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1. It's time for better approaches to 'school-to-work' transitions

In order to improve the employability of young people and their retention on the job market more determined European and national approaches to school-to-work transition are needed.

In the context of changing labour markets and rapidly evolving economic systems, the EU and the Member States should reinforce their cooperation with social partners, trade unions and young person stakeholders to foster active labour market policies to improve the education, training and lifelong learning of young people, in alignment with labour market needs on the one hand and societal needs on the other hand, taking due consideration of implications that ageing populations, green transitions and digitalisation bring.

The content of training and education pathways for young people should be better co-created with the involvement of all actors at stake, including youth trade union representatives, in order to ensure a better forecasting, planning, financing and delivering of school-to-work strategies which ensure better employability and labour-market-retention of young Europeans.

Justification:

According to Eurostat data from September 2021¹, more than 2.8 million young people are currently unemployed across the EU. Young people that are not in employment, education or training (NEETS) accounted for 17.6% of the 20-34 year-olds in the EU in 2020². High NEETs rates have negative consequences for the economy at large and, more importantly, being unemployed and without perspective to find a job can impact negatively the health, well-being and stability of the concerned young people. In 2019 one in four youngsters in the EU was at risk of social exclusion or poverty³, a figure which will likely have increased in the context of the global Covid pandemic.

European Commission President von der Leyen declared 2022 as the European Year of Youth, a year to invest in youth-oriented policies for a healthy post-pandemic employment and social recovery for young people. In this context CESI Youth considers it adequate to address the future labour market needs of young people and improve school-to-work transitions⁴ by means of:

- reorienting education and training systems to address labour market shortages and societal needs on the long term, together with strengthened VET systems to ensure the rapid acquisition of the necessary skills for young people that can contribute to their better employability and enhanced labour market outcomes in general. These changes should be realised in accordance with collective bargaining and social dialogue mechanisms and in line with national industrial relations systems. Moreover, consultation mechanisms between education institutions, authorities and companies as well as social actors, including unions and their youth representatives, should be strengthened as this can contribute in the drafting of realistic and effective education-to-work strategies.
- specific measures addressing vulnerable, disadvantaged young people who – due to various reasons ranging from disabilities to marginalisation and discrimination – are not able to respond by themselves to today's labour market needs. The European Commission's youth employment support should be taken further and its proposal on ALMA (Aim, learn, master, achieve) be swiftly implemented.
- also emphasising again more the value of VET systems and technical jobs. They should not be put in the shadow at the expense of a possible over-emphasis of academic work functions.
- more public investments in career guidance in the form of one-stop-shops which provide information on labour market needs together with corresponding educational pathways.
- a European homogeneous system for the evaluation and validation of non-formal and informal learning.
- a better recognition of degrees and employment experience across the Member States.
- further apprenticeship and job exchanges among enterprises in the EU to support 'brain exchange' opportunities for young people and to encourage more diversity at work. Intergenerational workers' exchanges could facilitate the transfer of institutional memories to younger work generations and could prevent the discrimination of young people due to age and lack of experience.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Unemployment_statistics#Youth_unemployment, accessed November 4 2021.

² https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Statistics_on_young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_or_training#Young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_or_training, accessed November 4 2021.

³ Eurostat data https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Young_people_-_social_inclusion&oldid=526294, accessed November 4 2021.

⁴ World Economic Forum 'The Future of Jobs' report of 2020 predicts that 'Employers expect that by 2025, increasingly redundant roles will decline from being 15.4% of the workforce to 9% (6.4% decline), and that emerging professions will grow from 7.8% to 13.5% (5.7% growth) of the total employee base of company respondents.' World Economic Forum report on 'The Future of Jobs' <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-future-of-jobs-report-2020/in-full>, accessed November 3 2021.

2. It's time for less financial burdens

The EU and the Member States, together with social partners and unions and their youth representatives, should make renewed efforts to prevent young people from falling into poverty.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had devastating effects for many young people in Europe, bringing unemployment or precarious work and thus a considerable decrease in personal income⁵ or even a lack of access to housing and healthcare.

Adverse generational effects in the long run must be avoided, both for the sake of the affected young persons individually as well as for the economy as a whole: A lack of stable and predictable income prevents young people, e.g., from accessing a real estate loan or starting an own family with children, thus also bringing social-economic repercussions that span far beyond individual fates. Immediate public investments are needed to prevent a lost young generation.

Justification

Higher unemployment rates, the threat of a financial recession or even strict public budget cuts following the Covid pandemic, social exclusion and rising inflation are putting more and more pressure on the health and well-being of young people. Many report feeling trapped in a poverty gap they cannot escape from due a lack of, e.g., access to stable permanent work contracts and affordable housing. To alleviate the financial situation of young persons:

- public higher education should be for free in all Member States.
- housing for students and young workers should be made more affordable.
- student loans should be offered at adequate levels and under more accessible and inclusive conditions.

