

Youth Employment in Europe

# Youth Employment in Europe

## A CALL FOR CHANGE



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# ***INTRODUCTION***



Since its foundation the European Youth Forum has demonstrated its adaptability and ability to address the pressing issues affecting young people throughout Europe. The work of the Youth Forum is spread across a number of fields including volunteering, education, health, sustainable development and youth work development. However, over the past 3 years the European Youth Forum has been increasingly focusing on the issue of employment, not just because of the way in which young people have been adversely affected by the global economic crisis, but also due to the profound way in which unemployment can affect different aspects of a young person's life.

The youth unemployment rate in Europe has been consistently higher than that of the older population since 1945, but since 2008 it has been increasing at an alarming rate. Today we face a situation where 1 in 5 young people are out of work and face a labour market that is less accessible and more volatile than before. Although international organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) have devoted quite a lot of attention to youth unemployment as a structural issue with the labour market, requiring reform and increased investment in youth support structures, other institutions have been slow in their response. Some have even taken the opportunity to directly criticise young people, and to deride this current

generation for their “lack of focus and commitment”.

The position of the Youth Forum is clear: young people in Europe have the right to quality and stable employment. Young people have not been adequately provided for and despite being more educated and driven than previous generations, they face structural hurdles in accessing the labour market. The Youth Forum has consistently represented the interests of young people at institutional level, developing progressive, but also realistic policies on internships, youth entrepreneurship and the need for a youth guarantee in Europe.

**“Young people have not been adequately provided for and despite being more educated and driven than previous generations, they face structural hurdles in accessing the labour market.”**

By creating the Youth Employment Action project in 2009 the Youth Forum not only signalled its commitment to youth employment issues amongst its own membership, it also showed that youth organisations can lead on this issue, that they can give practical skills to young people looking for employment and act as a voice for young

people who are too frequently overlooked and sidelined in decision-making processes relating to employment policy and the labour market.

Over the next pages you will read about the different policies of the European Youth Forum and the different measures that we feel can help a generation of young people

suffering from a volatile and unforgiving labour market. We have also provided information on the sterling work of youth organisations in this field, proving that, rather than waiting to be provided for, young people are at the forefront in creating change in employment policies and practice.



***YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT  
IN EUROPE - FROM  
PROBLEM TO CRISIS***



Youth unemployment has been an issue in Europe since long before the recent global economic crisis. When the European economy was at its strongest in 2007 and early 2008 and the overall unemployment rate in the EU was less than 7%, the youth unemployment rate remained stubbornly high at just over 15%.<sup>1</sup> There are many reasons for this; young people often find it difficult to make the transition from education to the labour market, some find that they do not have the necessary skills to get the job that they want, less experienced candidates are often less attractive to employers. It has also been argued that some young people do not have the necessary “soft skills”, including effective communication and self-presentation, in order to market themselves effectively to employers.

Predictably, the onset of the financial crisis in mid-2008 impacted young people the worst. The overall youth unemployment rate in the EU climbed to over 21% in 2010 and has remained over 20% ever since.<sup>2</sup> As European governments have been trying to deal with the economic magnitude of the recession, young people have also lost out in many countries with regards to their benefits and youth services, including the amount of money attributed to community and youth organisations.

The recession has also revealed huge differences with regards to the situation of young people throughout Europe. Germany, Austria and the Netherlands have managed to keep their youth unemployment rate under 10%, which is quite low considering the European average but is still not to be neglected. In Germany a strong economic performance in 2010 and quality apprenticeship schemes which prioritise practical skills as much as academic performance has meant that while youth unemployment in many European countries continued to grow, in late 2010 and early 2011 the youth unemployment rate in Germany actually fell from 7.5% to 6.5%.<sup>3</sup> In the Netherlands a multi-component youth package that includes mentoring programmes for young employees, investments of €40 million in job opportunities for vulnerable youth and a €10 million investment in career guidance has managed to control the rate of youth unemployment during the recession.<sup>4</sup> Although economic performance is by far the most important factor when considering youth unemployment, progressive policies towards the issue and a willingness to address age-based discrimination on the labour market have proven to be effective ways of dealing with youth unemployment.

1. [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/images/1/14/Youth\\_unemployment\\_rates\\_EU.PNG](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/images/1/14/Youth_unemployment_rates_EU.PNG)

2. *Ibid*

3. <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/8c907618-39ca-11e0-8dba-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1VW27AAA>

4. International Labour Office, *Global Employment Trends for Youth* (2010, Geneva)

Even in comparison to the high European average, in some countries young people have been disproportionately affected to an alarming degree. Spain's youth unemployment rate climbed dramatically after the onset of the financial crisis, reaching 46% by mid 2011, this is compared to a national average of 20.1%.<sup>5</sup> Such high levels of youth unemployment have resulted in social unrest, emigration and widespread dissatisfaction with the government among young people. The reason for Spain's high youth unemployment rate is partly explained by its economic reliance on the construction sector, in which most young males were employed. This sector dramatically collapsed in late 2008 and has since failed to recover.

