

# Social inclusion of young people

## Executive summary

### Introduction

Since the beginning of the economic crisis in 2008, young people have experienced difficulties in gaining a foothold in the labour market. While the situation has improved in recent times, in some Member States the youth unemployment rates are still a cause for concern. As a result of the crisis, young people are now the group at highest risk of social exclusion in Europe. The disengagement of young people can have serious consequences for an individual, for society and for the economy as a whole.

This report investigates the social inclusion of young people in Europe. It first reviews the situation facing young people in Europe today and the cumulative disadvantages arising from disengagement from the labour market and education. It then goes on to explore recent EU strategies aimed at promoting the social inclusion of young people, focusing in particular on the operation of the Youth Guarantee initiative to combat youth unemployment in 10 EU Member States. Finally, the report examines several broader approaches to support social inclusion, including strands designed to promote youth empowerment and participation in society.

### Policy context

The Europe 2020 strategy commits EU Member States to lifting at least 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion. This target is now likely to be missed due to the fact that since the crisis the share of people at risk of social exclusion has increased. To tackle the worsening situation, the EU Youth Strategy 2010–2018 was developed with the objective of providing opportunities in education and the labour market and to support young people becoming active citizens. The emphasis has been on promoting youth employment as the key pathway to achieving social inclusion. In this regard, major efforts have been made by the European Commission and Member States to implement the Youth Guarantee, an umbrella policy for

fighting youth unemployment. Moreover, policymakers have started to pay more attention to the broad approach needed to address the challenge of youth unemployment and social exclusion.

### Key findings

#### **Exclusion is harmful for young people**

While young people can deal relatively well with short spells of unemployment, lasting unemployment or disengagement has a strong negative impact on their future labour market outcomes and their well-being generally. Evidence shows that the more protracted the disengagement is, the more serious are its consequences. In particular, long-term disengagement from the labour market results in financial strain and a lower level of psychological and social well-being for young people that can be long-lasting.

#### **Social inclusion through employment**

Given the high unemployment rates, Member States have emphasised concrete initiatives for reintegrating young people into the labour market, as well as for their inclusion in education and training. In this regard, the Youth Guarantee aims to provide all young people up to the age of 25 with a good quality offer within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. Evidence collected across 10 countries reveals that Member States are following their own strategies in implementing the scheme.

The need for major reforms to improve the capacity and capability of public employment services (PES) and increase the provision of apprenticeships, vocational education and training (VET) and education opportunities has arisen in many countries, as well as the need for more effective partnerships among stakeholders.

In terms of concrete measures, most countries are focusing on improving young people's school-to-work transitions and introducing dual apprenticeship systems. Greater effort is needed, however, to reach the most vulnerable age groups.

### A broader approach to social inclusion

There is a need for initiatives for social inclusion which go beyond the labour market. However, evidence from the case studies does not indicate a clear trend of growing public investment in this field. Overall, social inclusion policies include the following: community-based measures, with a focus on civic participation and community development; personalised training and life skills programmes; awareness-raising and advocacy measures with the aim of tackling structural barriers to youth inclusion; and training and capacity building for professionals working with socially excluded young people.

All these initiatives, mainly provided by non-profit organisations, feature mentoring and counselling support, volunteering and civic engagement, education and housing as the main entry points. The general tools used are based on human relations (information, counselling, capacity building), further supported by the provision of resources (financial assistance, facilities).

## Policy pointers

- A stronger focus on social inclusion is needed at EU level to help all young people to become active members of society and to facilitate easier entry into the labour market. The social investment approach is a promising starting point for this, as it affirms the principle that investing in early life stages has effects on later social outcomes.
- Regarding Youth Guarantee implementation, Member States should refrain from adopting a narrow, employment-centred approach but rather adopt a broader, holistic approach which aims to also reach those who are not job-ready and are more difficult to reintegrate.
- Major reforms are needed to implement the Youth Guarantee, including reforms to strengthen the capacities and capabilities of the PES and the absorption capacity of VET and education systems.
- For a successful Youth Guarantee, Member States need to ensure that national, regional and local actors work together in partnership. This will require time and further effort, especially in including social partners and youth organisations.
- Young people, including those currently disengaged from the labour market, are not a homogeneous group and therefore need targeted interventions. Youth Guarantee schemes previously in place in some Nordic countries have shown that a personalised approach works well.
- Sustainability of policy interventions is key for the successful integration of young people into the labour market. In the framework of the Youth Guarantee, Member States need to ensure that the opportunities created are of good quality and ultimately lead to sustainable employment.
- While significant EU funding is available for Youth Guarantee implementation through the European Social Fund and the Youth Employment Initiative, Member States also need to prioritise youth employment using national resources. Broader measures for the social inclusion of young people are affected by financial constraints also linked to fiscal consolidation and prioritising employment-related initiatives.
- Good practices promoting the broader social inclusion of young people exist but they deserve more support in terms of public investment. These initiatives are in many cases run by private non-profit actors and involve diverse partnerships. Yet, scaling up these initiatives has been challenging due to a lack of financial stability and lack of support from public authorities.
- An approach that puts much more emphasis on motivation and the active engagement of beneficiaries, as well as networks of human relations (between peers, social workers and service agencies) works better than the traditional, conditionality approach and could inspire broader social policies.
- Financial constraints are not the only obstacle to initiatives that promote active engagement. Resistance from adults and institutions can also be a challenge. Much more can be done to increase the sensitivity of policymakers and social service workers towards the participation of young people.

### Further information

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