⁵ Moxon, D., Bacalso, C. and Șerban, A. M., *Beyond the pandemic: The impact of COVID-19 on young people in Europe*, European Youth Forum, Brussels, 2021.

3. It's time for better mental wellbeing at the workplace

The EU and the Member States, together with all educational and occupational stakeholders, including social partners and unions and their youth representatives, should make mental well-being at the workplace an integral part of the post-Covid pandemic recovery.

Justification

Mental health will be a priority of the European Year of Youth in 2022. The Eurofound 'Living, working and Covid-19'⁶ survey showcases that young people's mental health is worse than the rest of the population. 55% of the interviewed young people reported struggling with mental health issues following the Covid pandemic lockdowns. According findings of the European Youth Forum⁷, two-thirds of young people in Europe may suffer from depression or anxiety, which also stems for occupational worries.

According to Mental Health Europe,⁸ psychosocial risks also arise from poor work design and management and social work contexts, and much of their negative psychological, physical and social outcome in terms work-related stress, burnout or depression could be prevented if mental well-being in the workplace became more of a priority. In this context:

- mental health should be more discussed and promoted at schools and the working place.
- more and effective programmes for a better occupational well-being should be developed and implemented.
- more targeted and tailored campaigns to raise awareness about the mental health of young people should be pursued.

⁶ Eurofound survey 'Living, working and COVID-19' <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2020/living-working-and-covid-19>, accessed November 4 2021.

⁷ European Youth Forum 'Beyond Lockdown' report <https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/European%20Youth%20Forum%20Report%20v1.2.pdf>, accessed November 4 2021.

⁸⁸ Mental Health Europe leaflet https://mhe-sme.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/MentalHealth_Infographie_A4.pdf accessed November 4 2021.

4. It's time for a right to telework and a right to disconnect

New forms of work are challenging all work-related norms but also contribute to changing mindsets towards more flexibility at work especially among young people. In particular, telework brought forward an inherent higher degree of flexibility of work arrangements – and also a blurring of the work-private life boundaries. It should be a priority to install a right to disconnect and to ensure the proper application of rest periods under the EU working time directive in order to ensure a functioning management of work and private life especially for young workers.

Justification

During the Covid pandemic, the widespread introduction of telework meant the opportunity to preserve millions of jobs and to keep societies functioning. The momentum gained through telework as a general new and useful mode of working should be kept but be embedded into existing work protocols and employment contracts in order to make sure that work is not only as a way to have financial stability but also as a way to self-realise – which necessitates telework in line with adequate work-life balance. In this context:

- voluntary telework should be made available at every working place where it can be integrated.
- proper occupational health and safety and data protection should be ensured in telework schemes.
- hours of disconnection should be respected via a right to disconnect and a full and proper application of rest periods as stipulated in the EU working time directive.

5. It's time for more promotion of EU values and inclusive societies

Liberal democracy in general and youth participation in public life in particular is at threat in several Member States of the EU. Reinforced efforts are needed in Europe to maintain and foster free speech and the freedom of the press and media as well as the independence of the judiciary, minority rights (especially of the LGBT+ community) and, above all, pluralism of trade unions and the organised civil society. Education systems should place more emphasis on the need to enable pupils to become open-minded and responsible citizens. Volunteerism should be strengthened to foster youth participation in an open and liberal society.

Justification

Extremism, hostility towards democracy, attacks to rule of law, minority rights (especially of the LGBT+) and the freedom of association, populism and the spread of harmful false information are just a few of the current threats which European liberal democratic societies are facing. Reinforced efforts are needed in Europe at all levels to counter threats to liberal democracies. In particular:

- early citizenship education in schools should be further encouraged as tool to enable young pupils to become open-minded, tolerant and responsible citizens of tomorrow. This relates in particular also to the need to foster more awareness among young students of the values and norms upon which the EU was created – and the need to help protect and promote them.
- volunteering is a second measure which could be further facilitated, not least via the European Solidarity Corps. Volunteering is the backbone of many liberal and open societies. In Germany, for instance, almost two thirds of young people and young adults volunteer in society. Whether being active in a sports club or helping the homeless, whether in youth associations, in political movements or unions: Young people actively support society every day – and voluntary work also helps counteract the tendency of those young people to withdraw from public life. The commitment expands the personal horizon to include a broader social perspective and promotes a spirit of solidarity in particular with less advantaged citizens. Volunteering can also lead to young people becoming more politically active – and open democratic societies cannot function without political commitment and discourse.
- volunteering as trade unionism should be particularly encouraged, through more promotion not only in educational programs but also at the level of working relations too. The time allocated for this kind of volunteering should always be recognised by employers, either via remuneration (if included in collective bargaining agreements) or via working time compensation.