***“The reluctance of employers to invest in youth has meant that young people have been unable to attain proper contracts and secure their position on the labour market.”***

Another factor that is not unique to Spain is that young people are hugely over-represented in temporary and unstable jobs. Temporary contract workers have far fewer working rights than those in indefinite contracts and are usually the first to be let go in times of economic difficulty. This has certainly been the case in Greece where the Hellenic Statistics Authority reported a 43.1% youth unemployment rate in comparison to a national average of 15.8%.<sup>6</sup> Where older generations enjoy undetermined and secure contracts, younger people struggle to find jobs, and in creative industries exploitative internships, which are unpaid or with a remuneration that is a fraction of the minimum wage, have replaced real jobs. In many European countries efforts to massage unemployment statistics by directing young people into temporary jobs and internships has backfired as they struggle to hold down a position in an unstable economy.<sup>7</sup> The reluctance of employers to invest in youth has meant that young people have been unable to attain proper contracts and secure their position on the labour market.

5. [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/images/5/55/Table\\_unemployment\\_rates.PNG](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/images/5/55/Table_unemployment_rates.PNG)  
6. Hellenic Statistics Authority, Labour Force Survey April 2011 (Athens, 2011)  
7. [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/eie/chap3-8-2\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/eie/chap3-8-2_en.html)

Despite being the most educated generation to date many young people suffer a skills gap in a labour market that is more volatile and demanding than ever. The gradual privatisation of tertiary education in certain European countries, combined with a labour market that demands more flexible skills than ever before has made youth unemployment almost intractable in certain areas. At the same time the education curricula remain unadapted to the skills needs of the labour market and leave young graduates unprepared for what lies ahead of them. An increase in youth unemployment is closely related to a marginalisation of young people and is often at the heart of anti-social behaviour such as the August 2011 riots in the UK.

In order to address this issue youth organisations, decision-makers and employers require a coordinated approach that tackles the issue in a sustainable way that coherently address the economic and social and educational factors that lie at the heart of youth unemployment.





***COUNTING THE COST:  
THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF  
YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT***



The costs of youth unemployment and exclusion are becoming increasingly apparent as the impacts of the economic crisis and austerity measures filter down to the most vulnerable in society. In 2009 Eurofound, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, conducted research showing that across 21 EU Member States the costs of the exclusion of young people amounted to more than €100 billion. This study, which just looked at the costs of social welfare payments and the contributions to gross national product (GNP) that these young people are unable to make, puts a preliminary figure of the cost to society of €14,000 per young person not in education, employment or training (NEET), of which €11,000 represents unpaid contributions and €3,000 represents benefits payments.<sup>8</sup>

These statistics only begin to show the true costs youth unemployment and youth exclusion and do not consider, for example, the health impact that youth unemployment can have. Undoubtedly such high levels on unemployment will have social and health consequences. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has acknowledged that in recent years there has been an increase in mental health issues among youth, including anxiety, depression, eating disorders and self-harm. There is a lack of specific data on youth and mental health but the WHO estimates that 10-20% of

young people in Europe suffer from mental health issues, this figure is much higher among disadvantaged young people and migrants.<sup>9</sup> Suicide remains the third most common cause of death among young people in Europe. It is generally accepted that increased social pressures, such as financial and employment worries can trigger mental health problems or exacerbate existing issues, so unless concerted action is taken, the mental health situation of young people in Europe is likely to further decline in coming years. Research conducted at the University of Maastricht in 2011 has further highlighted that long term unemployment when young can have severe economic and societal impacts in the future, adding urgency to the situation.<sup>10</sup>

**“Unless concerted action is taken, the mental health situation of young people in Europe is likely to further decline in coming years.”**

For many European policy makers the record level of youth unemployment has become a demographic embarrassment and an economic liability. But it is also an issue of public health concern. Unemployed individuals consistently experience lower psychological well-being than their employed

8. <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/press/eurofoundnews/2011/july/newsletter2.htm>

9. WHO-Europe, A Snapshot of the Health of Young People in Europe (Copenhagen, 2009)

10. Beling, A., Unemployment, Mental Health and Well-being in Youth (University of Maastricht, 2011)

counterparts; the unemployed are more symptomatic, in that they tend to suffer more from depression, anxiety and psychosomatic symptoms; equally showing poorer self-esteem and life satisfaction than employed individuals. This coupled with the social pressures of adolescence and early adulthood has the potential to create a generation of young people suffering from mental anguish and social isolation.<sup>11</sup>

The EU has given special focus to the issue of mental health, with the Mental Health Pact in 2008, and the Mental health in Youth and Education Conference which was organised with the Swedish Ministry of Health in September 2009. More recently, in June 2011, the Council of the EU recognised the pressing issue of mental health in Europe, inviting the Commission and the Member States to continue working on the area and to conduct further research on the economic and social costs of mental health in Europe. Mental health is also an important area of work for the European Youth Forum, particularly in relation to the social inclusion of young people.

Positive rhetoric and a focus on youth is always welcome, but we must consider the potential impact that cuts to health services, including youth mental health services, could have on young people. Research has clearly shown that unemployment and insecure employment has a negative impact on mental health. This is arguably even more the case for young people who are more vulnerable during the transition from education to employment. As European leaders focus on controlling the financial crisis, they must also be careful to avoid a human recession, particularly amongst young people who have already borne the brunt of the crisis.

11. Ibid



# ***A YOUTH GUARANTEE FOR EUROPE***



Long term unemployment when young hinders personal development, lowers life chances and exposes young people to poverty and social exclusion. For this reason addressing youth unemployment is generally seen as an urgent task with regard to the development of European society, including ensuring the sustainability of social protection structures.

