

# YOUTH EMPLOYMENT TRENDS & POLICIES AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

SPAIN



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# Overview of key youth employment trends and policies

Country report **Spain**



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The logo features a stylized red figure that resembles a person or a flame, positioned to the right of the text. The text is arranged vertically, with 'CONFEDERATION' on the left, 'SYNDICAT' and 'EUROPEÆN' in the middle, and 'TRADE UNION' at the bottom.



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SPAIN



# Overview of key trends<sup>1</sup>

## 1

The situation of young people on the Spanish labour market has remained challenging over the last years.<sup>2</sup> The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic led to the loss of jobs, primarily by young people in the service sectors, such as tourism, hospitality, food, and affected many young people negatively.<sup>3</sup>

The youth unemployment rate in Spain has increased since the 2008 crisis (from 18.2% in 2008 to 27% in 2021) to the level where the main issues for young people are related to both **the lack of jobs and employment opportunities and the quality of jobs available**. Spain (together with Italy) continues to have one of the **highest youth unemployment rates** in the EU, which increased in the COVID crisis and do not show signs of improvement since 2020. Differences also exist between youth employment situation in the urban areas where the situation is more positive and the rural areas where fewer good

employment opportunities are available to young people.

Even when able to get a job, young people in Spain continue to experience precarious work conditions on the labour market.

In this respect, the main problems faced by young people in the Spanish labour market include, among other aspects, the transition to working life, the current situation of youth unemployment, the working conditions they face and their inactivity. Starting with the transition to the labour market and their level of education, it has become clear that having a job does not, as a general rule, imply their adequate inclusion in economic and working life as young people remain one of the main groups excluded from labour market and standard employment.

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<sup>1</sup> The detailed statistics are provided in Annex 1.

<sup>2</sup> Chung H, Bekker S and Houwing H (2012) Young people and the post-recession labour market in the context of Europe 2020. Transfer 18(3): 301–317. Clauwaert S and Schoemann I (2012) The crisis and national labour law reforms: a mapping exercise. ETUI Working Paper 2012/04. Brussels: ETUI. Also Editorial ([etui.org](http://etui.org)) .

<sup>3</sup> [ETU\\_BM2021-Chap2-Labour market and social developments crisis further entrenches inequality\\_0.pdf \(etui.org\)](#); Eurofound (2021), Impact of COVID-19 on young people in the EU, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Across the EU, over a third of young workers are working on temporary work contracts. This is particularly high in Spain, together with Italy, **where 55% of young people were employed on a temporary basis (EU-27 average is 36%, 2021)**. Since the entry into force of the most recent labour market reform in 2022 (see section 3), an increase in permanent contracts has been observed. Also, by Q32022, there has been an all-time low in terms of temporary employment. However, the positive effects of the labour market reform have not yet fully improved the situation of young people.

**Part-time youth employment** is also very widespread in Spain (with 26% of young workers working part-time in 2021) and this has increased since the 2008 crisis. There are more young people with part-time contracts compared to the Spanish average, at 39%, compared to the national average of 13%. 56% of young people working part time do so involuntarily as full-time jobs are not available (against the EU-27 average of 25%). This has furthermore increased between the two crisis periods.

Somewhat less prominent is the proportion of **young people who are self-employed**. In Spain, this was 5% in 2021, against the EU-27 average of 6%. The discussions in the project seminar in Rome highlighted that often such self-employment is involuntary and not fully genuine, as self-employed young people tend to work for the same employer as an alternative to regular employment.

Hence, in recent years there has been a major problem of over-qualification of young workers in the Spanish labour market, whereby it is estimated that one third of young people are over-qualified for the requirements of the job they occupy. The



## KEY TRENDS OF YOUTH IN SPAIN

### Unemployment rates

 **Highest youth unemployment**  
rates in the EU with Italy

**27%**  
in the 16-29 age group in 2021

### Employed on a temporary basis

**55%**  | **36%**   
EU-27 Average 2021

### Part-time youth employment

**26%**  **56%**  | **25%**   
in 2021 Involuntarily

### Risk of poverty and social exclusion

**13% of employed**  
in the 16-29 age group in 2021 | **One of highest rates in EU** 

### Weekly working hours

**35.3**  | **36**   
hours | hours

mismatch between the training they have and the levels required by companies has placed Spain with the highest rate of over-qualification in the EU, reaching 34% in 2022, compared to the European average of 21%.

