



promoting youth involvement and  
social engagement

**PROMISE:** Promoting Youth Involvement and Social  
Engagement: Opportunities and challenges for ‘conflicted’  
young people across Europe.

# European policy and practice report (level 1)

**Summary:** This report provides a summary of current integrated European research policy and practice focussing on young people. It details European policy-level responses to specific issues affecting young people and includes an overview of current European-level data and literature addressing young people’s relationship with social change.

Structured around the themes of ‘The situation of young people across Europe’, ‘Youth Policies in the EU’ and ‘Council of Europe’s actions in the youth field’, this report provides the European-level context for the PROMISE project.

This was submitted to the EC as deliverable 5 (D3.2).



## Background and Aims of PROMISE

PROMISE explores the role of young people (aged 14 to 29 years) in shaping society; past, present and future. It addresses their engagement with social, environmental and political issues and the potential, across Europe, for youth involvement in positive social action and sustainable change.

Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, PROMISE focuses specifically on young people ‘in conflict’ with authority (and usually, therefore, in conflict with social norms), who are seen to be the most ‘problematic’ in terms of positive social engagement, often triggering negative and punitive responses from authority, in turn furthering marginalisation and stigmatisation. The negative effects of stigma and marginalisation reduce opportunities for young people to engage positively in social action, and as a result, much of the creativity, innovation and energy within these groups is directed away from positive social change. Such ‘conflicted youth’ present significant opportunities for change and should therefore be the prime focus of policy makers and practitioners. PROMISE will explore the opportunities and means for converting conflict into positive social achievement amongst conflicted youth across Europe. Our overall aim is to unlock the potential and ‘promise’ of Europe’s youth.

The aims of PROMISE are:

- To provide a picture of the nature and extent of the multiplicity of young people’s involvement in society, barriers and opportunities to participation and future potential for engaging in social change.
- To identify and analyse the particular conditions that encourage or prevent youth participation.
- To explain the nature of relationships that present barriers for socio-ecological transition in diverse groups of young people across Europe.
- To identify and analyse the unique context of conflicted youth that contributes to the creation of youth on the margins across Europe.
- To provide an analysis of normative responses to the conflicts young people face.
- To understand the role of gender in youth participation: specifically to understand the experiences of young women and girls and how this can be addressed.
- To understand the roles of generation, ethnicity, class and other areas of diversity in youth participation and how these can be addressed.

The objectives will be achieved through analysis of existing data, and through of new data collected in the ten participating countries.



## Report on integrated European research and policy affecting young people

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### **Abstract**

Despite profound disparities between European countries, young people across Europe have many similarities. While they share common aspirations, from achieving a high level of education to moving to a foreign country, they also face common challenges, whether it involves finding a job, avoiding social exclusion or participating to politics while avoiding traditional ways to do so.

At the European level, the last decade has seen a rise in the importance of these issues in political agendas. While no single youth policy is identifiable at such a scale, a lasting trend is that of reinforced coordination of national policies. At the same time, international institutions, the European Union especially, support this process: on the one hand, by providing the necessary framework enabling transnational dialogues and the exchange of good practices, and on the other hand, by implementing various initiatives creating new opportunities for young people, from paid internships to volunteering experiences.

## Introduction

Over the last decades - and even more so since the last economic crisis - young people have been the subject of growing political interest at the European level. Despite wide variations in the way they have been hit in different countries, young Europeans have been facing increased challenges and obstacles in all aspects of their lives – including, but not limited to, rising youth unemployment, less affordable higher education and a growing risk of social exclusion. This situation has led decision-makers at all political levels to address such issues in a more focused, comprehensive and coordinated way.

Despite this rising focus on youth, depicting European policies affecting young people in a clear way remains, for many reasons, a challenge.

Without further definition, “Europe” is indeed an extremely blurry concept which has fed political and academic debates for centuries. When it comes to youth policies, many actors can also be considered, ranging from national governments to continent-wide political institutions, including various instances of interregional, cross-border and transnational cooperation, as well as the interactions between all these institutional layers. This is why, in order to complement the National Context Reports (Deliverable 5 / D3.2) produced by the PROMISE project and to focus on the most relevant political instances contributing to shape youth policies at the European level, this report will narrow its scope to two main actors:

- The European Union (EU) on the one hand which involves, with its hybrid system of supranational and intergovernmental decision-making, the most integrated cooperation policies in the field of youth on the European continent but covers (at the time this report is written) 28 Member States;
- The Council of Europe (CoE) on the other hand which, even though it relies on intergovernmental cooperation only, covers 47 member states and therefore encompasses – almost – the whole European continent.

Moreover, the concept of “young people” itself doesn’t cover the same reality from one European country to another. Legal definitions vary considerably, as well as the social representations of youth and the socio-demographic characteristics of the category of “young people” in each country. The EU itself uses different definitions depending on the context: statistical data gathered by the EC Directorate-General Eurostat, for instance, refer to young people aged between 15 and 24 when considering youth unemployment, and to those aged between 15 and 29 when focusing on demographics, while the Erasmus+ Programme encompasses individuals aged between 13 and 30. This report will therefore use the PROMISE working definition – young people aged 14-29 – but specify, when necessary, if it refers to another definition. The same will apply to the PROMISE working definition of ‘conflicted’ youth: this paper will present the definitions – e.g. youth at risk of social exclusion, marginalised young people, young people with fewer opportunities – used by the EU and the CoE in their own work to reflect their own perception of ‘conflicted’ youth.

Finally, because all policies affect young people in a certain way – at least as part of the overall population – this report will focus on policies that are explicitly addressing youth and the issues it is facing at the European level.

With these conceptual precisions as a background, the report will unfold into three parts. It will first present the situation of young Europeans to highlight their similarities and differences across Europe (I). It will then focus on the EU youth policies, to offer a comprehensive view of the specific objectives shared at the EU level in the field of youth, and what policies have been implemented in the recent years to reach them (II). It will finally present the cooperation in the field of youth in the wider context of the CoE (III).

## I. The situation of young people across Europe

Europe displays extensive socioeconomic contrasts: it includes poorer states which recently emerged from communism, fascist dictatorships and/or civil wars, as well as wealthier countries with a GDP per capita ranking among the highest in the world.

