Youth employment: the EU measures to make it work

Youth unemployment remains a key concern in Europe. Find out what measures the EU has put in place to help.

Employment and youth policies are the responsibility of member states. However, the EU has launched a number of initiatives complementing national policies as part of its measures to create a more social Europe.

This support focuses on funding youth employment programmes, improving the quality of apprenticeships and traineeships, offering international education and job opportunities and making it easier for young people to take part in volunteering projects.
Youth unemployment in numbers

A first real job enables young people to become independent and confident. However, a lack of future prospects and long unemployment among young people increase the likelihood that they will become unemployed again in later years and reduce their career prospects.

The unsuccessful search for work and training opportunities creates feelings of isolation, dependence and uselessness in young people. Apart from this, there are negative effects on the economy and on an ageing society.

Young people were amongst the hardest hit by the economic and financial crisis. The unemployment rate of people aged 15-24 years in the EU increased from 15% in 2008 to 24% in early 2013, with peaks in Greece (60%), Spain (56.2%), Croatia (49.8%), Italy (44.1%) and Portugal (40.7%).

Youth unemployment in the EU dropped from its 2013 peak to 14.6% in the first quarter of 2019, faster than the overall drop in unemployment. The share of 15-24 year olds not in work, education or training fell from 13.2% in 2012 to 10.3% in the third quarter of 2018. However, the unemployment rate remains higher than among the general population.

Funding youth employment programmes

To tackle youth unemployment, EU countries agreed in 2013 to launch the Youth Guarantee, an EU initiative to give everyone under 25 a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.

The Youth Employment Initiative is the EU’s main tool to help finance measures and programmes put in place by EU countries to carry out Youth Guarantee schemes, such as training and assistance for the young to find their first job, along with incentives for employers.

The initiative especially supports regions in the EU that have a youth unemployment rate above 25%.

According to the European Commission, more than 20 million young people have registered for Youth Guarantee schemes since 2014, while the Youth Employment Initiative provided direct support to 2.4 million young people by the end of 2017.

Quality apprenticeships and traineeships

The European Alliance for Apprenticeships platform was launched to support the Youth Guarantee and improve the quality of apprenticeships in Europe.

In 2014, EU countries agreed on a Quality Framework with recommendations for traineeships in order to give young people the possibility to gain high-quality work experience in safe and fair conditions, while increasing their employability.
International opportunities

In the EU, member states are responsible for higher education policies and training systems. The EU can help by coordinating between them and support their efforts through funding or policy cooperation.

Initiated in 1999, the intergovernmental Bologna Process has facilitated the mutual recognition of diplomas in higher education across 48 countries. Today, there is a European process of non-binding mutual recognition of bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degrees.

In 2018, to promote the recognition process further, EU countries adopted a recommendation on promoting the mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education diplomas across borders. Member states are encouraged to take steps to introduce the automatic recognition of diplomas by 2025.

Different tools that can help to support recognition of qualifications and facilitate cross-border validation of training and lifelong learning certificates already exist in the EU. These include:

- The European Qualifications Framework is a non-legally binding tool that helps to compare qualifications systems in Europe
- Europass is a set of key documents, including a Europe-wide standardised CV template and language passport, that makes it easier to compare your education and work experience internationally
- established to facilitate validation and recognition of work-related skills and knowledge acquired in different systems and countries

The EU aims to build a European Education Area to enable all young people to receive quality education and training and find jobs across the continent.

The EU’s programme in the fields of education, training, youth and sport is called Erasmus+, focusing on mobility and transnational cooperation. Started as a student exchange programme in 1987, it has become an umbrella programme covering school and higher education, vocational education and training, adult learning, youth non-formal and informal learning, and sports.

Erasmus+ enables students to study abroad, provides teaching and training opportunities for staff working in the education sector, supports traineeships and youth exchanges. Organisations, such as schools, universities, youth organisations, can also receive funding to create strategic partnerships and alliances with organisations from other countries.

The current Erasmus+ programme, which runs from 2014 to 2020, offers mobility opportunities to four million people and is enabling 25,000 strategic partnerships to be formed. The European Parliament proposes to triple the budget for the next Erasmus+ programme for 2021-2027.
The Your first Eures Job initiative aims to promote labour mobility by making young people aware of job opportunities in other EU countries.

A platform brings together job/traineeship vacancies of employers looking for young workers and the CVs of young jobseekers, aged 18 to 35 from all EU countries plus Norway and Iceland.

Volunteering opportunities

Officially launched at the end of 2016, the European Solidarity Corps finances volunteering activities, traineeships and jobs for young people in projects benefitting communities and people around Europe until the end 2020. By mid-2018, almost 64.000 young people had already registered to take part.

In 2019 MEPs approved the priorities for the new programme for 2021-2027 which would include volunteering for humanitarian aid outside the EU and offer more opportunities for young people with fewer opportunities, people from remote regions or with a migrant background.

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Study: youth employment initiative