

## **Youths working for a sustainable Europe How to improve the European Youth Guarantee**

For more than 10 years now, an unacceptable number of young Europeans are unemployed. Many of them are hindered to practise the profession for which they have been trained and find themselves either locked out of paid work or employed only short-time under poor working conditions. Young people in southern Europe are most severely affected, but there are also major problems in other countries, in Croatia, Slovenia and France for example.

Five years ago, with the **European Youth Guarantee** the European Commission and the European Council committed all Member States to offer all young people aged between 15 and 24 (the upper age limit was later raised to 30) either a paid job or a training place within four months.

The Member States have to develop programmes to put this arrangement into practice. To meet this requirement, they receive an amount of funding based on their general plans and on the level of youth unemployment in the country. An EU fund was set up for these activities, with a budget of EUR 6.4 billion to cover the period from 2014 to 2018; a further EUR 2 billion was made available last year and the scheme was extended until 2020. Funding under the European Youth Guarantee is provided on the expectation that Member States will draw up an effective implementation strategy and take practical measures designed to increase considerably the perspectives of young people securing a job which can provide them with a livelihood.

Today, it is clear that the financial incentives offered through the European Youth Guarantee are very far from enough to reduce unemployment rates to any significant extent. The countries hardest hit by youth unemployment have not introduced suitable policies and measures, nor have the Youth Guarantee's monitoring tools proved effective as a means of reviewing the measures, rewarding success and penalising failure, as it would be appropriate. Thus in the spring of 2017, more than four million young Europeans were unemployed, and youth unemployment rates were 43% in Greece, 41% in Spain, 35% in Italy and 24% in France<sup>1</sup>. These figures shame Europe and are blighting the future of an entire generation.

Particularly alarming is the proportion of young Europeans who are unemployed and at the same time without any professional formation or participation in training courses. In 2017, 14.5% of young people aged between 15 and 34 in the EU were in this situation. The figure for Italy was 25.5%; for Greece 24.4%; for Bulgaria 19.5%; for Croatia 18.9%; and for Spain 17.9%<sup>2</sup>.

The Youth Guarantee's limited success is unsurprising, as it will not be able to create jobs, unless additional measures are taken to boost investment and innovation in sectors of the economy with relation to the formation of the youths. This would also require an

improvement in the underlying economic situation compatible with the ecological requirements and with advances in science and technology. Under the present conditions, young people who are employed via the European Youth Guarantee or in similar employment programs with public aid, in their large majority will be unemployed anew when the activity financed by the Youth Guarantee has come to an end. At best they find afterwards only short-term employment contracts, frequently outside of their profession or they decide to emigrate to European regions offering better economic conditions. The companies involved in youth guarantee programs should therefore also be required to employ young people on a longer-term basis. It is clear from all of this that, without further incentives to expand and safeguard the development of high-quality products and services, the European Youth Guarantee alone cannot create lasting employment for young people in the countries where the problem is most severe. The Youth Guarantee's financial aid is thus only a partial solution, which must be supplemented with further-reaching support initiatives to develop sustainable future-oriented products and services.

One reason why youth unemployment in Europe has a little bit decreased in recent years is that many young people have migrated to regions that are currently prosperous. In many cases they have only been able to find work outside their qualification. At the same time, youth mobility within Europe is augmenting disparities between regions, especially, if the country from which workers emigrate has had to pay for their education.

The situation with regard to youth unemployment in Europe is likely to be a major topic for debate in the context of next year's European elections. The low turnout among young people in the elections will once again be an issue. Given present findings, however, it should come as no surprise if young people who are long-term unemployed, or only precariously employed, feel they have little to gain from the EU and the notion of solidarity between Europeans. The EU has not yet been of any tangible help to them in significant areas of their lives. But what future can the Union expect if a large part of young Europeans in particular are permanently excluded from the labour market? Turning the problem around, it is precisely this generation that the EU needs to win over if it is to hold up the reduction of youth unemployment as a Community achievement. The run-up to the European elections offers a great political opportunity to set out convincing ideas and take further credible steps to implement them.

