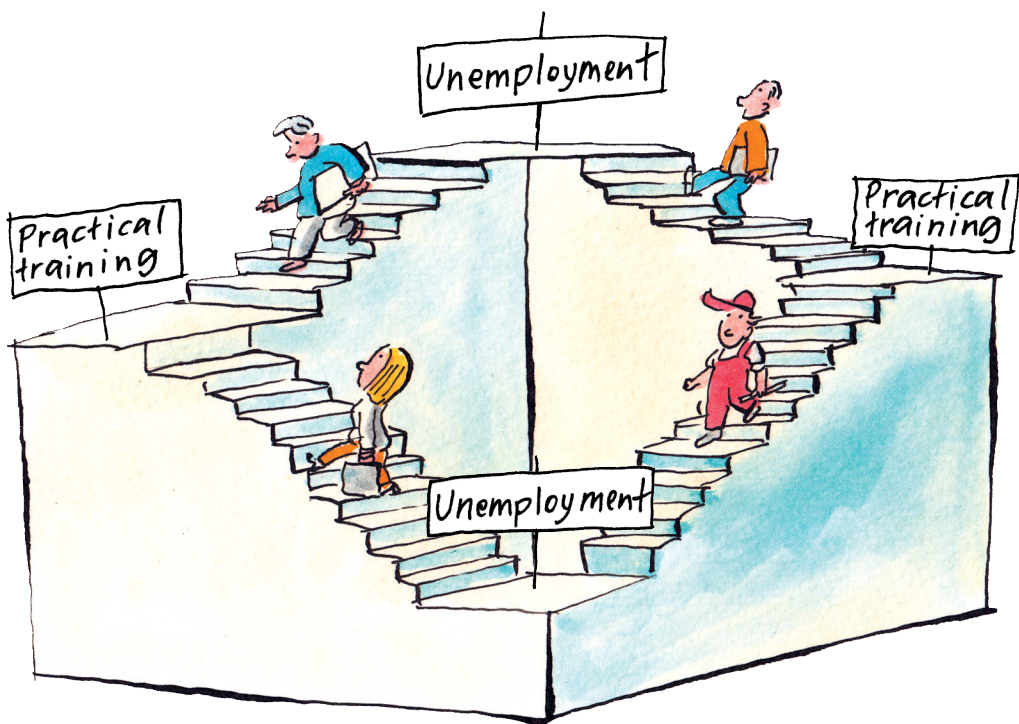


Youth unemployment





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FOREWORD

For years youth unemployment has been one of the most pressing problems in the European labor market; in autumn 2011 the unemployment rate in the 15-24 years age bracket was more than double the general unemployment rate. More and more young people are facing the prospect of absolutely nothing; they are neither involved in education or training nor are they working.

In its “Europe 2020” strategy, the European Commission focuses on improving the education and training situation, its aim being for the percentage of school drop-outs to fall and at least 40% of the younger generation to have a higher education degree by 2020. The dual aim of the flagship initiative “[Youth on the move](#)” is to make education and training systems in the countries of Europe more efficient and to make it easier for young people to enter the labor market.

For years combating youth unemployment in Europe has been one of the key focal issues of the “European Social Dialogue” education and training program of the European Centre for Workers’ Questions (EZA). By setting up the Platform for Young Workers in Europe in 2006 and organizing three European conferences on this issue so far, EZA has set itself the task of promoting the involvement of young workers in three fields: training, the labor market and the work of workers’ organizations.

In the 2011 education and training year, EZA coordinated projects on the theme of “youth unemployment”, the focal point of which was a European conference of young workers organized by [Europejski Dom Spotkań – Fundacja Nowy Staw \(FNS\)](#) and a seminar run by the [Catholic-Social Institute \(KSI\)](#) in Bad Honnef: their results and recommendations for action are summarized in this brochure.

At this juncture I would like to express special thanks to Marta Jędrych from the FNS, who since autumn 2011 has also headed up the core group of the Platform for Young Workers in Europe. She was the chief coordinator of the projects and drew up this report. My thanks also go to those responsible at the member centers involved, whose commitment helped make the projects a success. Finally I would like to thank my colleague Matthias Homey, who coordinated the activities from the EZA office. The European Commission's Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion supported our activities financially and in terms of content.