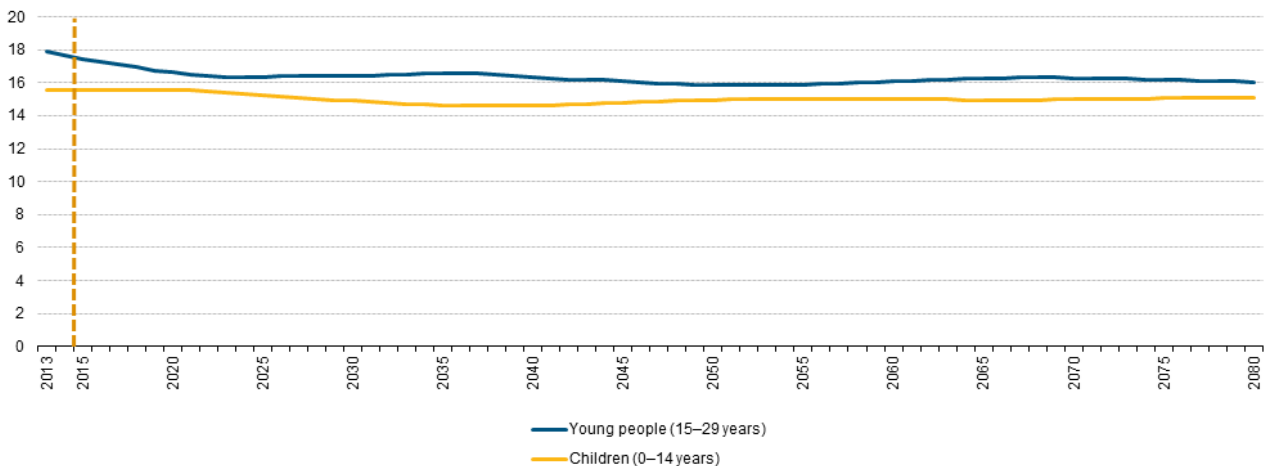
Despite these remaining discrepancies, young people across Europe are facing common trends that allow us to consider “European youth” as a relevant – if not homogeneous – category. Relying on Eurostat data and Eurobarometer surveys mainly focused on the 28 EU Member states (EU28)<sup>1</sup>, the following parts will present these cross-cutting trends.

### A. European youth: a decreasing share of the European population

In 2014, there were just under 507 million inhabitants in the EU28. Among them, one third – almost 170 million inhabitants – were under the age of 30, with children (aged 0-14) accounting for 15.6% of the total population and young people (aged 15-29) for a slightly higher share of 17.7%<sup>2</sup>.

The combined share of children and young people (collectively, those aged 0–29) in the EU’s population fell from a high of 40.6% in 1994, through 36.1% in 2004, to 33.3% by 2014. Eurostat population projections (figure below) of the share of young people in the EU28 total population shows a continued decline followed by a period of relative stability until 2080.

Figure 1 - Projected share of the youth population, EU28 average, 2013-2080



(\*) Data refer to 1 January of each reference year.  
Source: Eurostat (online data code: proj\_13npms)

Explained by the decline in birth and fertility rates in European countries over the past decades, this trend is also shared with non-EU member states across Europe.

Today’s young generations in Europe are therefore facing a common challenge when it comes to supporting the remainder of the population as they move into work – i.e. maintaining welfare systems, pension schemes and public healthcare systems despite the change in the European demographic pyramid.

<sup>1</sup> Youth Database, Eurostat.  
Online (<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/youth/data/database>)

<sup>2</sup> Being young in Europe today - Demographic trends, Eurostat, March 2015.  
Online ([ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Being\\_young\\_in\\_Europe\\_today\\_-\\_demographic\\_trends](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Being_young_in_Europe_today_-_demographic_trends))

## B. A rising share of young people with a migrant background

The progressive decline in the share of young people in the total population across Europe has however been partially slowed by the growth of immigration from non-EU countries<sup>3</sup>.

On the one hand, immigration from third countries compensated for the change in the general population and prevented the declining trend in the total population. On the other hand, young people aged between 20 and 29 are over-represented among immigrants coming into EU countries.

As a result, the share of young people with a migrant background (right figure) – who immigrated themselves or have parents who did – in Europe has increased over the past decades. For this reason, a rising proportion of European youth is facing issues related to this migrant background, e.g. discrimination, difficulties in accessing the employment market.

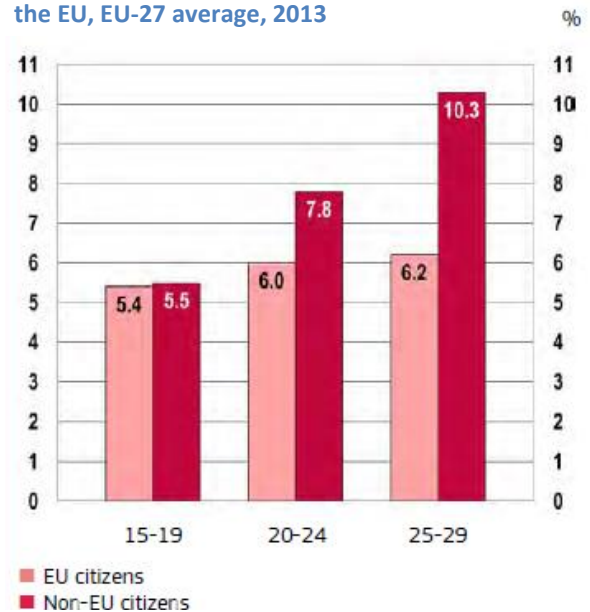
This trend has been accentuated in the past few years in the context of the European migrant crisis, as part of the global refugee crisis.

According to UNHCR data<sup>4</sup>, in 2015 alone, a historic number of 1,015,078 migrants arrived by sea from non-European countries, compared to 216,054 in 2014, and 344,603 in 2016 (as of November). Asylum seekers have accounted for the vast majority of these migrants: the number of first time applicants for international protection in the EU28 more than doubled from 563 thousand in 2014 to almost 1.26 million in 2015<sup>5</sup>. The main contributions to the increase were higher numbers of applicants from Syria (29% of applications in 2015), Afghanistan (14%) and Iraq (10%).

The majority of the refugee population is young: more than four in five (83%) of the first time asylum seekers in the EU28 in 2015 were less than 35 years old (Figure 3); those in the age range 18-34 years accounted for slightly more than half (53%) of the total number of first time applicants, while nearly 3 in 10 (29%) applicants were minors aged less than 18 years old.

Among them, moreover, are a large number of unaccompanied minors, i.e. persons less than 18 years old who arrive on the territory of an EU Member State not accompanied by an adult or who are left unaccompanied after having entered the territory of a Member State. Among minors who applied for asylum in 2015 in the EU-28, 23.1 % were unaccompanied, for a total of 88.7 thousand applications by unaccompanied minors.