Many countries have already put in place programmes to boost youth employment, and specialised measures often referred to as youth guarantees, early intervention or back to work policies. However, the means to achieving this aim can vary considerably with some schemes emphasising training and others trying to get young people into internships or other low-level jobs.

A standardised youth guarantee that will offer young people a job, training or re-training within 4 months of unemployment is what is required to tackle the youth unemployment rate and kickstart the European economy. Such a policy measure will help young people keep in touch with the labour market and keep updating their skills and competences, thus contributing to their employability at a later stage. Youth Guarantees that will offer a more tailored approach in helping young persons deal with the structural failures of the labour market will eventually build trust and confidence, and are more likely to strengthen the labour market ties and participation rates for the future.

**“A standardised youth guarantee that will offer young people a job, training or retraining within four months of unemployment is what is required to tackle the youth unemployment rate and kickstart the European economy.”**

Taking into account the diverse nature of the European labour market and the different economies in Europe, the means of implementing youth guarantees can vary considerably. For this reason the European Youth Forum defined the overarching principles behind the concept in its Position Paper on the Youth Guarantee in 2010.<sup>12</sup> A core concept behind the youth guarantee is that young people should have the right to personalised career counselling and guidance should be available to help find a tailored solution to unemployment. Education and training opportunities are important in securing a position on the labour market, in order to make these opportunities as open and available as possible, the Youth Guarantee scheme should be accompanied by a scholarship or should at least offer

12. Available at <http://www.youthforum.org/>

sufficient income, social protection and minimum health insurance standards to prevent young people from falling into poverty. Young people should also be free from all forms of discrimination when accessing Youth Guarantee schemes.

A rapidly changing and demanding labour market has made the recognition of skills and qualifications an important issue. Skills and qualifications gained as part of Youth Guarantee programmes must have formal recognition and should be fully respected by employers.

EU Member States should design their Youth Guarantee schemes in order to deliver on the goals that have been established under the Europe 2020 strategy. The high rate of youth unemployment is a key obstacle to achieving 75% employment

in Europe by the year 2020. The schemes should also consider the key points made in the Europe 2020 flagship initiatives, particularly Youth on the Move, New Skills for New Jobs and Innovation Union, which advocate the merits of youth mobility in Europe and the need for young people to be trained for new, innovative industries such as renewable energy and sustainable development. Furthermore, young people not in education, training or employment are particularly vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion, this group of young people should therefore be specifically addressed when working towards the Europe 2020 poverty target of the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion.



***QUALITY INTERNSHIPS  
FOR THE JILTED  
GENERATION***



The competition for jobs has become much more intense in the past 10 years in Europe. Whereas previous generations could make a relatively straightforward step from education to working life, this has become a giant leap for young people today. A key issue is that many employers demand that young people should be well educated, competent and mobile, but also that they have previous working experience. This is also often the case for “entry” level position.

Internships were relatively unknown in Europe until around 10 years ago. To a certain extent the concept of internships is imported from America and their rapid development in Europe, particularly in creative industries and in multi-national companies, has caught policy makers and labour rights organisations off guard.

As a half way house between education and employment, internships have the potential to help young people deal with a rapidly changing, and arguably volatile, labour market by offering first hand experience of working environments in a context that is geared towards education and the development of skills. The European Youth Forum adopted its Opinion Paper on Internships in 2009, stating that internships can be a valuable step in the transition from education to professional life and emphasizing that internships must be, above all, a learning experience for young people that

should facilitate their successful integration in the labour market.

**“As a half way house between education and employment, internships have the potential to help young people deal with a rapidly changing, and arguably volatile, labour market.”**

In this Opinion Paper the Youth Forum also noted that in many countries the learning dimension of internships has been decreasing, with many interns working on issues and tasks that do not contribute to the progress in their professional development.<sup>13</sup> International and intergovernmental organisations such as the International Labour Organization and the OECD have noted that some organisations have replaced paid positions with a regular cycle of underpaid interns.<sup>14</sup> Practices such as these are detrimental to European working rights and long term economic development. The European Commission has also echoed the position of the Youth Forum stating that quality internships which are of high educational standards and have a decent level of remuneration should be a priority for policy makers and employers alike.<sup>15</sup>

13. European Youth Forum, Opinion Paper on Internships (Adopted Brussels, May 2009)

14. International Labour Organization, Global Employment Trends for Youth: 2011 Update (Geneva, 2011)

15. See European Commission Communication « Promoting young people's full participation in education, employment and society » COM (2007) 498 final

Due to a lack of coherency as to what constitutes as a quality internship, the European Youth Forum developed a Charter on Quality Internships and Apprenticeships in cooperation with European policy makers, leading European businesses and trade unions in 2011.<sup>16</sup> Many of the core principles that were adopted during this consultation process had already been developed by the Youth Forum in its 2009 Opinion Paper on Internships. Drawing a distinction between internships that are organised as part of formal education, for example compulsory internships that constituted part of a university course or other third level education programme, and those that take place after education, the Youth Forum defined a set of principles that quality internships should comply with.

For internships taking place as part of formal education there should be a written contract between the educational institution, the interns and the hosting organisation. The specific internship should be recognised by the education programme and should have specified learning objectives, these learning objectives should correspond with the length of the internship and the tasks which the intern is given by the host organisation. Likewise, at the end of the internship there should be clear criteria for evaluation and the opportunity for all parties to give feedback on the experience. The Youth Forum also strongly believes in the added value of specific guidance by a

supervisor or mentor, trained specifically for the role, who can give the relevant support and advice to an intern in their host organisation. Finally, interns should be provided the appropriate insurance and be reimbursed for all costs, including travel costs, incurred during the internship.

