



RESOLUTION ON YOUTH AUTONOMY AND INCLUSION

COUNCIL OF MEMBERS
/EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL
ASSEMBLY
BRUSSELS, BELGIUM, 15-16 APRIL 2016

Respect of social rights of youth

Human Rights frameworks, on both a global¹ and a European level,² guarantee that social inclusion in its various aspects, is an inalienable and universal right of all people. Nevertheless, almost one third of European youth are at risk of poverty and social exclusion.³ Some of them are not just at risk; they are already living in poverty and social exclusion. Social inclusion is about society ensuring the realisation of young people's economic and social rights. This includes the right to education, workers' rights, the right to social security and social protection, protection of and assistance to the family, the right to decent housing, to science and culture, to health, mobility, an adequate standard of living, and to participation in society⁴.

Youth inclusion as a cornerstone of economic sustainability

Ensuring that social rights of all people are fully realised is not a political choice but a constitutional task of European states. The welfare system that lies at the heart of the European social model should protect and promote the economic and social well-being of its citizens, based on the principles of equality of opportunity and public responsibility for those who are denied an adequate standard of living – ensuring no one is left behind or left out at any stage in their life.

This vision is far from being a reality at the moment. During the financial and economic crisis in Europe, inequalities in society have increased and exclusion has dramatically risen. The increase in youth unemployment has raised income inequality by 4% among all advanced economies, increasing the intergenerational divide.⁵

This has an impact on the individual but also on the welfare system as a whole. Whilst several different models exist, welfare systems across Europe in general function on a contributory principle based on employment – workers and their employers make contributions and these contributions are used to calculate individual entitlements to welfare, as well as to fund future welfare spending. Young people not contributing today to economic life means a significant loss of contribution and thus financing of welfare systems. It means weak growth, also negatively affecting the sustainability of public finances, as well as a loss of skills-development and innovation, impacting on Europe's economy as a whole.

This impact is only heightened in view of an ageing society: by 2040, the EU will move from four working-age people per person over 65 today to about two working-age people.⁶ Less revenue because of a shrinking working-age population, coupled with higher public spending on health, pensions and long-term care means that preventative measures, including investment in education and health now, are essential.

New challenges reveal the inability of our systems to protect youth

New challenges have arisen in Europe today, not only revealing the gaps and fragility of our systems in protecting young people, but also exposing young people to more

¹ [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#).

² [Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union](#) and [European Social Charter](#)

³ [Europe 2020 Indicators - poverty and social inclusion](#), Eurostat, December 2014.

⁴ [Frequently Asked Questions on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#), OHCHR.

⁵ [Scarred Generation](#), Finance & Development, March 2012, Vol. 49, No. 1, Hanna Morsy, IMF.

⁶ [The 2015 Ageing Report](#), European Commission, 2015.

risks. The evolution of our post-industrial society, such as the increasing demand for specialised skills and automation on the global labour market, has required youth to adapt to a quickly changing labour market. The economic and financial crisis has increased the risks experienced by young people in Europe, creating new forms of insecurity and exclusion. Europe has lacked a holistic approach to young people's inclusion, shedding doubt on the ability of social policies to guarantee the respect of all young people's social rights.

Welfare systems need to recognise the specific needs of youth

This Resolution highlights that young people need to be better supported when the increasingly infrequent 'traditional' route to autonomy – finishing education, finding a job, moving out – is not achievable. Welfare systems are currently not adapted to the specific needs of young people today – needs that are related to a longer transition into autonomy: entering the labour market for the first time, leaving home, starting a family. Building on existing policy of the European Youth Forum, including on both employment⁷ and education⁸, it puts forward measures to ensure that all young people are adequately supported by welfare systems in Europe so that they do not fall into a state of social exclusion. Better coverage and quality of both services and income support, including education, employment support, healthcare, care services in-home support and housing will enable young people to reach their full potential as dynamic citizens that participate in their society and that have full access to their social rights in all aspects and through all stages of their life. In order for the poorest young people who grew up excluded from many aspects of the welfare system, including formal education, these services and support should be effective from a very early age, for them and for their families.