This is the background to our proposal, described below:

**The EU offers young people who have yet to find work a vocational training in professional fields being necessary for a sustainable development in Europe. The education should include an empowerment to start activities, for example establishing a company or cooperative afterwards. One obvious area here is climate protection and mitigating the effects of global warming. We propose to amplify the European Youth Guarantee by adding a further EU-funded programme: “*Young people for a sustainable future*”. The aim is to offer young Europeans – including young refugees with residence permits – a basic or supplementary training in professions that are important and necessary for climate protection. This training should be closely linked to practical activities and work experience, also in other European countries. It should be run along similar lines to the so-called ‘dual model’ of vocational training. The young people involved should also**

learn how to be proactive in the climate protection and energy transition sector, how to found start-ups and get involved in projects in the solidarity-based economy. Developing a climate-friendly energy system and climate-friendly forms of employment is a field in which creativity and a sense of initiative are particularly in demand.

The training being offered has to be combined with climate-protection activities in the Member States. By ratifying the Paris Agreement, all EU Member States have pledged under international law. “*Young people for a sustainable future*” should be an important step to fulfil this commitment. Young people who have hitherto been excluded could thus be offered a sustainable future, as part of a common effort and cooperative activity of and in the European Union.

We are restricting our proposal for an EU-wide offer to education and activities concerning climate-protection, in particular to the task of transforming our energy system from one that is destructive for the global climate to one that is climate-protective. In developing just this one sector, substantially more than a million young Europeans could be employed in fields which offer them a future.

For this to happen, however, Member States will have to meet their obligations under international law. And precisely Europe’s southern regions, which are hardest hit by youth unemployment, are best placed to employ young people in the switch to an energy transition which is based on solar power. In the coming years, they will also face more severe climate challenges than regions in the north and will have to do a great deal to mitigate desertification, erosion risks, severe droughts and damage to agriculture, - all the more a reason why they cannot afford to exclude young people from employment or to force them to migrate to other parts of Europe. It is in these countries own interest to keep their young people at home, they need their activities to safeguard a sustainable future at home. It is obvious, too, from the aforementioned climate-protection challenges that practically all sectors of the economy – mechanical engineering, electronics, ICT, agriculture, forestry, construction, timber construction, etc. – need well-trained young people with practical work experience and will need more of them in the future.

Relevant fields for training in the areas of climate protection/climate change mitigation are, for instance:

- Energy service management, which, in addition to energy technology know-how, calls for knowledge of economics, law and climate protection and training in entrepreneurial and communication skills.
- Renovating and constructing buildings to low-energy and zero-energy standards, timber und mud construction.

- **Energy audits in connection with climate-friendly heating and cooling technologies;**
- **“Solar technicians” who plan, install and maintain decentralised renewable energy systems for heating, cooling and power generation, taking due account of both technical and economic factors and being able to give energy advisory.**

**Young people without any vocational qualifications, so-called NEETs, are particularly likely to face long-term unemployment and social marginalisation. It is therefore essential to integrate them into the training component of an extended Youth Guarantee scheme. Training in the following fields could be offered, for example:**

- **Low-threshold energy consulting for households and small businesses in municipalities, city districts and neighbourhoods.**
- **Practical climate-protection and climate-adaptation activities in agriculture and forestry, landscape and green management, greening buildings, etc.**

*A feasibility study, led by the Hochschule für Technik und Wirtschaft Berlin (University of Technique and Economy) was carried out in winter 2017/18, with the aim to investigate the un/employment of young people and how to involve them in activities of energy transition and climate protection. The study was carried out in the Greek region of Attica and the southern Spanish province of Cádiz. It was funded by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety's European Climate Initiative (EUKI)*

<sup>1</sup> European Court of Auditors, Special Report 5/2017.

<sup>2</sup> From Eurostat, June 2018: [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=edat\\_lfse\\_20&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=edat_lfse_20&lang=en)