We hope that the results and recommendations for action in this brochure represent a useful tool for as many workers' organizations as possible engaged in combating youth unemployment and their multipliers in their daily work. We would be delighted to receive your suggestions on this issue, which is vital to the future of Europe. Our contact details are on the back of the brochure.

Roswitha Gottbehüt
Secretary General of EZA

1 Introduction

Young people often hear that they are the future. The future of their countries, of Europe, job market and trade unions. It has become a cliché which often sounds well but means little. Although the thesis that youth is the future of Europe cannot be undermined, this age group should be seen as the present time.

Young people are among us, they are confronted with many problems here and now and feel the negative effects of the crisis much harder than adults. When caring about the future we should act today and respond to problems of “our future” – the young people.

One of the major problems of young people is, without a doubt, unemployment, exclusion from the labour market, a bad job situation and the uncertainty of those lucky ones who managed to get a job.

The year 2011 was another crisis year, the deterioration of the situation of young people and it is high time the action for the benefit of young people was stepped up as much as possible. The European Centre for Workers' Questions (EZA), being aware of an especially difficult situation of young people in the labour market, decided to give attention to this issue through the project co-ordination of seminars devoted to this difficult subject.

The project was to analyse the situation of young people in the labour market, the reasons for the extremely difficult access to that market, their precarious employment situation and the discrimination of this age group as well as perspectives that lay ahead, possible solutions that could improve this financial situation of young people.

Unfortunately, in 2011 only two seminars addressing the situation of youth were held, but nothing is lost because some EZA member organizations by recognizing this issue as important, will discuss it at the seminars in 2012 and certainly also in the following years as well.

As part of the project “Youth Unemployment” the following seminars were held:

“The opportunities open to young people on the labour market” (03-09-11-AG) – seminar organised by the Catholic-Social Institute (KSI) in Bad Honnef between 24 and 26 October 2011.

“Give young people a chance – For a better training in Europe” (03-01-11-K0) – seminar organised by Europejski Dom Spotkań – Fundacja Nowy Staw (EDS-FNS) (European Meeting Centre – Nowy Staw Foundation) in Zegrze near Warsaw between 17 and 20 November 2011.

2 Youth and the labour market

2.1 Unemployed

It is natural that young people are more often unemployed than adults. But when this difference reaches a very high degree and young people have very poor prospects, the situation becomes very worrying and demands remedial measures.

The unemployment rate of youth in the European Union is more than twice higher than that of the general population. For example, in the third quarter of 2011 the unemployment rate of young people aged 15-24 in the EU was 21.3%, while the overall unemployment rate was 9.6% (Eurostat data). This huge disparity between the unemployment of young people and the general population is evident in most EU states, a positive surprise here is the example of Germany where the problem of youth unemployment is practically absent (2-3% difference).

It is also worth paying attention to the difference in youth unemployment rates among EU member countries, it ranges from 7% in the Netherlands to 45.7% in Spain (Eurostat data from the second quarter of 2011).

These percentage values conceal personal tragedy of millions of the young unemployed.

2.2 Who are the young unemployed?

Employers willingly employ young people... provided they have a minimum of several years of experience... This absurd condition is very often the cause of excluding the youth from the labour market. But where can they get experience if nobody wants to give them a chance?

Apart from experience, the level of education and qualifications plays a tremendous role. The following principle is evident: the higher the educa-

tion, the less likely one is unemployed. In this regard young people have big difficulties in competing with the older participants in the labour market, since generally they have lower qualifications associated with lower education levels and the aforementioned lack of work experience through which they could raise the level of their qualifications.

An interesting variable of youth unemployment is gender. The employment rate of the population in each EU member state is higher for men than for women. In the case of young people there is no so clear dependence. In fact, the current economic crisis initially hit primarily men working in industries that are most affected by the crisis, such as construction. This increase in unemployment among young men was significant especially at the beginning of the crisis in 2008-2010 when unemployment remained higher among young men than young women. Since 2010, the rising unemployment level among young women has been levelling the lack of employment between the sexes. The fact that younger generation women are better educated, which gives them more opportunities in the labour market, has to be taken into account.