The European Youth Forum believes that European institutions have a key role to play in encouraging and supporting Member States to adapt their welfare systems to better support young people's transition to autonomy. We acknowledge that welfare systems in Europe have different levels of resources and capacities. The recommendations formulated below should be taken into account by European institutions to bring young people back into the European social project, and particularly by the European Commission in the design of the recently announced European Pillar of Social Rights.⁹ Mechanisms of economic policy guidance and coordination, such as the European Semester, must be used to set and achieve European standards, enabling the principles of the European social model to be a reality. Throughout these processes, the participation of young people in decision-making must be ensured, through existing participative mechanisms such as the EU Structured Dialogue on Youth as well as through social dialogue and new participative mechanisms to better ensure young people's voice is heard in achieving their autonomy and inclusion, especially in areas where they are currently excluded.

⁷ European Youth Forum [Resolution on Quality Employment](#), April 2015.

⁸ European Youth Forum [Policy Paper On Quality Education](#), November 2013.

⁹ European Commission, [Press Release: The European Pillar of Social Rights](#), 13 January 2016.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A young person in education

Equal access to education is not a reality across Europe today despite the right to education that is enshrined in many human rights frameworks¹⁰. Equal access has been impacted by reduction in public spending on education at all stages, and in a formal and non-formal environment, which has particularly affected young people in more vulnerable situations, such as young migrants, young women and girls, young people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and young people from a lower socio-economic background.¹¹ European governments are far from ensuring inclusive, quality education for all.¹² We call for countries and the EU:

- To ensure that free, quality education is accessible to all;
- To ensure publicly funded individualised support as well as social support for more vulnerable groups of youth to access education, as well as investing in teacher, youth worker and educator training;
- To support programmes that enable all young people and adults to acquire basic literacy¹³;
- To implement measures reducing the share of early school leavers;¹⁴
- To establish and enforce internship and apprenticeship legislation along the principles of the European Youth Forum's European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships¹⁵ to ensure equal access to internships and apprenticeships;
- To better recognise non-formal education (NFE) and NFE providers such as youth organisations as crucial actors in providing innovative and flexible education among people at risk of social exclusion;
- To implement the relevant recommendations on the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning;¹⁶ In addition, voluntary work must be recognised by all Member States as an activity in which young people acquire both the skills and knowledge to help and care for themselves and others and contribute to building a more inclusive society in which the needs of more vulnerable youth are met;
- Specifically, the European Council, to unblock negotiations on the Equal Treatment Directive, ensuring equal treatment outside employment, including in the area of education.
- To work with local governments to ensure young people have access to affordable transport, helping them access educational establishments, internships and apprenticeships;

¹⁰ Article 14 of the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights guarantees the right to education, including compulsory education; Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to education, and that it must be free, at least in the elementary stages; Article 2 of Protocol 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights sets out the right not to be denied education.

¹¹ [Funding of Education in Europe: The Impact of the Economic Crisis](#), European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013.

¹² For the comprehensive position of the European Youth Forum on Education, see [Policy Paper On Quality Education](#), European Youth Forum, 2013.

¹³ To reach the target of reducing the share of low achievers in basic skills to 15% by 2020 stipulated in the Education and Training 2020 framework of the European Union.

¹⁴ To reach the target of reducing the share of early school leavers in the EU to 10% by 2020 as stipulated in the Education and Training 2020 framework of the European Union.

¹⁵ [European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships](#), European Youth Forum.