Figure 2 - Young people as a proportion of total EU citizens and non-EU citizens living in the EU, EU-27 average, 2013



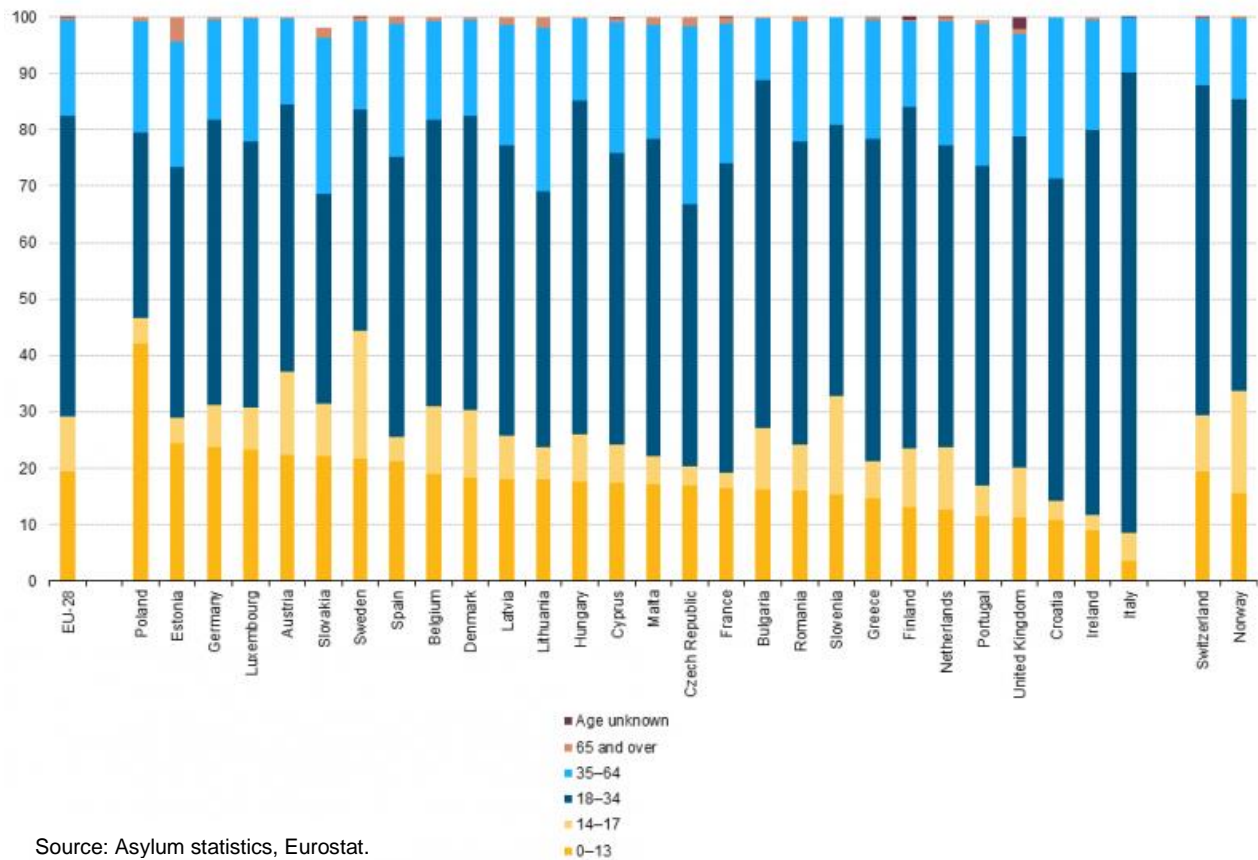
Source: EU Youth Report 2015, European

<sup>3</sup> Statistiques sur la migration et la population migrante, Eurostat, May 2016. Online ([ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Migration\\_and\\_migrant\\_population\\_statistics/fr](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics/fr))

<sup>4</sup> Refugees/Migrants Emergency Response – Mediterranean, UNHCR. Online (<http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>)

<sup>5</sup> Asylum statistics, Eurostat. Online ([http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum\\_statistics#Asylum\\_applicants](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_statistics#Asylum_applicants))

Figure 3 - Distribution by age of (non-EU) first time asylum applicants in the EU and EFTA Member States, 2015



Source: Asylum statistics, Eurostat.

Policy reactions in Europe have been diverse, ranging from the “unilateral open-arms” policy from Germany, to borders’ closure and walls construction in Hungary, for instance. Policy coordination at EU-level has faced opposition from several Member-States, in particular from Central and Eastern Europe, but has nonetheless led to the *de facto* suspension of the Dublin Regulation (asylum seekers had to apply for asylum in the first EU country they entered), an EU wide project on resettlement offering a number of places to persons in need of protection in voluntary countries, and several attempts focused on managing the influx of migrants (strengthening of Europol and Frontex, creation of “hotspots” in Italy and Greece, agreement with Turkey).

### C. Increasingly mobile, internationally-oriented young Europeans

Thanks to increasing opportunities, young Europeans have become more mobile and likely to go work or study in another European country<sup>6</sup>.

This trend is more striking within the EU itself. With over 20 % of the young immigrants (aged 15-29) coming from another EU Member State; Ireland, Cyprus, Luxembourg and Austria stand out as the countries whose youth population received the highest proportion of young immigrants from other EU countries in 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Erasmus: Facts, Figures & Trends, European Commission, Publications Office of the European Union, 2014. Online ([http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/education/library/statistics/erasmus-plus-facts-figures\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/library/statistics/erasmus-plus-facts-figures_en.pdf))

Even though young EU citizens have the most opportunities to move to another EU Member state thanks to their EU citizenship; young people living in non-EU countries across Europe are also increasingly internationally-oriented thanks to the opportunities they can also benefit from through cooperation between the EU and partner countries.

#### D. A highly educated European youth

European young people spend on average more than 17 years in formal education, a period which has been increasing in recent years: in the EU28, school expectancy rose from 17 years in 2003 to 17.6 in 2012.<sup>7</sup>

Young people are more highly-qualified than older generations: in 2013 in the EU28, 81% of young people (aged 20-24) had completed at least upper secondary education while only 66% of people aged 55 to 64 had similar qualification levels.

Moreover, over a third of Europeans aged between 30 and 34 have achieved a tertiary degree in 2014, a proportion which has grown in the recent years.

#### E. Youth unemployment: a challenging labour market for young Europeans

Since the start of the economic crisis in 2008 the increase in youth unemployment has been a common feature to all European countries, and has been significantly greater than for the older active population (aged 25-64) (figure below).

The EU28 unemployment rate among young people in 2014 was indeed 26.3% for those aged 15-19, 20.6% for those aged 20-24 and 13.6% for those between 25 and 29 years old<sup>8</sup>.

Even though there have been important disparities between European countries – unemployment has hit Greek, Spanish or Italian youth for instance in a far greater extent than young people in North European countries – young people across Europe are facing the same challenge, as accessing the labour market becomes increasingly harder for them.

Precarious jobs have also become a significant feature among European youth. In Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Cyprus and Romania, involuntary part-time work increased by 13% from 2011 to 2014. Involuntary part-time employment is moreover higher among people aged 25-29 in all countries<sup>9</sup>.

Figure 4 - Unemployment rates among young people compared to the 25-64 age group. (EU28 average)



Source: Unemployment statistics, Eurostat.

<sup>7</sup> School expectancy of pupils and students, Eurostat. Online ([http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=educ\\_igen&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=educ_igen&lang=en))

<sup>8</sup> An unemployed person is defined by Eurostat, according to the guidelines of the International Labour Organization, as someone aged 15 to 74 without work during the reference week who is available to start work within the next two weeks and who has actively sought employment at some time during the last four weeks. The unemployment rate is the number of people unemployed as a percentage of the labour force.