Young people also more frequently than adults suffer from temporary periods of unemployment. Although relatively few young people are in a situation of long-term unemployment (only 6% according to the European Commission data), youth much more likely than young adults experiences short-term unemployment, which evidences the great uncertainty of this age group in the labour market.

The life situation of young unemployed is exacerbated by the fact that very often they are not entitled to unemployment benefits which contributes to deepening the social exclusion of unemployed young people and also narrows their possibilities for seeking employment.

2.3 NEETs – young people who do nothing

NEETs is the term for people who neither study, go to work nor participate in any training or courses (acronym of Not in Education, Employment or Training). The lack of any professional activity and education is assumed as a starting point in defining NEETs. Therefore, in this group we find both those who are actively looking for work and those who do not want to work or take education although nothing stands in the way, and also those who for some reason cannot take up employment or further education (chronically ill, disabled, caring for dependent persons).

Statistics evidence the fact that this problem occurs on a large scale.

According to Eurostat data, in 2010 around 7.5 million people aged 15-24, which amounts to 12.8%, remained outside the labour market and education. The percentage of NEETs varies considerably depending on the EU country, in 2010 it reached the highest value in Bulgaria (21.8%) and the lowest in the Netherlands (4.4%).

Generally, the women prevail in this category, especially in the age group 20-24, while among younger people (aged 15-19) the majority are men. As for the level of education, across the EU, people with primary and secondary level education are predominant in this group. People with higher education constitute only a few percent in this group.

2.4 Blessed are those who go to work

Find a job finally – it is a dream of millions of young Europeans. In the eyes of the unemployed those who have found a job are really lucky fellows. Is it really the case? Let us examine the conditions under which young workers are employed.

Young workers constitute a group that experiences the constant uncertainty of their professional situation and the constant threat of losing their jobs.

The big problem here is the so-called junk contracts. Employers often agree only to conclude fixed-term contracts, often also in a form that does not guarantee pension and health insurance.

In 2010 42% of young workers in Europe were employed on fixed-term contracts, while in the 25-59 age group there were only 11% of such contracts concluded (Eurostat data).

Another typical form of employing young workers is part-time work. While this situation is understandable and desirable for those who combine work with education, for others, getting lower wages makes it difficult to achieve full independence. Sometimes young people are also forced to take up self-employment instead of an employment contract, which in practice is only apparent self-employment and for young workers it is an additional source of uncertainty.

Having difficulty in finding their perfect or at least suitable work young people are forced to take up any employment. Thus they often work below their qualifications and accept insecure forms of employment while in addition being remunerated worse than the older participants of the labour market.

Young workers are also those who generally lose their jobs in the first place in times of a crisis or transitional difficulties of a given company. Fixed-term contracts are often simply not extended. Permanent contracts do not protect young workers from being the first to be dismissed either, companies prefer to keep older, more experienced employees and look for savings in dismissing the young ones

Hence, not only do young people have huge problems in finding work, but also in keeping it.

3 The opportunities open to young people in the labour market in the European Union

This is the title of the seminar held at the Catholic-Social Institute in Bad Honnef in October 2011. It was more of a working group than a seminar in character. About 20 people – representatives of very different countries and age groups participated in it.

The purpose of this working group was to analyse the causes and possible solutions with regard to youth unemployment in the various EU member states. The measures taken to fight youth unemployment, proposed strategies as well as perspectives that young Europeans have in the labour market were subjected to the analysis. Efforts were made to develop proposals to increase the chances of particular groups of young people in the labour market. A very important method in this regard was to compare the situation in different countries which was possible due to the presence of speakers from all over Europe. The analysis of pan-European solutions was facilitated by the presence of a representative of the European Commission.

3.1 The integration of young people in the community is a priority

The main objective of the labour market policy should be the integration of young people in the economic life. In order to facilitate the professional integration of young people, the focus should be given to the socialization of the world of work and a better design of the transition from education to work. The participation in working life enables acquiring important social competences through the acquisition of behaviour patterns corresponding to the ethics of the profession. When taking measures for the benefit of integration, due care should be taken to avoid discrimination based on gender.