For internships taking place outside of formal education, a different set of principles are required, particularly to ensure that the intern is treated fairly in the workplace and that the internship is not designed to replace a fully paid position. Like internships taking place in conjunction with formal education, a written contract should exist between the intern and the host organisation stating the duration of the internship and its learning objectives. Interns should receive decent remuneration according to his or her tasks and working hours. This remuneration should be in addition the reimbursement of cost incurred during the internship. Interns should have their competencies recognised and should have the opportunity to take part in relevant trainings, particularly those relating to labour legislation, workers' rights and regulations concerning safety in the work place.

16. For more information on the Quality Charter visit <http://www.qualityinternships.eu/>

With these principles clearly defined, the Youth Forum and partners have been consistently advocating for quality internships over the past 2 years. The European Commission seems to have taken many of its points onboard and will develop its own Quality Framework for Internships in partnership with the Member States, but much work still has to be done and it has become clear that solving the internship issue remains pivotal in finding solutions to the youth unemployment issue.





***YOUTH  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP  
AND INNOVATION***



Youth entrepreneurship has become a more prominent issue on the European policy agenda over the past few years, with the European Commission in particular promoting youth entrepreneurship in order to achieve a more dynamic and innovative Europe by the year 2020.<sup>17</sup> The European Youth Forum welcomes this new focus on the issue and strongly believes that entrepreneurship is not only a form of employment but also a way of realising innovative ideas and solutions. Entrepreneurship creates jobs, fosters wealth for society as a whole and particularly social entrepreneurship, including green entrepreneurship, contributes to community development, supports environmental sustainability and produces social capital.

With the high levels of youth unemployment in Europe, entrepreneurship is increasingly seen and proposed to young people as an alternative way to be active on the labour market, get income and realise their potential. However, the number of young people that engage in entrepreneurial activities remains relatively low.

In order to encourage greater youth entrepreneurship the European Youth Forum believes that young people should have the same chances in this respect as others and their specific needs have to be adequately addressed to avoid being under-represented in the business environment. Young aspiring entrepreneurs are particularly vulnerable since they need to process a huge amount of new information, they

have limited access to institutional support and they are often put off by strict laws on bankruptcy and high administrative burdens.

***“With the high levels of youth unemployment in Europe, entrepreneurship is increasingly seen and proposed to young people as an alternative way to be active on the labour market.”***

The European Youth Forum and its Member Organisations have already highlighted the need for more support on enhancing opportunities for young people to successfully engage in entrepreneurship. The Youth Forum Policy Paper on Employment states that young people should be in a position to consider self-employment and entrepreneurship as a viable option for their career with measures in place to support this goal, including the simplification of administrative procedures for young people, more information about social security systems, better access to business incubators, and most importantly: the integration of entrepreneurship in school curricula from an early stage, involving youth organisations in developing these education programmes.<sup>18</sup>

17. European Commission Innovation Union Flagship Initiative [http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/index\\_en.cfm?pg=keydocs](http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/index_en.cfm?pg=keydocs)  
18. See 0813-07 European Youth Forum's Policy Paper on Youth Employment

The Youth Forum has also been active in an advocacy context on this issue, organising a roundtable event in the European Parliament in May 2011 to bring together young entrepreneurs and policy makers in order to discuss actions that need to be taken in order to make entrepreneurship more appealing to young people. Youth entrepreneurship and self-employment was also one of the key topics addressed in the EU Structured Dialogue with youth, implemented during the Trio Presidency Spain-Belgium-Hungary under the theme of youth employment. At the April 2010 EU Youth Conference in Jerez, Spain, young people and representatives from the various Ministries of Youth Affairs from the 27 EU Member States identified a number of priorities to be addressed, including that entrepreneurship should be encouraged and all young people willing to become entrepreneurs should have equal opportunities to do it, that procedures linked to entrepreneurship should be simplified, that better information on entrepreneurship and support programmes is required, and that there is a need for specific training and support in going through the complex procedures.<sup>19</sup>

Formal education has a vital role when it comes to encouraging entrepreneurship, as it reaches most young people in a structured and measurable manner. However, formal education needs to encourage

creativity, self-confidence, critical thought, societal values and participation. In the Eurobarometer survey “Entrepreneurship in the EU and beyond” respondents were asked how they perceive the role of their school education in raising an interest in entrepreneurship. The results prove that there is still a lot of space to invest in education in this regard – only half of the respondents agreed that their school education had helped them develop an entrepreneurial attitude. This is much lower than other parts of the world such as China and the US. Respondents from other European countries such as Iceland, Norway, Croatia and Switzerland also gave more favourable feedback than those in the EU.<sup>20</sup>

The European Youth Forum has therefore been advocating for the formal education curricula to promote and support creative thinking and entrepreneurial skills in young people. Career-oriented training and guidance and contact with local entrepreneurs should be integrated at all levels of education in preparation for a future career, both for employment and entrepreneurship for all young people. Guidance and counselling play an important role. Sufficient free and high quality counselling and guidance services are hugely important for guaranteeing quality in all educational forms, and must always be focused on the needs and abilities of each individual student, be it in guidance at the end of elementary/

19. Joint conclusions of the Spanish Presidency EU Youth Conference “youth employment and social inclusion”, Jerez, Spain 13-15 April 2010

20. Eurobarometer survey, (2009) ‘Entrepreneurship in EU and beyond’, page 97-98

secondary schooling, guidance for students in vocational education or training, counselling in higher education, or other levels.