<sup>9</sup> Being young in Europe today - Labour market, Eurostat. Online ([ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Being\\_young\\_in\\_Europe\\_today\\_-\\_labour\\_market\\_-\\_access\\_and\\_participation](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Being_young_in_Europe_today_-_labour_market_-_access_and_participation))



Moreover, the non-EU-born young population has been harder hit by unemployment and its increase in the past few years: for the non-EU-born population aged 15–29, the unemployment rate increased by 10.3 percentage points between 2008 and 2015 (16.6% in 2008 compared with 26.9% in 2015).<sup>10</sup>

## F. Higher levels of poverty and risk of social exclusion among European youth

On average in the EU28, the at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate<sup>11</sup> for young people is higher than for the total population (respectively 29.0% and 24.5% in 2013)<sup>12</sup>. Moreover, the at risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rates stopped increasing for the total population in 2013, but continued to rise for young people, widening the poverty gap between young people and the total population.

Another indicator of the difficult economic situation of youth across Europe is the share of young adults living with their parents: even though it varies drastically from one EU country to another due to social factors, the share of young people aged 18-34 living with their parents has increased by one percentage point since 2007, up to almost 48% in 2006 across the EU-28<sup>13</sup>.

## G. Response to authority – Youth delinquency

Partly due to the wide variety of criminal laws and their approaches to age and criminal responsibility in Europe (the age of criminal majority is 18 in most Council of Europe member states, but the age of criminal responsibility varies from 10 in the UK to 18 in Luxembourg), consistent and comparable statistics on youth crime and anti-social behaviours at the European level are lacking.

Eurostat statistics on crime are for instance only able to distinguish according to the legal status of offenders and/or victims, i.e. if they have reached the legal age of majority or not<sup>14</sup>. The European Commission itself, in its *Agenda for the Rights of the Child* published in 2011, pointed to a lack of reliable, comparable and official data on the situation of children in judicial proceedings in the EU Member States. In June 2015, it admitted the situation had barely improved<sup>15</sup>. Since then, it has commissioned an EU-wide study that has only been able to gather partial data<sup>16</sup>.

However, European research points out that crime and anti-social behaviours are more prevalent among young people than in older generations: juvenile delinquency and youth delinquency as a whole are

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<sup>10</sup> Migrant integration statistics, Eurostat.

Online ([ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Migrant\\_integration\\_statistics](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Migrant_integration_statistics))

<sup>11</sup> This indicator is based on three sub-indicators of poverty: the at-risk-of-poverty rate; the severe material deprivation rate; and the rate of living in a household with very low work intensity. People at risk of poverty or social exclusion are defined as the proportion of the population that falls into at least one of these categories.

<sup>12</sup> Income and living conditions Database, Eurostat.

Online ([ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/income-and-living-conditions/data/database](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/income-and-living-conditions/data/database))

<sup>13</sup> Share of young adults aged 18-34 living with their parents by age and sex - EU-SILC survey, Eurostat, November 2016.

Online ([appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc\\_lvps08&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_lvps08&lang=en))

<sup>14</sup> Crime and criminal justice, Eurostat.

Online (<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/crime/database>)

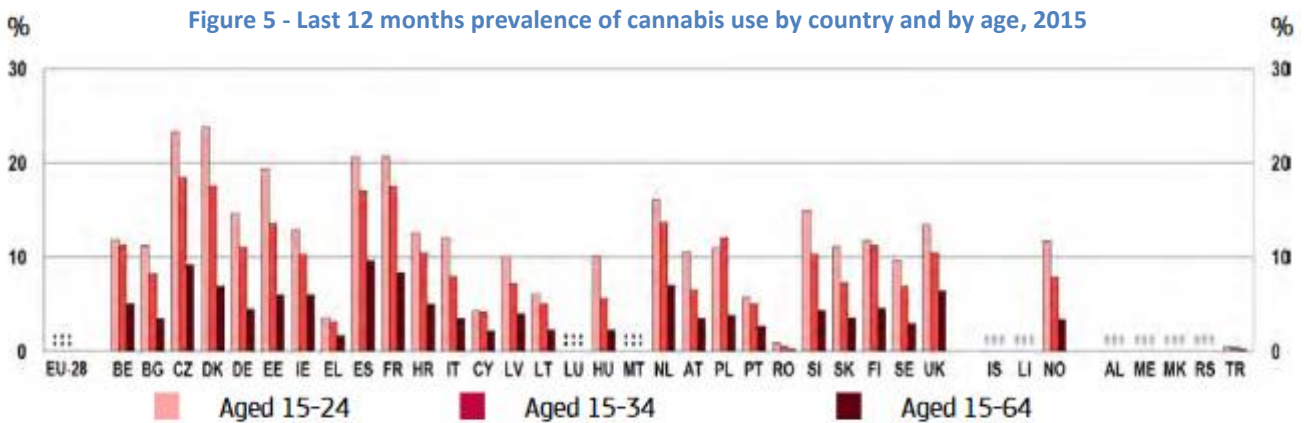
<sup>15</sup> “The significant data gaps make it difficult to assess the true nature of the implementation of children’s involvement in the justice systems across the EU” in *Children’s involvement in criminal, civil and administrative judicial proceedings in the 28 Member States of the EU*, European Commission, June 2015.

Online (<http://bit.ly/2gHZrZK>)

<sup>16</sup> Data on Children in Judicial proceedings in EU-28, DG Justice of the European Commission.

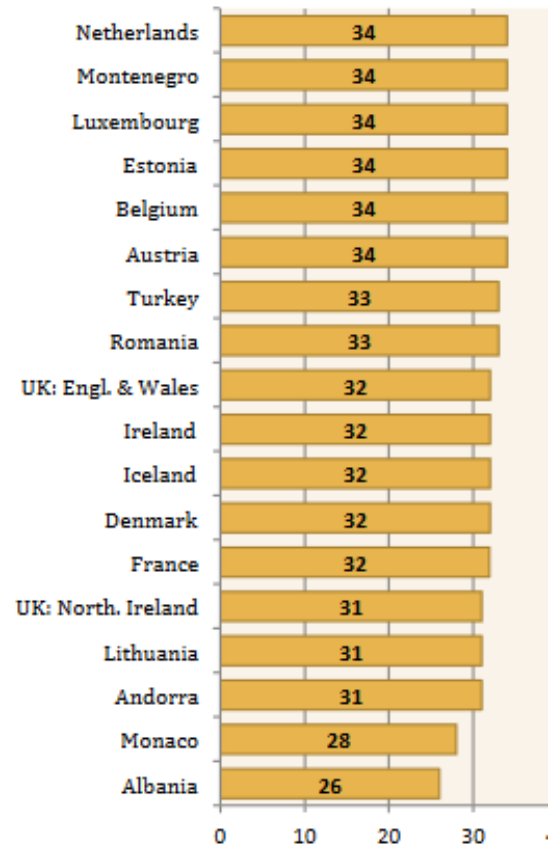
Online ([www.childreninjudicialproceedings.eu](http://www.childreninjudicialproceedings.eu))

considered by experts involved in the YouPrev project<sup>17</sup>, funded under the EU Daphne III programme, as “a stable and time-bound phenomenon [...] widespread and mostly of low severity” while it remains a “transitory developmental phenomenon” for most youngsters.