3.2 School and profession

School and vocational education of youth is the most important prerequisite for the future of society. Governments and businesses are responsible for the relevant education and vocational training. Young people should be regarded as partners in the dialogue of complete confidence and included in the reflection on shaping the education and training processes. That is why young people should be early enough and adequately informed on this issue. The transition from education to the labour market should be made with educational and psychological support and assisted by career counselling.

3.3 Political solutions

With regard to the labour market young people now experience uncertainty and adverse forms of employment, which leads to the degradation of young workers. Thus there must be political solutions such as:

- Statutory regulations regarding minimum and maximum wages – the upper limit of wages will “free” money for e.g. wages for all workers and creating new jobs. Wage dumping can be prevented by the minimum wage.
- A fair balance of wages is needed, i.e. the payment must match the work done.
- Fixed-term contracts and temporary work lead to the uncertainty of young participants in the labour market. Fixed-term contracts should be legally prohibited, unless they are objectively and matter-of-factly justified. Social security must be guaranteed for all workers including those who perform temporary work.

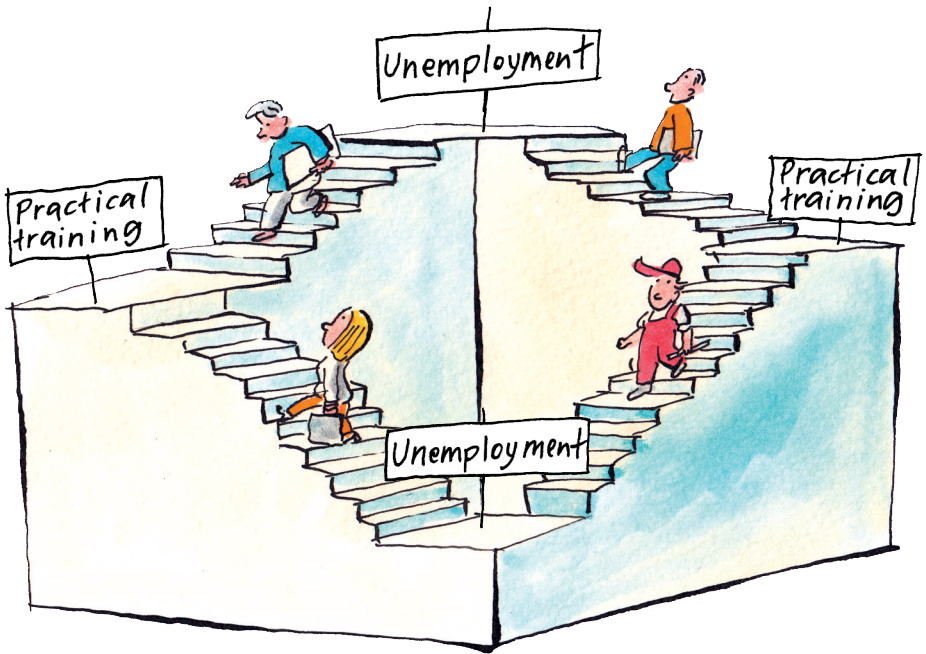
3.4 Europe 2020 Strategy and youth

EU priorities to improve the chances of young people in the labour market are in particular areas as follows:

- support the transition from education to the labour market (career counselling, vocational training, internships, active policies of the labour market, individual approach),
- improvement in the labour market (stimulating the demand for labour, reducing labour market segmentation, promotion of quality mobility),
- better cooperation between the actors (anticipating and forecasting skills, matching training with the demand for labour, counselling in schools, recognition of skills, apprenticeships, internships, innovative ways of gaining experience).

As part of the Strategy Europe 2020 programme “Youth on the move” seeks to enhance the level of education of youth and increase their employment opportunities. If the programme potential is fully exploited, it can greatly contribute to improving the situation of youth and achieving indicators assumed in the Strategy. This programme includes two-pronged action:

- coordination of the policy so as to identify and stimulate action at EU and national levels,
- specific activities for young people – such as the EURES initiative “The first job with EURES” for the benefit of employee mobility in the EU and increased support for young entrepreneurs through the new European microfinancing tool ‘Progress’.