A key issue in Spain remains the significant proportion of young people outside the labour market and formal education and training across the two crisis periods (the so-called NEET rate). The proportion of such young people has only slightly declined somewhat in Spain, indicating a lack of significant progress (from 15% in 2008 to 14% in 2021). **Spain's NEET rate is comparable to the one of the EU (13%)**. Indeed, there has been a decrease in the number of young people who neither study nor work with respect to the period prior to the pandemic. Considering the national average, the series available for the period 2021-2022, shows that the rate of young NEETs was at its lowest values, representing 14.1%.

**Wages for young people** in Spain have grown over the last decade and have almost reached the EU average. In 2018 (latest data available), young people in Spain earned around EUR 21,000 per year, against the EU-27 average of EUR 22,000.

However, many young people remain **at risk of poverty whilst working** in Spain (13% of employed in the 16-29 age group in 2021), which is **one of the highest rates in the EU**. Moreover, this has increased over the last years.

Similarly, 31% of all young people (employed and unemployed) remain **at risk of poverty and social exclusion in Spain** (2021 data, against EU-27 average of 25%, **making Spanish youth situation one of the worst in European comparison**). This has improved slightly over the last years.

Young people in Spain continue to work the average numbers of **weekly working hours across the EU**. In **2021**, this was 36 working hours per week across the EU, whereas Spanish young people worked 35.3 hours per week.





# Policies for direct youth employment support

## 2

**Policies adopted in Spain the context of tackling the economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic** were not explicitly aimed at young people and young workers, rather at the workers and general population.<sup>4</sup> Few measures were taken for young people, mainly focusing on the labour market, online education and higher education; with a limited focus on precarious young workers. The main focus of the policies was to preserve the existing employment levels and provide adequate social protection. No explicit focus was put on improving the quality of existing jobs for young people in particular. When analysing the government's response to the pandemic in terms of public policies for youth employment, it is useful to distinguish between two lines of action: greater social protection, with effects on the labour market in general; and greater use of digital tools, in particular with regard to new forms of work organisation, also in the education.

The key economic and employment policy instrument used in the COVID-19 context was the short-term work scheme<sup>5</sup>, where Spain spent relatively large resources on the scheme compared to other European countries. In Spain, job retention measures had a significant impact on income stability and unemployment, with more focus on employers and employees on standard employment contracts, and also to some extent on other categories such as the non-standard workers, self-employed people<sup>6</sup>. In Spain the self-employed have a specific unemployment benefit scheme called a cessation of business activity benefit which they can choose to join. The eligibility conditions have been relaxed (e.g., the required contribution period has been abolished) and the application procedure streamlined during the pandemic.

During the COVID-19 crisis, among the measures adopted to ensure greater social protection for

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<sup>4</sup> Eurofound (2021), Impact of COVID-19 on young people in the EU, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

<sup>5</sup> [01-ETU BM2021-Chap2-Labour market and social developments crisis further entrenches inequality\\_0.pdf \(etui.org\)](#) Figure 2.8.

<sup>6</sup> Baptista, I., Marlier, E., Spasova, S., Peña-Casas, R., Fronteddu, B., Ghailani, D., Sabato, S. and Regazzoni, P. (2021), Social protection and inclusion policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis. An analysis of policies in 35 countries, European Social Policy Network (ESPN), Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

workers and cushion the socio-labour impact of the pandemic, the key measure has been the short-term work scheme, known in Spain as the Temporary Redundancy Provisions, also as ERTes (Expedientes de Regulación de Empleo Temporal). In this regard, Royal Decree-Law 8/2020 of 17 March 2020 reinforced the coverage of workers affected by ERTes with a series of measures extended until 31 March 2022. This enabled the workers affected by the pandemic for example, to access the unemployment benefits, even if they lack the necessary contribution period.