Deviant behaviours are also more widespread among young Europeans than in older generations, as shown with the example of drug use in the European Youth Report 2015. Young people are for instance more prone to using cannabis than older age groups, as late adolescence and young adulthood is often described as the age of ‘experimentation’. The figure above illustrates the great differences between cannabis use among young adults and that of the wider population (15-64). The greatest difference is in Hungary, where young adults were more than four times more likely to have used cannabis in the past year than the wider adult population, followed by Denmark, Italy and Norway, where this ratio was almost 3.5. Between 2011 and 2014, the EU28 youth population (15-34) use of cannabis has moreover increased from 7.6% to 10%.

**Figure 6 - Countries with the youngest prison population classified by decreasing median age.**



Regarding the prison population across Europe, it is overall young, as revealed by the Council of Europe data<sup>18</sup>: in 2014, the average age of the prison population among the CoE’s member states was 36 years old, while the median age of the prison population was even lower at 34.9 years old. This observation is valid in EU countries as well as other European countries (figure right).

Source: Annual Penal Statistics, Council of Europe, December 2015

<sup>17</sup> Youth deviance and youth violence - Findings from a European study on juvenile delinquency and its prevention, Thomas Görgen et al, 2013.

Online ([http://www.youprev.eu/pdf/YouPrev\\_InternationalReport.pdf](http://www.youprev.eu/pdf/YouPrev_InternationalReport.pdf))

<sup>18</sup> Annual Penal Statistics, Space I - Prison Populations, Council of Europe, December 2015.

Online ([http://wp.unil.ch/space/files/2016/05/SPACE-I-2014-Report\\_final.1.pdf](http://wp.unil.ch/space/files/2016/05/SPACE-I-2014-Report_final.1.pdf))

## H. Disaffection of “traditional” politics

Contrary to the claim that young people are disaffected with politics, interest in political issues among young people in Europe has remained stable over the last decade, with approximately one third of respondents reporting to be very or quite interested in 2012<sup>19</sup>.

Yet “traditional politics” – i.e. electoral and party engagement – has had less and less appeal for young citizens across Europe. In 2012, among the respondents to a Eurobarometer survey<sup>20</sup>, only 47% of 15-24 year-olds and 50% of 25-34 year-olds declared that they believe that voting is one of the two best ways to ensure that their voice is heard by decision-makers. This lower turnout amongst young people has a great impact on elections and referendums’ results: the outcome of the Brexit referendum in June 2016 was, for instance, particularly influenced by the turnout by age group. An *Opinium/London School of Economics* poll released in July revealed that an estimated 64% of registered UK voters aged 18-24 turned out to vote, with a clear majority in favour of Remain, compared to 74% among the 55-to-64 population and a remarkable 90% for those aged 65 and over, who clearly favoured the Leave vote<sup>21</sup>.

Instead, young Europeans tend to favour flexible, non-institutional and issue-based forms of active participation, e.g. helping NGOs, signing petitions, joining public demonstrations, boycotts, wearing political symbols such as badges and stickers. The 2012 *European Social Survey* shows that on average about 20% of young people had recently signed a petition and about 10% had joined a public demonstration and worn a badge or sticker. Since then, multiple examples in EU Member States have shown high participation from young people in such protest demonstrations, for instance in Spain and Greece in the aftermath of the financial crisis, and recently in France with the *Nuit Debout* movement.

\* \* \*

These common trends represent the challenges and opportunities young people are facing at various degrees across Europe as a whole.

However, in most European countries they also hide another reality: the widening gap among young people themselves, shown by the rising inequalities between highly-educated, mobile and internationally-oriented young people and young people experiencing more difficulties to access the labour market.

All these issues also reflect the priorities set by European decision-makers over the course of the last years, as will be shown in part II.

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<sup>19</sup> European Social Survey, ESS ERIC, 2012.

Online ([www.europeansocialsurvey.org/data/download.html?r=6](http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/data/download.html?r=6))

<sup>20</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 77, European Commission, 2012.

Online ([ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb77/eb77\\_citizen\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb77/eb77_citizen_en.pdf))

<sup>21</sup> EU referendum: youth turnout almost twice as high as first thought, *The Guardian*, July 2016.

Online ([www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jul/09/young-people-referendum-turnout-brexit-twice-as-high](http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jul/09/young-people-referendum-turnout-brexit-twice-as-high))

## II. Youth policies in the European Union

Since its creation by the Treaty of Rome in 1957, the European Union has become a one-of-a-kind political entity characterised by a mix of supranationalism and intergovernmentalism. In many fields, including youth policies, this hybrid status has provided the framework for the most integrated policies at the international level, covering 28 Member-States representing 508 million Europeans.

However, the European Union's institutions and the powers conferred on them are clearly defined. This part will therefore first look at the areas of competence of the EU impacting youth, defining in which fields and how the EU can act as well as its objectives towards youth. It will then look further at initiatives implemented to achieve these objectives by the EU institutions responsible for drafting policies and taking decisions in this field, mainly the European Commission (EC) and the Council of the EU.

### A. Framework and objectives of the EU youth policies

#### A.1. Legal framework

EU competences and objectives take their source in the primary legislation, more specifically in:

- The Treaty on European Union (TEU)<sup>22</sup>;
- Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)<sup>23</sup>;
- The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union<sup>24</sup>.

#### *Types of EU competences*

The Treaty of Lisbon, which amended the abovementioned treaties in 2009, clarified the division of competences between the EU and EU countries, now divided in three categories:

- Exclusive competences (Article 3 TFEU): areas in which the EU alone is able to legislate and adopt binding acts;
- Shared competences (Article 4 TFEU): the EU and EU countries are able to legislate and adopt legally binding acts. EU countries exercise their own competence where the EU does not exercise, or has decided not to exercise, its own competence;
- Supporting competences (Article 6 TFEU): the EU can only intervene to support, coordinate or complement the action of EU countries. Legally binding EU acts cannot require the harmonisation of EU countries' legislation.

Moreover, in the area of its non-exclusive competences, EU competences are further limited by the subsidiarity principle: the EU can act only if the objective of a proposed action cannot be achieved by the EU countries but could be better achieved at EU level.

#### *Youth: a supporting competence*

Under this framework, the areas affecting youth the most – "*education, youth, sport and vocational training*" in the Article 6 of the TFEU – all belong to supporting competences: youth is a national policy area; harmonisation of Member States' legislation is therefore excluded, and the EU can only act to support, coordinate or complement national policies.