4 Give young people a chance – For a better training in Europe

Under this title a conference organized by the European Meeting Centre – Nowy Staw Foundation and EZA Platform of Young Workers was held in Zegrze near Warsaw in November 2011. The conference brought together nearly 70 participants from 18 EU states – young representatives of trade unions and labour organizations associated in EZA.

The project's objective was to analyse the situation of young people in three areas: the labour market, trade unions and education. The whole structure of the programme took into account those three elements – three experts who outlined the situation of young people in these three aspects participated in the conference. In addition, the participants were divided into three working groups, each group worked on one aspect. Young participants highly praised the work of the working groups as a very effective method involving and motivating for exchange of experiences and search for good solutions. Group work proceeded with the use of many creative methods, discussions, simulations and games.

4.1 The participation of young workers in the labour market

This working group took on in particular issues such as: opportunities and barriers for young people in the labour market (comparison of individual EU states), the transition from education to the labour market, the difficulties young people face in their first job and the role of trade unions in increasing chances of youth in the labour market.

Young people have fewer and fewer chances for stable employment, especially those at risk: with worse qualifications, disabled, women raising children.

Lack of work and increasing problems in obtaining stable employment are delaying the process of entering adult life and a longer stay in the education system (we have more and better-educated youth, but we observe the phenomenon of depreciation of diplomas and deterioration of the situation of low-skilled young people). The phenomenon of taking up professional and family roles later in life is more frequent.

Participants in this working group found out that despite the difficult situation on the labour market young people should be active and think positive, they should look for solutions themselves and work together to solve their problems. They must engage in life-long learning, think critically and be active players in a civic society. Lack of critical thinking makes young people slaves of economy, this is the fact they are not aware of.

Formal education is very important for young job seekers, it provides analytical skills and teaches abstract thinking, but does not give the required labour market experience. The quality of formal education is extremely important. The importance of informal education which helps young people develop their language, social and intercultural skills cannot be ignored. Informal education perfectly complements formal education, so young people should be encouraged to take it up as well.

It has to be also taken into account that the labour market is not a constant phenomenon and the world of work is constantly changing. Not only should young people be trained for professions such as those already in existence, but also for professions that will change in the future. And more and more they will have to learn to create their own jobs rather than wait until someone gives them that job.

4.2 The participation of young workers in trade unions

This issue covered mostly the social dialogue, trade union models in Europe and the question of whether young workers need trade unions.

Trade unions have few young members. This situation differs from country to country, but the general principle remains the same – young people rarely engage in the work of trade unions.

A possible reason for this situation is that new forms of employment for young workers prevent them from becoming members of trade unions. Young people often pay more attention to individual than collective action. They evaluate the activities of trade unions as negative, have sceptical attitude towards them and do not trust them.

Many young people simply do not have time for public activities or do not want to devote their free time to such activities.

So how can be young people engaged in the activities of trade unions? For instance by the means of information campaigns in sectors where the majority of young people work, the cooperation of trade unions with student organizations, changing the image of trade unions through public or media campaigns, or an organization of more modern, colourful and fun demonstrations and pickets in the form of happenings. In order to get through to youth, trade unions must use the tools young people use (Internet TV - YouTube, Facebook, Twitter).

The conference participants viewed a short promotional video showing how a German trade union recruits young members with the use of innovative ways targeted directly to young people, which have proved a huge success and one action brought in a lot of young members to this trade union. Therefore it is needed to know how to convince young people, how to talk to them and how to reach out to their needs.

But in order to increase the participation of young people in trade unions, two ways need to be followed, on the one hand – first open trade unions to young people and new forms of action, on the other – change the awareness and negative opinions that young people have about trade unions.

4.3 The participation of young workers in education

The main issues discussed in this group were: education of the youth in the 21st century, the relationship of education with social integration and education in the context of globalization.

