



Youth Opportunities Initiative

The employment situation of young people in the European Union is alarming. The economic crisis has hit young people extremely hard, with an increase in unemployment to above 22% in 2012, for the EU as a whole. Through stronger partnerships between political authorities, business and trade unions at all levels of governance, the "Youth Opportunities Initiative" aims to help tackle youth unemployment and avoid the heavy economic and social cost of a "lost generation" of young Europeans.

Figures

In March 2012, the EU unemployment rate was 10.2%, with 24.8 million men and women unemployed. The average EU youth unemployment rate was 22.6%, with 5.5 million young people aged 15 to 24 years old unemployed (303 000 more than in March 2011). The highest rates were observed in Greece and Spain (more than 50%) and the lowest in Germany, Austria and the Netherlands (less than 10%). Long-term youth unemployment is on the rise: 30% of young unemployed people have been without work for more than one year.

The number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) has increased from 10.9% in 2007 to 12.8% in 2010 in the EU as a whole.

EU policies and actions

Following its [Youth on the Move](#) initiative (one of the [Europe 2020](#) strategy's flagships) the European Commission launched the "[Youth Opportunities Initiative](#)" (YOI) on 20 December 2011, in response to the dramatic rise of youth unemployment in many Member States (MS).

The initiative builds on a strong partnership between MS and the Commission and encourages concerted action between MS' authorities, businesses, social partners and the EU. The Commission is encouraging MS to mobilise EU financial support and instruments fully (in particular the [European Social Fund](#)).

The initiative aims to help unemployed young people, who left school before finishing upper-secondary level, go back to school or into a vocational training course that can give them the skills needed to get a job. It also aims to get young people with a diploma, but who cannot find work, a first experience of work.

Key priority actions will include:

- Preventing early school leaving
- Developing skills that are relevant to the labour market
- Supporting first work experiences and on-the-job training
- Access to the labour market: getting a (first) job

In the working document "[Implementing the Youth Opportunities Initiative: first steps taken](#)" (part of the "[employment package](#)", "Towards a job-rich recovery", adopted on 18 April 2012), the Commission presents an overview of the measures put in place in the MS with high youth unemployment along the YOI priorities. The Commission also launched a public consultation on a "[Quality Framework for Traineeships](#)" to ensure they have educational value and help young career starters to make a smooth transition from education to work.

The Commission is due to report to the European Council in June 2012 on follow-up actions in the eight EU countries with the highest youth unemployment rates. Action teams of EU and national officials were set up after the January 2012 [informal European Council](#), to develop national plans to address the situation in the eight MS.

For more information, see the European Parliament Library Briefing "[Youth unemployment - EU policies to tackle unemployment](#)"