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<sup>22</sup> Consolidated version of the TEU, Official Journal of the EU, June 2016.  
Online ([eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C\\_2016.202.01.0001.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2016:202:FULL#C\\_2016202EN.01001301](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_2016.202.01.0001.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2016:202:FULL#C_2016202EN.01001301))

<sup>23</sup> Consolidated version of the TFEU, Official Journal of the EU, June 2016.  
Online ([eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C\\_2016.202.01.0001.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2016:202:FULL#C\\_2016202EN.01001301](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_2016.202.01.0001.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2016:202:FULL#C_2016202EN.01001301))

<sup>24</sup> Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Official Journal of the EU, June 2016.  
Online ([eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C:2016:202:TOC](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C:2016:202:TOC))

Nevertheless, articles 165 and 166 of the TFEU further develop the objectives of EU action in the youth field. Article 165 states that “*the Union shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States*” and “*Union action shall be aimed at: developing the European dimension in education; encouraging mobility of students and teachers [...]; promoting cooperation between educational establishments; encouraging the development of youth exchanges and encouraging the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe.*” Article 166 adds that “*the Union action shall improve initial and continuing vocational training [...]; facilitate access to vocational training and encourage mobility of instructors and trainees and particularly young people; stimulate cooperation on training between educational or training establishments and firms; develop exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the training systems of the Member States.*”

Moreover, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, which has the same legal value as the treaties (Article 6 TEU), includes an article on children’s rights (Article 24) and an article forbidding child labour and providing for protection of young people in the workplace (Article 32).

#### *Other areas of competence affecting youth*

Besides a supporting competence in education, youth, sport and vocational training, the EU has powers in other areas with an impact on youth:

- Thanks to shared competences, it can act in *economic, social and territorial cohesion, the area of freedom, security and justice, and research;*
- Treaties also allow the EU to take measures to ensure that EU countries coordinate their *economic, social and employment policies* at EU level.

## **A.2. Overarching strategies**

In fields related to youth, the EU can therefore only act to help Member States coordinating their national policies, or to complement them. Today, these responsibilities are encompassed within the following strategic framework.

### *Europe 2020*

In 2010, the EC published a communication setting the European Union’s ten-year strategy for “smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.” The Europe 2020 strategy<sup>25</sup> sets five detailed, quantified targets to be reached by 2020 through the coordination of Member States policies:

1. Employment: 75% of the 20-64 year-olds to be employed;
2. R&D: 3% of the EU's GDP to be invested in R&D;
3. Climate change and energy sustainability: greenhouse gas emissions 20% (or even 30%, if the conditions are right) lower than 1990; 20% of energy from renewables; 20 % increase in energy efficiency;
4. Education: Reducing the rates of early school leaving below 10%; at least 40% of 30-34-year-olds completing third level education;
5. Fighting poverty and social exclusion: at least 20 million fewer people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

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<sup>25</sup> Europe 2020 – A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, Communication from the EC, March 2010. Online([eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:EN:PDF](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:EN:PDF))

Because of their higher risk of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion, as well as the specific objectives set in education, Europe 2020, which will remain the relevant strategic framework for all EU action until 2020, has led European decision-makers to focus their efforts on youth to reach these objectives.

### *EU Youth Strategy*

In parallel, the Commission and the Council of the EU agreed on a more specific cooperation framework in the youth field for the 2010-2018 period, called “*An EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering – A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities*”<sup>26</sup>.

While respecting Member States’ overall responsibility for youth policy, the EU Youth Strategy sets a framework for cooperation with two main objectives:

- To provide more and equal opportunities for young people in education and the job market
- To encourage young people to actively participate in society.

It aims to achieve these objectives in two ways:

- Specific youth initiatives, targeted at young people to encourage non-formal learning, participation, voluntary activities, youth work, mobility and information;
- ‘Mainstreaming’ cross-sector initiatives that ensure youth issues are taken into account when formulating, implementing and evaluating policies and actions in other fields with a significant impact on young people (education, employment or health and well-being).

Work proceeds in work cycles of three years, and priorities for the fields of action are chosen for each cycle. In order to foster mutual learning among the Member States and enable evidence-based policymaking, the Commission draws up an EU Youth Report at the end of each work cycle, which maps progress towards the goals. Further studies are commissioned as necessary.

Member States cooperate by means of high-level expert groups and other networks. The structured dialogue with young people and youth organisations gives young people a say when youth policy is shaped.

Finally, the funds provided by relevant EU programmes are mobilised to achieve the goals of European cooperation in the youth field.

### *EU Agenda for the Rights of the Child*

Besides the EU Youth Strategy providing the overarching structures of youth policies coordination in the EU, the European Commission adopted on 15 February 2011 a communication called the *EU Agenda for the rights of the child*<sup>27</sup> to promote, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in all relevant EU policies and actions. This agenda included 11 concrete actions for the EU to contribute in an effective way to children's well-being and safety.

Among these concrete actions, several focused on juvenile delinquency and its management before, during and after judicial proceedings in EU Member States, including “Promote the use of the Council of Europe Guidelines of 17 November 2010 on child-friendly justice”<sup>28</sup>. These guidelines, which are not binding for

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<sup>26</sup> EU Youth Strategy, Communication from the EC, April 2009.

Online (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A52009DC0200>)

<sup>27</sup> An EU Agenda for the Rights of the Child, Communication from the European Commission, February 2011.

Online ([ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/agenda\\_child\\_state\\_of\\_play\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/agenda_child_state_of_play_en.pdf))

<sup>28</sup> Guidelines on child-friendly justice, Council of Europe, November 2010.

Online (<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168045f5a9>)

member states, propose minimum standards for the involvement of children in judicial proceedings. They state that “*The minimum age of criminal responsibility should not be too low and should be determined by law*” and that “*Alternatives to judicial proceedings such as mediation, diversion (of judicial mechanisms) and alternative dispute resolution should be encouraged whenever these may best serve the child’s best interests.*”

The EC has since then mainstreamed these guidelines in several EU legislative proposals, thus giving them a binding value for all 28 EU Member states. Following its proposal in 2013, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU especially adopted in May 2016 the *Directive (EU) 2016/800 on procedural safeguards for children who are suspects or accused persons in criminal proceedings*<sup>29</sup>.

Even though this directive explicitly excludes any harmonisation in the legal age of criminal responsibility across the EU (Article 2.5: “*This Directive does not affect national rules determining the age of criminal responsibility*”), it sets minimum standards to protect minors involved in criminal proceedings. Among them, it especially requires Member states to ensure that “*deprivation of liberty, in particular detention, shall be imposed on children only as a measure of last resort*” and “*where possible, the competent authorities have recourse to measures alternative to detention (alternative measures).*” EU Member states now have until by June 2019 to transpose this directive into national law.

For more detailed information about the current situation regarding the involvement of children in criminal judicial proceedings in each EU Member state, an overview as of 2014 is available online<sup>30</sup>.

#### *Action Plan on Unaccompanied Minors*

Regarding the specific issue of unaccompanied minors in the EU, the European Commission adopted in May 2010 an *Action Plan on Unaccompanied Minors*<sup>31</sup>, proposing an EU approach based on three main strands for action: prevention of unsafe migration and trafficking; reception and procedural guarantees in the EU; identification of durable solutions.

The Action sets out the goal that the future of each unaccompanied minor should be taken by competent authorities – preferably within six months – from the moment the child is found on EU territory or EU borders. It is based on ten principles to help guide EU institutions and Member States in their future approach towards unaccompanied children.

For the protection of unaccompanied minors, it set out the following recommendations to be followed by EU Agencies and Member states:

- Appoint a representative for all minors from the moment they are detected.
- Separate minors from adults to protect them from traffickers or smugglers and, thus, prevent (re-)victimisation.
- Provide appropriate accommodation (detention should only be used in exceptional situations).
- Create common guidelines on age assessment and family tracing.