Education can be understood as an investment in human capital. Therefore unemployment is often a result of lack of qualifications or their mismatch to the labour market requirements.

The education system often does not respond to the needs of the labour market, it should be made more open for the needs of employers. The education system is required to be reformed so that people entering the labour market have at least elementary work experience. Apprenticeships and learning through working in workplaces are essential, this largely solves the problem of complete lack of experience of people seeking their first job. Moreover, internships must be made mandatory in every form of education. In order to make it possible, employers should be involved more, encouraged and assisted in taking students as interns.

It is also necessary to change the values system of the modern society so that social exclusion is prevented. Earning large sums of money cannot be the sole or main goal. There is a need for changes in self-esteem and enhancement of the status of the work which does not require college education. The education system should provide more opportunities for children due to the fact that today often both parents work. The education system should be supported as well as families themselves.

5 EZA Platform of Young Workers

The European Centre for Workers' Questions (EZA), being aware of the difficult situation of young people in the labour market and the importance of providing young people with the best opportunities, set up the Platform of Young Workers (PYW).

This platform brings together young representatives of EZA member organizations who want to work together to strengthen the position of young workers in social and professional life.

The Platform's activities are focused on analysing and discussing any issues related to young Europeans and the labour market by initiating, organizing and promoting projects at the international and European levels.

The Platform's objectives are:

- drawing attention of politicians, social partners, trade union activists and labour organizations to issues related to youth,
- actions to improve the working conditions of young workers,
- allowing young workers to exchange experiences, good practices, knowledge, etc.,
- increasing the role of young workers in their organizations and society through their active participation,
- motivating young people to take action,
- encouraging the Platform' members in joint planning and carrying out projects for the benefit of young workers.

The main and most visible task of the Platform is to organize a conference for young workers. This conference, combined with the general meeting of the Platform, is held every two years. Until now, there were three conferences held (in Belgium in 2007, Portugal in 2009 and Poland in 2011). Apart from the conference, the Platform organizes smaller seminars for young workers and conducts surveys among them.

An important objective which the Platform's members pursue is to increase the participation of young people in the seminars organized by EZA member centres. It is important to involve young employees in the debate on the future of European labour market, which is not possible without the presence of young people where such discussions are held. The voice of young people should be listened to with attention and considered on a par with the opinions of people in the labour market who have longer experience and usually a better position. The real exchange of experience should also have an intergenerational dimension.

6 Recommendations for workers' organizations

Workers' organizations should focus a lot of their attention on young people and aim their activities at young people. In this regard it is vital to:

- Consider young people partners in dialogue of complete trust and involve them in discussions on the subject of the form that education and training processes should take,
- Provide young people with support during the transition from education to the labor market (by offering or giving easier access to career counseling, vocational training, apprenticeships),
- As a workers' organization promote better integration of young people in the labor market with collective wage agreements. Examples of this can be: creating more training opportunities for young people, taking on young people on a permanent job contract after their training, semi-retirement provisions with the creation of jobs for young people,
- Promote and make it easier for young people to take up apprenticeships (to enable this to happen employers have to become more involved and be encouraged to and receive assistance in taking on people at school as apprentices),
- Training – it is worth offering training courses to young people combined with international exchange of experiences. The range of training on offer should be adapted to suit demand on the labor market (in this respect it is important to plan for the future and training should be provided for young people not only for currently existing occupations but also for those that will exist in the future),
- Encourage young people to gather knowledge from every aspect of their life and surroundings,
- Encourage young people to become involved in activities of trade unions for example by organizing information campaigns in sectors in which a

large number of young people are employed, by working with student organizations, changing the image of trade unions through social and media campaigns, organizing more modern forms of demonstrations and happenings, and being present on Internet social networking sites. Work should also be done to change the awareness of young people on the subject of trade unions and their negative image,

- Take measures to combat all forms of discrimination against young people on the job market and in trade unions,
- Bring about greater participation by young people in seminars organized by member centers of the European Center for Workers' Questions (EZA) as participants and speakers,
- Make more attractive the programs of seminars on work in working groups using creative and interesting methods and methods that motivate people to exchange experiences and seek the appropriate solutions.