¹⁶ Council of Europe: Recommendation Rec(2003)8 on the promotion and recognition of non-formal education/learning of young people; European Union: Recommendation 2012/C 398/01 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

- To provide adequate support for young carers, to ensure that they have the same opportunities as other young people
- To support the access to art and culture, especially in remote neighbourhoods and for disadvantaged young people.
- To facilitate and extend the access to artistic and cultural trainings and courses;
- To work on having scientific and cultural knowledge available and free for young people as well as for young people to be able to share their own culture.
- To provide education at all levels in the minority languages according to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

A young person building their future

Young people's employment in precarious work with no job security, and low wages is widespread. 42% of young EU workers are on temporary contracts, in comparison to 10% among workers aged 25-64.¹⁷ There has also been a rise in forced, bogus self-employment amongst young people, whilst average wages for young workers have continued to decrease relative to adult ones despite rising education levels amongst youth.¹⁸

This has an impact on a person's ability to build their future. A low income means young people are unlikely to be able to save, whilst precarious work contracts typically do not allow for contributing to statutory pension schemes - putting public budgets under enormous strain for everybody, today and in the future. We call for:

- Equal pay for equal work and specifically to end age-based discrimination in access to minimum wages;
- A set of social rights standards applicable to all contracts, including precarious contracts, that ensure protection in case of dismissal, health and accident insurance, as well as the ability to contribute to statutory pension schemes; Every worker is entitled to be treated with respect and dignity, as they go about their work. No one at work should be subjected to discrimination, harassment, bullying or any other form of abusive behavior;
- Measures to increase rights-awareness of young people and their knowledge on relevant procedures to claim rights or seek redress on rights violations;
- The introduction of legislation that makes it easier for temporary workers to bank enough working time to reach adequate incomes at retirement:
 - Internships and apprenticeships, as well as temporary work should be able to count as working time giving rise to pension entitlements;
 - Pension systems based on intergenerational solidarity that ensure the well-being of the elderly without overburdening the young, so that it is not only one generation that must take the burden when reforms are necessary;
- Ensuring constructive participation of young people in decision-making processes on pension systems;
- Young people who are self employed or engaging in entrepreneurial activities to have access to social and health protection with no excessive administrative procedures or cost;
 - Information on this must be readily available to young entrepreneurs.

¹⁷[Young People and Temporary Employment in Europe](#), Eurofound 2013.

¹⁸[Global Employment Trends For Youth](#), International Labour Organization, 2015.

A young person living independently

Young people's autonomy and inclusion is dependent foremost on their social background and the education they were able to receive, but also later on their access to a quality job. For this to occur, investment in job creation as well as policies that support employers in hiring young people are essential.¹⁹ But in the cases where young people are unemployed, a safety net must be ensured. Across most EU countries, to receive unemployment benefits young people have to have contributed to the unemployment benefit system via employment for a minimum period of 12 months.²⁰ This one-year period is extremely difficult to achieve for young people who often have to do several internships or short-term jobs before getting a first stable job. Therefore, despite very high rates of youth unemployment, in some countries less than 3% of youth aged 16-29 receive unemployment benefits.²¹ As a consequence, unemployed young people have to rely on minimum income which – when such assistance exists – tends to be with age-based exceptions or in reduced amounts for youth compared to the rest of the adult population. We call for:

- Investment in inclusive and tailored services, through schemes such as the Youth Guarantee,²² to provide professional guidance for young people including:
 - Individual counseling support for young people;
 - The creation of youth contact points - one-stop-shops for young people - that connect public and private institutions, and civil society organisations;
 - These youth contact points should deliver a wide range of services to offer comprehensive support through financial guidance, information about healthcare services, educational and employment opportunities. They should be accessible to all, in terms of opening times, location welcoming atmosphere and accessibility of information, even for those who can't read or hear, for instance.
- Reinforcing careers services to help young people orientate themselves towards a path or an area that they can choose or have already chosen;
- The creation of more jobs for young people via hiring subsidies or other options, which can be especially beneficial to young people when targeted at the low-skilled or low-wage jobs;²³
- The European Union to put forward a Framework Directive on adequate minimum income schemes including:
 - No restrictions in access to minimum income based on age as this is age-based discrimination;
 - A definition of adequacy that means ensuring that the amount of income support received is actually enough to live a decent life;
- Measures to support young people with disabilities in living independently including:
 - Personal Assistance allocations to supply any assistance needed, provided on an individual needs assessment;
 - Promoting supported jobs to integrate young people with disabilities into the open labour market;

¹⁹European Youth Forum [Resolution on Quality Employment](#), April 2015.