The role played by ERTes in maintaining employment levels was relevant for young people. **Of the total number of ERTes adopted, young people accounted for 21.6%. Thus, based on the current employment rate, the number of young people in employment has recovered and even improved among the 20-24 year olds.** Also, amongst the social protection measures, during the critical phase of the pandemic, temporary incapacity due to isolation or contagion by Covid-19 was also compared to that caused by an accident at work, with the right to a 75% benefit from the day after the day of sick leave. The treatment of COVID-19-related incapacity to work as an accident at work meant that, in order to be eligible for the benefit, the workers concerned (both employees and self-employed) do not need to show a minimum period of paid contributions.

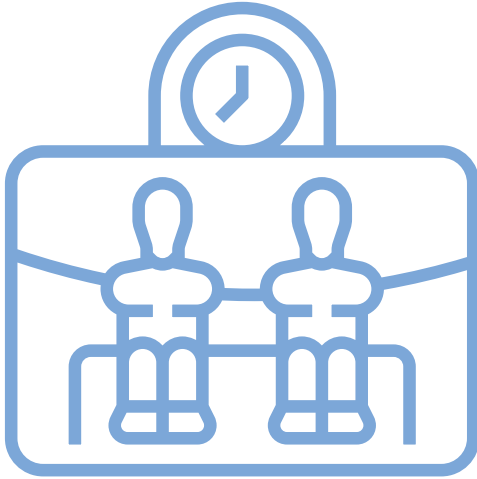
As regards the use of digital tools, both in education system and in companies, as a result of Covid-19, digitalisation took a significant leap forward with the use of teleworking. This led to the learning of computer tools at different social levels, with public

administrations promoting the acquisition of these skills among citizens, not only to improve their employability, but also to facilitate their ability to adapt to the new pandemic circumstances.

Another example of job expansion in the public administration is the AIRE (Activation, Impetus and Recovery of Employment) initiative in Spain. Promoted by the regional government of Andalusia, it aimed to help Andalusian city councils alleviate the social and economic effects of restrictions on mobility and economic activity related to COVID-19. Specifically, the objective of this measure was to promote job creation by encouraging the temporary hiring of unemployed people to work on projects that would improve their employability by providing them with work experience. The scheme provided the public sector employers with additional funding when hiring young people for the purpose of work experience.

The key policy change **adopted in the context of the 2008 crisis** in Spain was the budgetary austerity measures.<sup>7</sup> The public spending containment policies, or austerity policies, applied in Spain in response to the financial crash made it difficult for young people to find work, significantly increasing the risk of youth unemployment or of finding precarious or low-paid employment. Likewise, as part of the effects that these austerity measures had on the socio-economic conditions of young people, during the years of the so-called Great Recession of 2008, unemployment became the main concern of the young population, together with the quality of employment. The application of these measures

<sup>7</sup> Chung H, Bekker S and Houwing H (2012) Young people and the post-recession labour market in the context of Europe 2020. *Transfer* 18(3): 301–317. Clauwaert S and Scho“mann I (2012) The crisis and national labour law reforms: a mapping exercise. ETUI Working Paper 2012/04. Brussels: ETUI. Also Editorial ([etui.org](http://etui.org))



and the consequent reduction in social spending not only increased inequalities between different social groups, but also led to a greater vulnerability of young people compared to previous periods.

These high levels of poverty were also reflected in the working conditions of young people. Extreme job insecurity and structural unemployment were the conditions to enter labour market and fuelled a massive exodus abroad in search of better job opportunities. In addition, the public budget cuts, combined with the economic recession in the sectors with large youth employment (such as the service sector) led to the significant drops in the youth employment rate and increases in the NEET rate observed in this period.

Focussing on financial resources, the labour market initiatives of the Spanish state aimed at young

people during the 2008 economic crisis concentrated on stimulating the hiring of young people with good qualifications, leaving young people with no qualifications without sufficient protection.

