



YOUTH: ONE STEP AHEAD

1. To accelerate young people's autonomy

The consequences of the economic crisis have been a progressive decline, particularly in regards to the living and working conditions for young people in many countries and regions of Europe.

The exclusion from the labour market and increasing poverty levels amongst young people are the two most concerning indicators.

Thus whilst statistical data show that a higher education level guarantees better prospects of income and social integration, the school system that is not updated reveals growing difficulties in contributing to attaining a general improvement (this is proven by OECD-Pisa studies results, data on "NEETs" and the first projections on PIACS data).

Reforms of the education system are desirable and attainable but often slow and uncertain in their outcomes.

Staying in the education system for a longer period of time does not always guarantee better skills but is instead sometimes a way of delaying the following transitions.

We deem that public policies must counter the tendency caused by existing paradigms to delay transitions such as exit from the education system, entrance into the labour market, emancipation from the family, thereby preparing own family building and parenthood.

For this to happen, new tools and objectives are necessary.

2. Prevention and access to work

Firstly, public policies must take action on all transitions involved in young people's life and on all factors which determine them. The primary objective to be reached is to assure an early entrance (starting from the secondary school) of young people into the labour market and that they keep on being employed in decent and sustainable jobs, guaranteeing the concrete possibility of returning to education to acquire an adequate level of knowledge, skills and abilities.

As far as priorities are concerned, we deem it is necessary to adopt long-term strategies to prevent factors, which push young people towards vulnerability (i.e. NEETs and low paid jobs). Strategies and policies preventing young people's marginalisation must be started right from the early childhood education. The experiences carried out by some Regional Governments show that this can be attained both by arranging quality alternatives to the education system as well as by developing the educational quality of structures for the first early childhood education.

At the same time it is necessary to implement short-term political strategies geared towards restricting the "NEET" phenomenon, which has been growing continually since 2009 in almost all regions of Europe. If reducing the number of drop-outs constitutes a significant priority for the safeguarding of the citizenship right, the phenomenon of "NEET" constitutes an even more significant benchmark in that it measures the effectiveness of public and private policies and

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indicates the birth of a parallel society and split labour market which takes away valuable energies from programmes of economic and social development.

This challenge can be tackled by constructing a model of “flexicurity” adapted to the young people’s age-group and its transitions, which provide guarantees of access to training and to social and health protections on the one hand, and guarantees of having young people included in the labour market on a permanent basis within a regulated and flexible market.

Moreover policies are required to ensure young NEETs to be properly included into the welfare and social security systems providing them with housing and all necessary conditions

The EU must take on the task of adopting this priority and of helping Member States and Regional and Local Governments to face this challenge promoting benchmarking and the OMC.

3. The responsibility of companies and civil society

Young people’s access to a decent and sustainable job is the final aim to be reached by the contribution of policies. This could be possible if companies of all sizes also take on, as their own the task of enabling a work experience for young people as early as possible, e.g. through internships.

Companies must recognise they have a precise responsibility in offering training possibilities. For both adolescents and young adults there must be frequent opportunities to alternate or combine work and study. Studies show that after 18 it is possible for people aged over 18, to get trained thanks to both training on the job and continuous training.

This result can be reached by a synergic commitment of companies and public policies, which should make use and benefit from structured models of education/work alternance and work-based embedded learning approaches. These might be added to the already used benefits including traditional fiscal tools (such as incentives to companies and young entrepreneurs) and work experience opportunities.

It is not enough to reform the school system. Instead a system of differentiated pathways must be created and welcomed whilst systems that do not work must be removed.

Work, study, social life must be combined with individual life pathways that guarantee the possibility of progressing through the constant growth in skills. The transition from school to work must disappear and instead become a continuous and single flow (*unicum*) to ensure a smooth transition.

4. Multilevel public policies, coordinated and effective

Public policies can reach an adequate level of effectiveness managing to orientate the entirety of sectoral policies towards the specific situation of young people (from health, to economic development, work, education, housing, family, culture, social policies).

These must also know how to deal with the task of both inter-sectoral and multi level coordination. The national, regional and local levels of government must work together in a strongly complementary perspective.

To this end it is appropriate to encourage the adoption of normative tools and organisational solutions, which support the coordination and consistency of all policies (e.g. framework legislation, systems with local dimension, etc.).

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Policies and strategies must be prompted by a continued monitoring of different transitions which concern the life cycles of young people. For this, as well as taking action on long-term strategies, governments must equip themselves with tools and measures which allow them to respond before and just in time to emergencies without having to wait for new measures and plans to be approved.

For this reason also, policies for young people can only be successful if backed by a strong local and regional commitment within a framework of national and European strategies.

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