²⁰This is particular the case in Southern and Eastern European countries. See [NEET Youth in the Aftermath of the Crisis](#), OECD, 2015.

²¹Ibid.

²²European Youth Forum [Position Paper on the implementation of the Youth Guarantee](#), August, 2015.

²³[NEET Youth in the Aftermath of the Crisis](#), OECD, 2015.

- Measures to ensure that young adults who are in state care or in prison have adequate access to support mechanisms, during and after their time in state care through back-to-school and back-to-work schemes;
- Reforms of contributory unemployment benefits to adapt them to job-starters' reality and to the proliferation of non-standard forms of employment, through:
 - Decreasing the minimum period of contributions needed to access unemployment benefits;
 - Internship and apprenticeship contracts that give the opportunity to the young person, including those who have not completed tertiary education, to start contributing to the unemployment benefit system;
- Youth organisations involved and concerned with provision of services to unemployed youth to be considered equal partners by governments and companies. They must be allowed to accompany the insertion of youth into the job market through internship and apprenticeship schemes;
- The European Union to better coordinate European social security systems to ensure income-support, pension contributions and other welfare benefits are not lost when moving to work in another country or when moving back to the country of origin;

A young person accessing housing

Access to affordable housing is often denied to young people. Young people are being priced out of the city housing market and are increasingly distanced from home ownership. Longer periods of higher education, high student costs, increased labour market insecurity and tighter access to credit, means that many young people are turning to rental solutions – leading to even more increases in rental prices. Furthermore, young people are often victims of multiple discrimination, with landlords refusing to rent to young people based on their age or because they are receiving benefits or on a low income.²⁴

Moreover, youth homelessness is increasing in many EU Member States with high risks of young people getting caught in long-term exclusion. Accessible housing and early intervention to fight homelessness should be key policy priorities. We call for:

- Measures to deal with the shortage in housing stock and with the consequent increase in property and in rental prices through:
 - Investment in building affordable housing;
 - Appropriate rental regulation to ensure rent is affordable;
 - Subsidised housing for vulnerable groups;
- An 'independence-supporting approach' to housing support that recognises the difficulties that young people have in making their transition to independent living including:
 - Rent deposit schemes that can help young people access rental accommodation by guaranteeing their rental deposit;
 - Non-conditional access to housing allowances for all young people
 - Legislation that allows and promotes alternative housing, without reduction in social assistance;
- Measures to combat youth homelessness, developed with people who are directly concerned, including:

²⁴ [Multiple discrimination and young people in Europe: Beyond age only based discrimination](#), European Youth Forum, 2014.

- Developing home and housing education: providing young people with accessible advice on their options and entitlements if they leave home, including what to do in an emergency;
- Favouring preventative strategies, for example, providing mediation services to prevent family breakdown often linked to youth homelessness;
- Ensuring that, if a young person does become homeless, they benefit from a comprehensive range of services aimed at re-integrating them into their community as quickly as possible;
- Ensuring that if a person doesn't have a housing option, they will not be penalised and will be supported in the alternative they find;
- National governments and the European Union to ensure better cooperation between the youth care sector, the homelessness and the social housing sectors, to prevent homelessness when young people leave youth care including;
 - The adoption of 'after care national strategies', appointing a designated person to provide after care support for each young person identified as care leaver;
- The European Council to unblock negotiations on the Equal Treatment Directive, to tackle multi-discrimination against young people on access to housing based on age and resources,.
- A recognition that age-based discrimination exists in the financial sector, restricting young people's access to credit and essential financial support, and measures to ensure that young people have fair access to these.