Comparing the measures adopted in the two crisis periods, the measures adopted in the context of COVID-19 pandemic to keep workers in jobs were more successful in supporting the employment of young people too. In contrast, the budgetary austerity measures adopted in the context of 2008 economic crisis had direct negative effect on overall employment levels, as well as increasing youth unemployment and NEET rates.

A key labour market reform adopted at the end of 2021/early 2022 (the General Provisions of Royal Decree-Law 32/2021) helped directly to reduce the incidence of temporary work amongst young people.<sup>8</sup> The reform abolished a type of contract known as “por obra y servicio,” for a specific project or service. Instead, two types of contract for temporary purposes were permitted: structural, for production circumstances, and the substitution of another employee with the preservation of their role. The former can only be renewed up to six months, or a year if the collective agreement for the activity in question permits it. To reduce temporary work further, anyone who has 18 months’ worth of temporary contracts in the space of 24 months will be considered as permanent contract, thus reducing the current time frames for this to happen. Notable is the link between the adoption of the reform and the release of the EU funds under the Recovery and Resilience Facility (see section 5).

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<sup>8</sup> [Spain passes landmark labour reform, unlocking EU billions | Euronews](#)

# Policies on social protection

## 3

Social protection systems should provide protection against the risks and needs associated with unemployment, sickness, parenthood and social exclusion. However, full social protection in Spain is not, due to the various conditions attached, available to young people who have not yet been economically active or who have only recently entered the world of work.<sup>9</sup> Those employed in the least stable employment situations are mostly young people (platforms, catering, other services) and not all have equal access to social security. The minimum qualifying period to receive an unemployment benefit is 12 months within the qualifying period in Spain.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, unemployment benefits remained a difficult social protection scheme

to access for some categories of non-standard workers and the self-employed (which are prevalent amongst the young workers).<sup>10</sup> Eligibility conditions related to activity status, and the contributory history requirement, applied, affecting negatively young people.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, this has changed to benefit also the young people. All workers affected by temporary collective dismissals or reduced working time schemes had the right to receive benefits from the temporary unemployment scheme even if they do not meet the minimum contribution period required.<sup>11</sup>

In Spain, the self-employed (which is a popular choice for young people) are required to be insured against unemployment. Since January 2019, insurance

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<sup>9</sup> Ghailani, D., Peña-Casas, R., Coster, S. and Regazzoni, P. (2021), 'Access to social protection for young people. An analysis of policies in 35 countries', European Social Policy Network (ESPN), Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

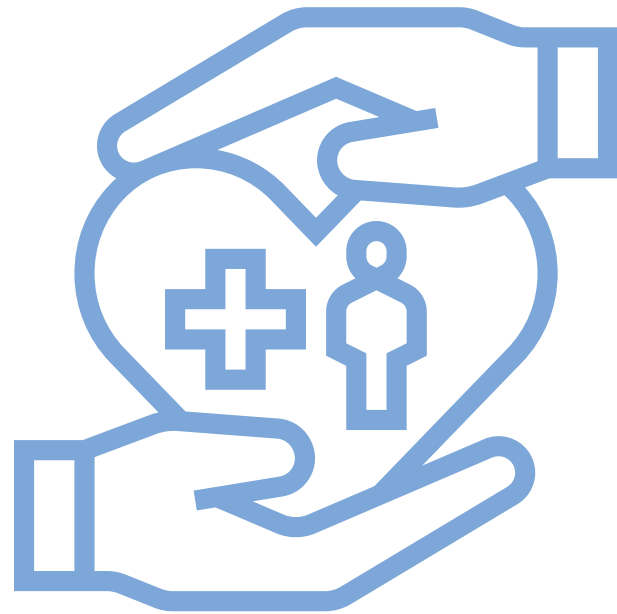
<sup>10</sup> Baptista, I., Marlier, E., Spasova, S., Peña-Casas, R., Fronteddu, B., Ghailani, D., Sabato, S. and Regazzoni, P. (2021), Social protection and inclusion policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis. An analysis of policies in 35 countries, European Social Policy Network (ESPN), Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

<sup>11</sup> Baptista, I., Marlier, E., Spasova, S., Peña-Casas, R., Fronteddu, B., Ghailani, D., Sabato, S. and Regazzoni, P. (2021), Social protection and inclusion policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis. An analysis of policies in 35 countries, European Social Policy Network (ESPN), Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

against temporary incapacity (Incapacidad temporal) due to an accident at work or an occupational disease is mandatory for the self-employed (except for self-employed agricultural workers). Apprentices also have access to the unemployment schemes. Domestic workers, however, are not covered by the statutory unemployment scheme.

