing monitoring process of mobility flows may be both functioning solutions in order provide EU decision-makers with data supporting measures aimed at tackling socioeconomic and demographic inequalities.

*Good news:* the European Union is already working on a similar mechanism and it bears the name of **EU Youth Test**. It consists of **an impact assessment tool that will ensure that young people are taken into consideration during policy-making processes within the European Union**, identifying any mitigation measure necessary to avoid negative impacts. Moreover, the Youth Test will enable the EU to create **better targeted and impactful policies**, work **to reduce inequality gaps** and **support current and future generations**. **Youth mainstreaming in all policies is one of the four key objectives of the European Year of Youth and the aim of the EU Youth Strategy**, the framework for EU youth policy cooperation for 2019-2027 fostering youth participation in democratic life,

supporting social and civic engagement and aiming to ensure that all young people have the necessary resources to take part in society.

The EU policies and initiatives developed at the EU level in occasion of the European Year of Youth must be positively welcomed as a bold signal of commitment for present and future generations of young people: the European Year of Youth can simply be **the point of departure of a long-lasting legacy**.

In light of the challenges and concerns previously identified, what follows is a non-exhaustive **list of recommendations** for a fruitful conclusion of this European Year of Youth:

- EU institutions should firmly encourage Member States to **reduce generational inequalities** in income, social protection and employment at national level through the implementation or reinforcement of social protection measures and taking into consideration needs and characteristics of various subgroups within the young population.
- In relation to the above recommendation, with the aim to reach a more harmonized scenario, EU institutions should address harder efforts to **reduce territorial inequalities between EU countries** in terms of youth unemployment.
- **Make greater use of modern digital technologies**, especially by formal education systems, so that **to create opportunities to strengthen employment services** and job matching, to better cope with the demands of the digital economy and the evolving labour market needs.
- In the framework of the EU-level strategies designed for the youth sector, **make sure that young people are included in the social dialogue**.

## SOURCES

Conference on the Future of Europe, European Citizens' Panel 1: "Stronger economy, social justice and jobs / Education, culture, youth and sport / Digital transformation" Recommendations (2021) [https://prod-cofe-platform.s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/0xvp06devg9rgh6orpt3oz3sk5x6?response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3D%22Panel%201%20-%20Recommendations\\_Final%2028%20%2022.pdf%22%3B%20filename%2A%3DUTF-8%27%27Panel%25201%2520-%2520Recommendations\\_Final%252028%25202%252022.pdf&response-content-type=application%2Fpdf&X-Amz-Algorithm=AWS4-HMAC-SHA256&X-Amz-Credential=AKIA3LJJXGZPDFYVOW5V%2F20220705%2Feu-central-1%2Fs3%2Faws4\\_request&X-Amz-Date=20220705T093304Z&X-Amz-Expires=300&X-Amz-SignedHeaders=host&X-Amz-Signature=ff07a919ce76e97878af7385e11371b2c9f47c7c31408462cb88ac7c9b395320](https://prod-cofe-platform.s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/0xvp06devg9rgh6orpt3oz3sk5x6?response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3D%22Panel%201%20-%20Recommendations_Final%2028%20%2022.pdf%22%3B%20filename%2A%3DUTF-8%27%27Panel%25201%2520-%2520Recommendations_Final%252028%25202%252022.pdf&response-content-type=application%2Fpdf&X-Amz-Algorithm=AWS4-HMAC-SHA256&X-Amz-Credential=AKIA3LJJXGZPDFYVOW5V%2F20220705%2Feu-central-1%2Fs3%2Faws4_request&X-Amz-Date=20220705T093304Z&X-Amz-Expires=300&X-Amz-SignedHeaders=host&X-Amz-Signature=ff07a919ce76e97878af7385e11371b2c9f47c7c31408462cb88ac7c9b395320)

Eurofound, *Who are the NEETs?*, (2017) <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/it/news/news-articles/who-are-the-neets>

European Commission, *Commission kick-starts work to make 2022 the European Year of Youth*, Press Release, (October 2021) [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_21\\_5226](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_5226)

European Commission, *European Education Area explained* <https://education.ec.europa.eu/about/eea-explained>

European Commission, *European Skills Agenda*, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223#:~:text=The%20European%20Skills%20Agenda%20is,in%20the%20European%20Green%20Deal>

European Commission, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1549&langId=en>

European Committee of the Regions, *Addressing brain drain: the local and regional dimension* (2018) <https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/studies/Documents/addressing-brain-drain/addressing-brain-drain.pdf>

European Parliament, *Covid-19: how the EU fights youth unemployment*, (October 2020) <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20200709STO83004/covid-19-how-the-eu-fights-youth-unemployment>

European Union, [https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity/mission\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity/mission_en)

Eurostat, *Early leavers from education and training*, (May 2022) [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Early\\_leavers\\_from\\_education\\_and\\_training#Do\\_early\\_leavers\\_have\\_a\\_job.3F\\_Analysis\\_by\\_the\\_individual.E2.80.99s\\_labour\\_status](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Early_leavers_from_education_and_training#Do_early_leavers_have_a_job.3F_Analysis_by_the_individual.E2.80.99s_labour_status)

Eurostat, *Statistics on young people neither in employment nor in education or training*, (May 2022) [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Statistics\\_on\\_young\\_people\\_neither\\_in\\_employment\\_nor\\_in\\_education\\_or\\_training#To\\_what\\_extent\\_are\\_young\\_adults\\_neither\\_in\\_employment\\_nor\\_in\\_education\\_or\\_training.3F\\_The\\_transition\\_from\\_education\\_to\\_work](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Statistics_on_young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_or_training#To_what_extent_are_young_adults_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_or_training.3F_The_transition_from_education_to_work)

Eurostat, *Unemployment statistics*, (March 2022) [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Unemployment\\_statistics#Youth\\_unemployment](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Unemployment_statistics#Youth_unemployment)

Ghailani D., Peña-Casas R., Ragazzoni P., *Access to social protection for young people. An analysis of policies in 35 countries*, European Social Policy Network (ESPN), European Commission, (2021), pp.30-32, See <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1135>

International Labour Organization, *An update on the youth labour market impact of the COVID-19 crisis*, (June 2021) [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_emp/documents/briefingnote/wcms\\_795479.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/briefingnote/wcms_795479.pdf)

Mascherini M., Sándor E., *Is history repeating itself? The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on youth*, Eurofound, (May 2020) <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/blog/is-history-repeating-itself-the-impact-of-the-covid-19-crisis-on-youth>

OECD & CEDEFOP, *Greener Skills and Jobs – Highlights*, (n.d. no date) [https://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/Greener%20skills\\_Highlights%20WEB.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/Greener%20skills_Highlights%20WEB.pdf)





**DBI**  
DON BOSCO  
INTERNATIONAL