A young person balancing work and life

Young people are under increasing pressure to reconcile their work and life, particularly young parents, young mothers and single-parent families. 35% of young mothers are inactive, but 80% of these inactive young mothers would like to work if they could freely choose their working hours.²⁵ More has to be done to facilitate the participation of women in the labour market and to achieve gender equality in Europe in general. Reconciling work and life will only become more challenging given an ageing population where the burden of increased care responsibilities for the elderly in the future will fall onto the young, especially young women. There is also a need to develop the protection and support given to new young parents living in poverty so that they can have the tools and be in a situation that allows them to welcome and raise their children. We call for:

- Investments in universal, free care services for children as well as the elderly; 79% of young parents who use or would like to use childcare services reported that they have experienced some kind of obstacle in accessing these services, the most cited one being fees;²⁶
- Parental leave of at least a period of 20 weeks as a minimum individual right of each parent. Parental leave should be distributed so that there is an incentive for each parent to take parental leave;
- Parental leave that is fully paid, or equal to at least 80-90 per-cent of the parent's salary;
- Protection from dismissal, imposed night shifts and overtime for six months for new parents, and flexibility for breastfeeding mothers;

²⁵ [Caring for children and young dependants: effect on careers of young workers](#), Eurofound, 2013.

²⁶ Ibid.

- Extension of the same rights to migrant workers and adoptive parents;
- Support measures for reintegration into the work place after leave;
- The European Union's upcoming initiative on work-life balance²⁷ to include measures on maternity, paternity and parental and carers' leave;
- Measures targeting single-parent families that are at higher risk of poverty, including:
 - Increased support in (re)accessing employment;
 - Tax credits to support low income single-parent households;
- Measures for first-time parents including tailored advice on positive parenting;
- Enforcement of EU legislation protecting all people from discrimination in employment and occupation including in recruitment conditions and selection criteria and on the grounds of pregnancy or applying for maternity, paternity or parental leave.²⁸

A young person in need of healthcare

Access to health during the whole-life cycle is key for people's well-being. Adverse childhood experiences, such as violence and abuse, disease, disability and poor nutrition have a long-term effect on the physical and mental health and development of an individual.²⁹ The specific transition period from childhood to adulthood is also crucial, influencing young peoples' well-being and lifestyle in the future.

Certain health services are particularly important for young people, due to specific challenges met during their transition into adulthood. Access to mental health services is crucial, given that intentional self-harm is the second most frequent cause of death among young people aged 15–29³⁰. Nevertheless, health services are still too far from young people's needs and everyday reality. Certain groups still face barriers, particularly young women and girls and LGBTQI youth who are often victims of multiple-discrimination, particularly in accessing information and healthcare services related to sexual and reproductive health.³¹ We call for:

- Universal free access to health care to be properly ensured in practice, regardless of sexuality, origin, educational, employment or resident status;
- Individual preventative care services to be accessible early on, including regular mandatory medical inspections in early childhood;
- The establishment of youth-friendly health services as described in the UNFPA criteria³² in disadvantaged neighbourhoods;
- Easy access to information and consultation from health-care providers based on the principles of confidentiality and tolerance, especially when related to sexuality and mental health;
- Free access to contraceptives; in almost one third of Member States, contraceptives are not covered under public health insurance;³³

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ On the EU level, enforcement of Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation.

²⁹ [Health for the World's Adolescents](#), World Health Organisation, 2014.

³⁰ [Being young in Europe today](#), Eurostat, European Commission, 2015.

³¹ [Multiple discrimination and young people in Europe: Beyond age only based discrimination](#), European Youth Forum, 2014

³² [Investing in Adolescents' Health and Rights](#), United Nations Population Fund, 2003, p. 42.

³³ [Report on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights](#), Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, European Parliament, September 2013.

- Legislation that ensures all young women can safely access abortion and post-abortion care free from stigmatisation.
- Governments and institutions to take responsibility for providing appropriate and up-to-date education on self health awareness and healthy lifestyles;
- Education for young people that informs them about mental health issues and gives them greater knowledge on how to seek help for dealing with mental health issues.