Like other areas related to youth employment, youth organisations have a role to play in the promotion of entrepreneurship. Youth organisations play the leading role in non-formal education, so they should be considered as the experts of understanding and satisfying young people's needs for self expression. They create enabling environments for entrepreneurship by encouraging young people to think freely, challenge existing norms and feel confident in themselves. Most importantly, they give young people skills and competencies that formal education does not. Establishing and building up a youth organisation can be considered as a form of entrepreneurship in itself that fosters a culture of entrepreneurship among young people.

It is clear that in order to encourage a greater uptake of entrepreneurship among young people there has to be cultural shift. In order to achieve this youth organisations, formal education providers, business and policy makers must work together. The Youth Forum will continue to encourage this process.



# ***THE ROLE OF YOUTH ORGANISATIONS***



Youth organisations are important actors in tackling youth unemployment and advocating for the rights of young people. They organise training and non-formal education that directly help young people to find work as well as standing up for young people in the political discourse around youth unemployment and ensuring youth representation in decision making processes. Youth organisations also enable young people to become active citizens and play a role in their communities.<sup>21</sup>

Youth organisations, through non-formal education, help to foster and develop soft skills among young people that many politicians and business leaders claim are lacking in this generation. Non-formal education and projects run by youth organisations help young people to learn to be committed, show initiative and take responsibility. From an early age young people learn how to show respect for others by acquiring competencies such as communication and interpersonal interaction, conflict resolution, leadership, management, planning, team-working skills, and problem-solving skills. Youth organisations that are involved in the European Youth Forum have the possibility of sending their members to international events, where they can learn and exchange experience about youth employment, participation, democracy, sustainable development, health and most importantly multi-cultural working environments.

Youth organisations also undertake important lobby and activism work. Many youth organisations are recognised stakeholders in employment policy across Europe and can directly represent youth opinions in the decision-making processes. Others collect information from young people on their experiences of the labour market and lobby policy makers for a more youth-focused approach to the issue. In some countries such as Ireland, Spain, Greece, Switzerland and the UK, youth organisations have become a rallying point for young people to communicate their dissatisfaction with employment policies and austerity measures.

***“Many youth organisations are recognised stakeholders in employment policy across Europe and can directly represent youth opinions in the decision making processes.”***

Through this multi-layered approach, youth organisations have been developing their expertise in the topic. Despite common youth unemployment trends across Europe, as well as best practice examples from other European countries, National Youth Councils are forced to use their limited resources on the ground and to focus

21. European Youth Forum, Policy Paper on Youth Employment (Adopted Castelldefels, May 2008)

on regional or national policy making structures. For this reason the European Youth Forum, which has been working on youth unemployment at the EU-level for a number of years, decided to create the Youth Employment Action project and bring together its leading organisations that are working on youth employment.



***THE YOUTH  
EMPLOYMENT  
ACTION PROJECT***



The European Youth Forum launched the Youth Employment Action project in September 2009. Representatives of seven different National Youth Councils (NYCs) and International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations (INGYOs) who were interested on working more on youth employment joined this meeting.

A number of different projects and priorities were discussed and it was decided that the project needed to be first and foremost a platform for the exchange of best practices. Each organisation committed to further prioritising the issue of young unemployment in their work with the European Youth Forum ensuring overall coordination at European level. In particular INGYOs wished to engage in practical trainings for their members in order to help them to make the transition to the labour market, National Youth Councils focused on the need to lobby on behalf of youth on local and national level, as well as support the work of the Youth Forum at European level.

As the project developed, the European Youth Forum created a concept and brand for the group which would be known as "Youth Employment Action". During the lifetime of Youth Employment Action the members of the project have become the Youth Forum's experts on youth employment issues, participating in various international conferences and youth events and building on their own activities. The

opportunities of becoming involved in the project, including working with other organisations on youth employment, developing training skills and increased competence in employment and social affairs as well as the resources invested by the European Youth Forum have resulted in the project growing from seven members in September 2009 to 14 by the time the project met for the third time in Brussels on 31 May 2011.

Members of the project have also been instrumental in their contribution to other areas of the Youth Forum's work including their participation in the European Parliament Roundtable on Youth Entrepreneurship in May 2010 and their content input to the initiative of European Youth Forum on a European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships. Through their engagement with diverse and challenging issues such as disadvantaged youth, entrepreneurship and innovation, poverty, the transition for education to the labour market, internships and health issues arising from unemployment the members of the Youth Employment Action project have demonstrated the capability of youth organisations to make a real difference to the lives of young people across Europe.





***WORK ON THE GROUND:  
A PROFILE OF  
7 DIFFERENT YOUTH  
ORGANISATIONS***



## AEGEE

The European Students' Forum (AEGEE) is a student organisation that promotes co-operation, communication and integration amongst young people in Europe. As a students' association with 15,000 members in 42 European countries, AEGEE has gathered significant experience in the field of formal and non-formal education. Nowadays students often have to face a trade-off between their academic and non-academic commitments. As active citizens they contribute to society working as volunteers and being involved in workshops following a foundation of non-formal education. Unfortunately this work often remains unrecognised by their University and any future employers.