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<sup>29</sup> Directive (EU) 2016/800 on procedural safeguards for children who are suspects or accused persons in criminal proceedings, European Parliament and Council of the EU, May 2016.  
Online ([eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32016L0800](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32016L0800))

<sup>30</sup> Summary of contextual overviews on children's involvement in criminal judicial proceedings in the 28 Member States of the EU, European Commission, 2014.  
Online (<https://goo.gl/zS8yLU>)

<sup>31</sup> Action Plan on Unaccompanied Minors (2010 – 2014), Communication from the European Commission, May 2010.  
Online ([https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/action\\_plan\\_on\\_unaccompanied\\_minors\\_en\\_1.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/action_plan_on_unaccompanied_minors_en_1.pdf))

## B. Specific EU tools and methods targeted at youth

In this specific framework for cooperation in the youth field at the EU level, two main methods can be distinguished: increased cooperation between Member States to coordinate their national policies, and specific tools – programmes, funds and initiatives – taken and implemented at the EU level to complement national policies.

### B.1. Open Method of Coordination – A reinforced coordination of national youth policies

The EU Youth Strategy adopted what is known as the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). This method brings together Member States' Ministers in the relevant fields in a specific configuration of the Council of the EU.

In that context, EU ministers identify together a number of goals and quantifiable objectives in their specific policy area. Member States then remain free to adopt legislations and adapt in a way that is consistent with their national priorities.

The process is supported by a system of quantitative monitoring based on jointly established indicators and benchmarks. It has taken the form of two Youth Reports in 2012 and 2015<sup>32</sup> produced by the European Commission, and looking at the achievements of the three preceding years.

Quantitative monitoring is accompanied by qualitative monitoring occurring during exercises of exchange of best practice, peer reviews between EU Member States and expert working groups.

The overall process is supported by the Structured Dialogue running in parallel to the three-year cycles. In that context, each Member States sets up a National Working Group organising national and regional consultations of young people following themes and guiding questions decided at EU level. These consultations lead to National Reports that are compiled and feed the work of the Youth Council of ministries.

### B.2 Specific initiatives at EU level

In addition to the reinforced coordination of youth policies between Member States, the EU has implemented specific initiatives to complement national policies. The implementation of these tools involves various actors, ranging from EC Directorate-Generals to public agencies at the national level.

#### *Erasmus+ - Formal and non-formal education*

Erasmus+ represents the first EU spending programme in the youth sector. Covering the 2014-2020 period, it merges the former EU programmes for education and training, youth and sport with a total budget of €14.7 billion.

Its specific objectives are to:

- improve the level of key competences and skills of young people, including those with fewer opportunities, and promote participation in democratic life in Europe and the labour market, active citizenship, intercultural dialogue, social inclusion and solidarity;

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<sup>32</sup> EU Youth Report 2015, European Commission, Publications Office of the European Union, 2016. Online ([ec.europa.eu/youth/library/reports/youth-report-2015\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/youth/library/reports/youth-report-2015_en.pdf))



- foster quality improvements in youth work, in particular through enhanced cooperation between organisations in the youth field and/or other stakeholders;
- complement policy reforms at local, regional and national level and support the development of knowledge and evidence-based youth policy;
- enhance the international dimension of youth activities and the role of youth workers and organisations as support structures for young people.

These objectives are pursued through three key actions:

1. Learning mobility of individuals: This key action supports mobility opportunities for young people through student exchanges, the European Voluntary Service and youth exchanges, exchanges of university staff and youth workers and relevant training and networking activities within and outside the EU.
2. Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices: This key action supports strategic partnerships, that is, cooperation projects aimed at promoting active citizenship, social innovation, participation in democratic life and entrepreneurship.
3. Support for policy reform: This key action provides funding for the implementation of the EU strategic framework and the structured dialogue with young people. It also helps European youth NGOs.

The programme implementation involves many actors. The EC is in charge of defining its budget, functioning and overall objectives. The *Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency* (EACEA), linked to the EC, implements the centralised parts of the programme and advertises it. At Member States' level, National Agencies are in charge of managing the decentralised parts of the programme.

In addition, several networks are providing support to stakeholders in the youth field, through their expertise and the exchange of identified good practices, for instance Eurydice for national education systems, and SALTO Youth for youth organisations.

#### *Employment and Social inclusion – Youth Guarantee*

The *European Social Fund* (ESF) is part of the EU cohesion policy, and the main tool for promoting employment and social inclusion, while focusing on the most deprived regions of the EU. While it doesn't focus in itself on youth, it participates to the implementation of the *Youth Guarantee*.

Introduced in 2013, the *Youth Guarantee* is a specific scheme aimed at tackling youth unemployment by ensuring that all young people under 25 get a good-quality, concrete offer within four months of them leaving formal education or becoming unemployed. Such offers include job, apprenticeship, traineeship, or continued education.

Besides the ESF financial contribution, the *Youth Guarantee* is also financed through the *Youth Employment Initiative*, launched to provide extra support to young people aged below 25 and living in regions where youth unemployment was higher than 25% in 2012. Additional funding is provided by Member States themselves.

#### *Employment and Social inclusion – Other initiatives*

Additional support to young people in finding a job comes from *Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs*. It provides funding to support cross-border exchanges young aspiring entrepreneurs and more experienced entrepreneur, in order to help new entrepreneurs to acquire the skills needed to run a small firm.

Indirect support also comes from the Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI). Youth is part of the target group of its three strands:

- The PROGRESS axis aims at the modernisation of employment and social policies in Member States, with a focus on fighting youth unemployment;
- The EURES axis fosters job mobility, and funds the “Your first EURES job” mobility scheme, which encourages young people up to 35 years old to find a job, traineeship or apprenticeship in another Member State;
- The Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis supports the provision of microcredit and microloans to vulnerable groups and micro-enterprises, including a focus on young unemployed people.

#### *Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020)*

Formerly called *Daphne*, part of the *Rights, Equality and Citizenship* programme is now funding projects preventing violence and discrimination against vulnerable groups including, among other categories, young people as a whole.

#### *Research in the field of youth*

The European research programme Horizon 2020, which followed the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, will run with a budget of nearly €80 billion from 2014 to 2020. Covering many topics, it includes a “Societal Challenges” strand, which itself funds transnational research projects with a focus on European youth<sup>33</sup>.

In 2014-2015, the “Societal Challenges” strand focused, among other issues, on “*the young generation in an innovative, inclusive and sustainable Europe (job insecurity, youth mobility, adult education, social and political engagement of young people, modernisation of public administrations)*”.

In the framework of the EU Youth Strategy, the EC also issues calls for tender for researches and studies in the field of youth, aimed at feeding the policy reforms of Member States.