AEGEE is carrying out the Youth UnEmployment project to tackle these problems by implementing a series of activities which will help young people increase their employability. The first action of Youth UnEmployment Project was an internet survey available September and October 2010. The survey's purpose included collecting information about young people's knowledge of youth unemployment, experience and awareness of the topic, as well as information on youth entrepreneurship. Over 600 young people from across Europe have responded.

The Youth UnEmployment team is currently in the process of organizing events in Europe under the name of European Action

Day (EAD). The goal of this action is to increase recognition of non-formal education and voluntary work as working experience by enhancing the skills and awareness of youth in 4 main areas: self-employment and entrepreneurship, social media as a tool to earn money and find a job, definition of voluntary work and its value for volunteers, and things that a young person should know about getting a job. AEGEE antennae which had applied to take part in EAD chose one of the listed areas. The antennae have organised 1-3 day events which consist of workshops, lectures, debates on the chosen topic. Organised activities will be open for all students and interested people.

The Youth UnEmployment Project is directed at students or young people at the turning point of their life from the students' world to the professional one. For many of them this is a very difficult period. The European School of Entrepreneurship (ESE), another action in Youth UnEmployment Project, aims at empowering all those people to set up their own enterprises. AEGEE strongly believe that the European School of Entrepreneurship will change life of the participants and will influence their regions in a small but positive way.

Outside of employment, AEGEE's most well-known achievement has been the effective lobbying for the Erasmus Programme, which lead it to develop to its current state of development and recognition. Also, AEGEE has led it to develop and its longest

running project, the Summer University, gathering thousands of volunteers every summer to contribute to new perspective to the participants over the multicultural dimension of the European continent, providing high-content, high-quality and low-cost summer courses (ranging from language courses to seminars about political, cultural, environmental issues).

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## **The National Youth Council of Ireland**

The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) is the representative body for national voluntary youth work organisations in Ireland. It represents and supports the interests of around 50 such organisations, and uses its collective experience to act upon issues that impact young people. It seeks to ensure that all young people are empowered to develop the skills and confidence to fully participate as active citizens in an inclusive society. NYCI's role is recognised in legislation through the Youth Work Act 2001 and as a Social Partner in the Community and Voluntary Pillar.

NYCI is a vocal advocate on the issue of youth unemployment in Ireland. Youth unemployment stands at 27% among 18 - 24 year olds, and at about 33% among young men under 24 years of age. The number of long term unemployed young people is also concerning. In addition, those young people who have employment are often working in low paid, part time and contract work which makes their economic and social situation very precarious. Education, training and public employment services are unable to meet increased demand for support because there is reduced capacity to deal with demand due the financial cut-backs. Over the past number of years, emigration has also increased, which is something Ireland has not experienced since the 1980s. Finally, the pressures of the current economic crisis and failure of leadership at the EU level is leading to a certain amount

of EU skepticism which in turn is leading to greater expression of nationalism and racism.

NYCI prioritises the issue of youth unemployment over the past number of years. They have held two events with young job-seekers, those working with young job-seekers, and other stakeholders. Other events include seminars and conferences designed to bring young people together and make their voices heard on the issue of unemployment. NYCI has also published research projects and position papers coordinated with experts on youth unemployment, as well as joining government and shadow ministers in 2010 and 2011 to discuss solutions, and was appointed to the government steering group on the National Internship Scheme JobBridge to advise how best to roll out the scheme.

NYCI has also been a strong advocate for youth work, a educational programme intended to provide training and assistance to young people through their involvement in volunteer organisations. In 2008, when the Irish government cut funding to youth work lines by €4 million, the NYCI created with programmes to reduce the impact of these, and other cutbacks to youth work schemes. Additionally, the NYCI has lobbied heavily, and successfully, for the re-allocation of some funds to various youth work schemes throughout Ireland.

In addition to their strong youth employment advocacy, the NYCI also focuses on a wide range of issues relating to youth citizenship and participation, having launched, among other programmes, the

campaign, "A New Age in Voting", with the purpose of lobbying to reduce the voting age in Ireland to 16. This measure is aimed at increasing the levels of participation among youth aged 16 and 17, and to engage youth in the democratic process and in civil life. Also, the NYCI has compiled information and drafted policy papers related to the issue of social inclusion, pushing for the creation of a second-tier payment system to eradicate youth poverty, which currently stands at 10.7%.

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## European Youth Press

European Youth Press (EYP) is an umbrella association of young journalists in Europe. It promotes the role of youth media at the European level and includes associations and youth media from 23 European countries, involving more than 50,000 journalists younger than 30 years old. EYP aims to enable young people to give voice to their opinions on a European level and provide a critical view of media and politics through journalistic education as well as learning by doing. EYP organizes events and training on many topics related to media and freedom of press, and provides contact forums and educational seminars for member associations. In 2010 EYP created Working Group on the Access of Young Journalists to the Profession of Journalism to study this growing problem among young journalists in Europe.

The media crisis has led to the worrying trend of publishers and media outlets closing the door to new, younger journalists and imposing stricter, negative working conditions to newcomers. In many European countries, young journalists face many problems in joining the profession, with negative salary conditions for young journalists just entering the field. Furthermore, the quality of the education in the sector is not always guaranteed at the national level and recognition of these problems does not seem to be present at the EU level or in many national political agendas. This problem has a strong relevance for the future of the media sector, for the independence of journalism and for the

quality of the information provided.