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As shown above, there is no single EU youth policy. Youth has become, especially since 2009, an important topic in the EU agenda, which has focused on better coordinating the 28 national youth policies, and to support and complement this process through the action of the EU. This superposition of policy-making, and the multiplication of its tools at both national and EU levels, provide a wide range of supporting opportunities to young Europeans, whether directly by funding their mobility projects or indirectly by contributing to the improvement of education and youth work. At the same time, it creates a complex maze of programmes, funds and initiatives making the access to such opportunities more complicated for stakeholders.

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<sup>33</sup> A list of ongoing EU-funded research projects in the field of youth is provided in Annex 1.

### III. Council of Europe's actions in the youth field

Founded in 1949 to promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Europe, the Council of Europe (CoE) runs with a much lower budget than the EU and relies only on intergovernmentalism. With its 47 member states, however, it enables cooperation in the youth field at a broader scale than the EU.

In the youth field, the CoE encourages young people to get actively involved in strengthening civil society in Europe and to defend the values of human rights, cultural diversity and social cohesion. It also aims to promote and develop youth policies, putting special emphasis on the participation of young people.

The CoE, as part of its efforts to fostering greater youth participation, relies on a system of co-management: representatives from youth NGOs are contributing to committees with government officials who work together on defining priorities for the youth sector and making recommendations for future budgets and programmes. These proposals are then adopted by the Committee of Ministers, the Council of Europe's decision-making body.

To achieve its objectives in the youth field, the CoE's Youth Department brings together young people, youth associations and networks, government agencies and experts for discussions and feedback on current policies and future objectives. It also encourages the development of youth associations, networks and initiatives, and promotes international co-operation through specific funding opportunities.

These opportunities include activities ranging from training courses, study sessions, seminars, expert meetings and research, to publications and advice on youth policy development.

#### *Cooperation programmes*

As part of its action in the youth field, the CoE further collaborates with other national and international stakeholders.

The *Partnership between the EC and the CoE* in the field of youth policy, youth research and youth work is part of the collaborations. Since 1998, both institutions are working together on specific topics, now including:

- European Citizenship;
- Human rights education and intercultural dialogue;
- Quality and recognition of youth work and training;
- Better understanding and knowledge of youth;
- Youth policy development.

The Partnership activities and publications enhance the exchange of experience and good practice between the actors involved is embedded in a structured dialogue and contributes to the implementation of the political objectives of both partners.

The CoE has also been collaborating with the Russian Federation on youth policy since 1992. Main objectives of this cooperation are to support the development of youth policy at federal and regional levels and to provide assistance to non-governmental youth organizations, as well as to draw attention to interaction among government structures and public organizations.

## Conclusion

Despite profound disparities between European countries, young people across Europe have many similarities, making “European youth” a relevant concept for further social investigation. While a majority of young Europeans share common aspirations, from achieving a high level of education to moving to a foreign country, they also face common challenges, including finding a job in the post-crisis labour markets, avoiding social exclusion, and finding new, innovative and unconventional ways to participate in politics due to a rising distrust against “traditional politics”, i.e. political participation through institutionalised means such as elections and getting involved in a political party.

At the European level, the last decade has seen a rise in the importance of these issues in political agendas. While no single youth policy is identifiable at such a scale, a lasting trend is that of reinforced coordination of national policies, in particular within the European Union and the Council of Europe thanks to dedicated strategies and institutional structures.

The European Union, and its 28 Member States, has gone further than any other international institution in that field: on the one hand, it provides the necessary framework enabling transnational dialogues and the exchange of good practices, and on the other hand, it implements various initiatives creating new opportunities for young people, from paid internships to volunteering experiences.

However, these efforts at the EU level are still a work in progress. A slight improvement has been recorded in the last two years in issues such as education and unemployment, but the challenges European youth face as a whole remain long-lasting trends. In particular, a gap among young Europeans themselves is still growing, between well-integrated young people able to afford higher education and finding it easier to find a job after their studies, and the so-called NEETs (*Young people neither in employment nor in education and training*) suffering from social exclusion or facing an increasing risk of marginalisation.

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As the statistical office of the European Union, **Eurostat** provides a wealth of statistics and comparative data on EU Member states and partner countries. Its Database is available online and offers a wide range of statistics on Youth especially. (<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/youth/data/database>)

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## Annex 1 – Ongoing FP7 and H2020 research projects in the field of youth

<b>Youth mobility and labour market integration</b>	<b>MOVE</b> – Mapping mobility: Pathways, institutions and structural effects of youth mobility in EU ( <a href="http://www.move-project.eu">http://www.move-project.eu</a> )
	<b>YMOBILITY</b> – Youth mobility: Maximising opportunities for individuals, labour markets and regions in EU
	<b>NEGOTIATE</b> – Negotiating early job: Insecurity and labour market exclusion in Europe ( <a href="http://www.negotiate-research.eu">www.negotiate-research.eu</a> )
<b>Youth entrepreneurship</b>	<b>STYLE</b> – Strategic Transitions for Youth Labour in Europe ( <a href="http://www.style-research.eu">http://www.style-research.eu</a> )
	<b>CUPESE</b> – Cultural Pathways to Economic Self-Sufficiency and Entrepreneurship: Family Values and Youth Unemployment in Europe ( <a href="http://cupesse.eu">http://cupesse.eu</a> )
<b>Social inclusion</b>	<b>SociEtY</b> – Social Innovation, Empowering the Young for the Common Good ( <a href="http://www.society-youth.eu">http://www.society-youth.eu</a> )
	<b>CITISPYCE</b> – Combating inequalities through innovative social practices of, and for, young people in cities across Europe ( <a href="http://www.aston.ac.uk/lss/research/research-centres/interland/citispyce">http://www.aston.ac.uk/lss/research/research-centres/interland/citispyce</a> )
	<b>EXCEPT</b> – Social Exclusion of Youth in Europe: cumulative disadvantages, coping strategies, effective policies and transfer
<b>Young people’s participation in society and politics</b>	<b>MYPLACE</b> – Memory, Youth, Political Legacy and Civic Engagement ( <a href="http://www.fp7-myplace.eu">http://www.fp7-myplace.eu</a> )
	<b>PIDOP</b> – Processes Influencing Democratic Ownership and Participation ( <a href="http://www.fahs.surrey.ac.uk/pidop/index.htm">http://www.fahs.surrey.ac.uk/pidop/index.htm</a> )
	<b>PARTISPACE</b> – Spaces and Styles of Participation: Formal, non-formal and informal possibilities of young people’s participation in European cities ( <a href="http://www.partispace.eu">http://www.partispace.eu</a> )
	<b>CATCH-EyoU</b> – Constructing Active Citizenship with European Youth: Policies, practices, challenges and solutions
<b>Education</b>	<b>RESL.eu</b> – Reducing Early School Leaving in Europe ( <a href="http://www.resl-eu.org">www.resl-eu.org</a> )
	<b>GOETE</b> – Access, coping and relevance of education for young people in European knowledge societies in comparative perspective ( <a href="http://www.goete.eu">http://www.goete.eu</a> )

**PROMISE** is a collaborative research project involving 12 partners in 10 countries.




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**For more information** Please see the website: [www.promise.manchester.ac.uk/en/home-page/](http://www.promise.manchester.ac.uk/en/home-page/)  
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