EYP started its activities in the field setting up a concrete strategy on the topic to promote both the issue of access to media professions at the European level and the dialogue on problems shared by young journalists in different European countries. To research and collect data on the condition of young journalists in Europe, EYP prepared a questionnaire on this topic. The results of the research will be the basis for a publication. In the next months, EYP board members will meet representatives of European and national federations of journalists and publishers, EU officers, and Members of the European Parliament to present EYP activities on the issue. The EYP research on the topic will be presented at the European level at an international event held in a European institution.

The European Youth Press has organized numerous events for young journalists and has promoted the role of youth media and the freedom of the press in Europe. EYP also takes part in discussions about journalistic education standards and media policies throughout the European Union. The EYP sees itself as serving the national structures through the development and coordination of projects organized by young media makers in Europe. EYP provides contact forums and educational seminars for multipliers of the member associations. Above all, the aim of all member associations and of EYP is to inspire young people to become involved in the media and take an active part in civil society by fostering objective and independent journalism.

## Allianssi

Finnish Youth Co-operation Allianssi is the national youth committee of Finland. It currently includes 118 member organisations from the youth work field, and exists to encourage young people to become responsible members of society and to help them participate in decision making processes and international activities. Serving youth organisations and the youth work field as a whole, Allianssi represents Finnish youth both in Finland and in international forums. It organises training, disseminates information and arranges youth exchange programmes abroad, supports youth participation, work for immigrants and mobility.

In Finland, the unemployment rate of people under the age of 25 is two times higher (20.4 % in June 2011) than the general unemployment rate (8.4 % in June 2011). Unemployment has been increasing from late 2008, and though it started to decrease in 2010, the situation is not yet good enough. The key issue now is to get a studying place, a job, an internship or a workshop for every young person facing unemployment or who hasn't succeeded in applying for a study place. Being unemployed or without a study place after comprehensive school increases the risk of social and economic exclusion.

Allianssi has organised two employment projects for young people between 2009 and 2011. In the first project, Employing Young People 2009, the Ministry of Education gave Allianssi €500,000 to organise jobs for young people within the youth work sector in Finland. The employment mechanism was so called salary support: an employer would get a compensation of €1500 a month for each young employee if the organisation employed a young person for at least one month with a full-time job. The project managed to find a temporary job for 205 young people in youth organisations, municipals etc..

In 2010, Allianssi applied for funding for another employment project. This time, the Ministry of Education granted Allianssi with a subsidy of nearly €5 million. The objective was to get a working place for at least 1100 youth (those under 29) for at least three months. The project lasted almost a year, and was very successful. Nearly 1200 young people were employed or received an internship, and only €4.6 million was used. Many of those employed were able to continue working in the same organisation following the supported period. Organisations could hire not only unemployed young people but also those who had just graduated or were at risk of being unemployed.

At the political level Allianssi has been actively reminding the institutions of the Finnish government that youth unemployment is a serious problem that requires active participation from politicians and

ministries both now and in the coming years. Allianssi has also worked with Finnish institutions to increase the level of youth participation at the local and regional level, as youth participation not only ensures the continued influence of the next generation, it also provides an excellent educational opportunity.

Other issues of importance to Allianssi include youth equality, anti-discrimination measures, youth development and education, and cross-border cooperation to ensure the greatest range of opportunities for all young people in Europe.

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## Youth Express Network

Youth Express Network is a European youth organisation working on local, regional and international levels with young people with disadvantaged backgrounds. It gathers 29 organisations in 17 European countries. Youth Express Network stands for equal opportunities for all young people, a tolerant society, human rights, equal access to information for all and active youth participation. They do training courses for youth and social workers, study sessions and seminars, publication of magazines and newsletters, research, cooperative and cross-border projects.

A recent report from the Youth Express Network member organisations placed youth employment as the main problem for the young people followed by social inclusion issues including how to attract young people from disadvantage groups into youth activities, dealing with a lack of activities for leisure time, lack of opportunities for personal development, problem of usefully spending their free time, a lack of locations for gathering, lack of free expression, and a general lack of public spaces for young people.

Youth Express Network organises and assists with various seminars, conferences and studies throughout Europe. The themes of these range from art and social inclusion to internships, and employment to parenting. They are designed with the intention of furthering the goals of greater

social inclusion and mobility for young people. In addition to these activities, the Youth Express Network also supports exchanges and networking with its member organisation with the express intent of seeing young people join more European projects and gain greater access to the world around them.

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## **The National Youth Council of Slovenia (MSS)**

The National Youth Council of Slovenia (MSS) is an umbrella organisation uniting all national youth organisations irrespective of their various interests or ideological and political orientations. Its efforts and activities are based on the premise that the association of young people should be autonomous and integrated into a free and democratic society. The objectives of MSS include representing youth organisations in Slovenia and abroad, promoting the idea of bringing young people together on a voluntary basis, setting up a forum for issues of common interest to the various youth organisations, co-operating in the development of a government youth policy, encouraging the active participation of youth people in society, and promoting co-operation at national and international levels.

In Slovenia, youth unemployment issues relate to youth facing an aggravated transition into the labour market. Youth tend to enter the labour market late, and non-formal work experience is not recognised by the state, formal education institutions, or employers. When looking for their first job, youth are forced to take insecure, unstable, and particularly inappropriate positions. Youth self-employment is underdeveloped and insufficiently encouraged. The Slovenian labour market suffers from a large flexibility and low security in certain parts, most especially those most populated by youth (i.e. fixed-term contracts,

part-time jobs, student work, and occasional jobs).

Another issue in Slovenia is youth housing, as youth have great difficulty in accessing housing, both for rent and for purchase. There is a serious lack of apartment for long-term rent, whilst renting in the short term brings numerous problems to youth, and accommodation for students is seriously lacking in the country. Also, the ownership structure of apartments in Slovenia brings problems of registering the (permanent) residence, which would be a basis for asserting their rights.

MSS engages heavily in advocacy, presenting the position of youth to both national and international institutions and organisations. They also prepare policy papers on youth unemployment, housing, health, participation and voluntarism, information, and mobility. In addition to working on structured dialogue processes in Slovenia, MSS has also been involved in education and training for youth leaders and workers, training and seminars on various youth-related issues, development of local youth structures, and the preparation of information for youth organisations and youth legislation. MSS also promotes voluntarism and participation for youth, as well as acquainting the general public with the issues facing youth, both in Slovenia and abroad.

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## Rural Youth Europe

Rural Youth Europe (RYEurope) is a European non-governmental organisation for rural youth. Established in 1957 it works to promote and activate young people in countryside. Rural Youth Europe organise international trainings, seminars and youth exchanges and also works as an intermediary between national youth organisations and public institutions at the European level. Rural Youth Europe has 26 member organisations in 21 European countries and over 500,000 youth participants.

Rural Youth Europe has a number of goals in order to improve the quality of life for rural youth, these are to, educate and train young people and create an awareness of rural and social issues, support the development of new rural youth organisations, to take an active role in the development of environmental and agricultural issues and policies, and to lobby and highlight the problems and needs of rural youth to focus the attention of international and national bodies, as well as the general public.

Quality, stable employment is a key issue for rural youth. According to a study undertaken by Rural Youth Europe in 2007, the main challenges faced by rural young people include: financial and logistical difficulties in setting up a business, a lack of adequate training and education opportunities, high unemployment rates, a lack of services and infrastructure, the negative

image of farming and rural work, and a general lower standard of living in rural areas in Europe.

Due to geographical barriers, young people in rural areas have always faced multiple challenges including a lack of basic services and facilities such as health and education, a lack of transport options and leisure activities. However, Rural Youth Europe have noted that the lack of opportunities for young people have severely increased over the past 10 years. Urbanisation, intensive agriculture, pollution and the subsequent rural decline and ageing of the population have deeply transformed rural Europe. Nowadays, rural young people are seen as being disadvantaged in almost all fields of life.

For this reason Rural Youth Europe was one of the founding members of the Youth Employment Action project in September 2009. Through the project Rural Youth Europe endeavoured to actively develop and improve the skills of young people in rural areas so they can access the labour market more easily, co-operate with a range of national and international organisations to share best practice and creative methods to improve the employability of young people, and highlight the needs of young people with fewer opportunities in their struggle to join an increasingly competitive labour market.

Having secured funding through the Youth in Action programme of the European Commission Rural Youth Europe have organised a number of practical events aimed at improving the skills and competencies of young people from rural areas. So far Rural Youth Europe have provided tailored workshops and trainings for over 300 young people in the field of employment. For example in September 2010 they organised the "Make it Work!" training to improve job skills in Ayr in Scotland training dozens of young people on how to make themselves more appealing to employers including interview techniques and CV workshops. At the Spice Up Your Potential! Training in Budapest in March 2011 they trained young people in coaching and mentoring techniques in order to help their peers find work and to give them confidence in the labour market. In September and October 2011 Rural Youth Europe also organised seminars in Spain and Germany on the relationship between community work and employability.

Through its work Rural Youth Europe have empowered rural youth in a practical and tangible way. They have also demonstrated the capacity of youth organisations to make a real change to the quality of life of young people and how they can concretely improve employability and foster development.



# ***CONCLUSION***



This publication has shown the different issues around youth unemployment, from the need to encourage entrepreneurship and innovation among young people to a rights based approach towards internships and employment. It has also shown the value of non-formal education in preparing young people for the labour market and role that youth organisations can play and can hopefully be an inspiration for more ideas in this field.

There is no magic solution for the youth unemployment situation in Europe. However, implementing measures such as ensuring quality internships with real educational value, providing better quality entrepreneurship education in the formal education system, bringing in a youth guarantee for Europe, and making more funds available through the Youth in Action project for activities aimed at improving youth employability are all steps in the right direction.

The issue of youth unemployment must be adequately tackled at European, national and local levels. Youth organisations throughout Europe have done fantastic

work in trying to push youth unemployment up the political agenda and help young people practically. This work needs to continue, policy makers must be held accountable to the young people of Europe and young people must demand their right to fair, decent employment. Only by working together, in a spirit of true cooperation can the issue of youth unemployment be adequately tackled.

The economic and political future of Europe rests on the shoulders of the current generation of young people. A high youth unemployment rate and the social exclusion of young people is something that none of us can afford.

***“The economic and political future of Europe rests on the shoulders of the current generation of young people.”***