Access to healthcare is universal.<sup>12</sup>

Employment status is the main factor contributing to variability of eligibility for maternity, paternity and parental leave. In Spain, to be eligible for the maternity and paternity leave benefits, female and male workers over 26 years of age must have 180 contribution days in the 7 years immediately preceding the birth of the child or 360 contribution days over the whole working life. Special rules apply for workers between 21 and 26 years of age: they only need 90 contribution days in the last seven years or 180 contribution days over the whole working life. No minimum contribution period is required for workers under 21 years of age.



<sup>12</sup> Ghailani, D., Peña-Casas, R., Coster, S. and Regazzoni, P. (2021), 'Access to social protection for young people. An analysis of policies in 35 countries', European Social Policy Network (ESPN), Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

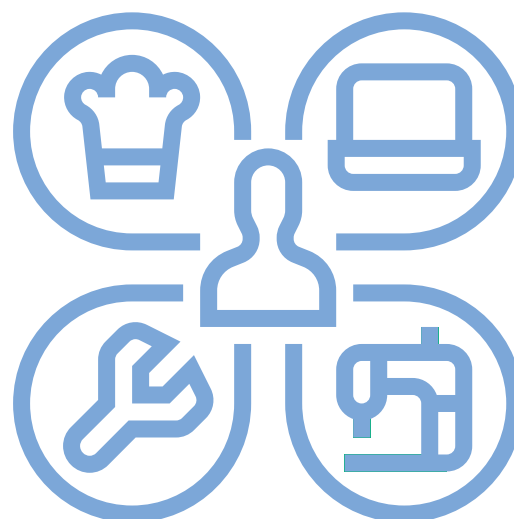
# Policies supporting education / training of young people

## 4

In Spain, an aid and training programme, aimed at providing free training to support the development of digital skills among young people and thus the digital economy, was implemented to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. Through a combination of training and orientation services, the programme aims to promote youth employment in the digital economy and the integration of NEETs into the labour market through improved ICT skills.<sup>13</sup>

Rethinking the delivery of vocational education, to the extent permissible within COVID-19 restrictions, was one of the ways adopted to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. In Spain, through the 'Flexibility of vocational training internships' package, the Ministry of Education collaborated with regional governments to implement greater flexibility in relation to company internships for VET students. Measures adopted included a range of measures, including the exemption of some students from the need to undertake initial VET internships, reducing the number of hours required for an internship, remote internships and the substitution of other equivalent activities for internships.

Moreover, one of the main measures within this package was the total or partial exemption from the requirement for VET final-year students in the health and social services fields to undertake workplace training. Likewise, the requirement for these students to have one year of work experience before they could be hired was eliminated.



<sup>13</sup> Eurofound (2021), Impact of COVID-19 on young people in the EU, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Instead, they were enabled to enter employment immediately, owing to the urgent demand for health professionals. It is thought that the introduction of greater flexibility in the longer term may accelerate digitisation processes in VET, particularly regarding the organisation of work and evaluation of tasks using digital technologies during internships.

Spain has a number of regulations **on traineeships** in recent years. In Spain, open-market traineeships are regulated either as “labour traineeships”, based on a (regular) labour contract, or as “non-labour traineeships”, based on a written agreement.<sup>14</sup> Remuneration is mandatory for both forms but the rules are different for the two types. To start with, traineeships with labour contracts – limited to graduates under 30 years of age with a diploma

(university, vocational training) – have to be paid. Remuneration must be proportional to an equivalent position; guaranteeing at least 60 percent of its salary during the first year and 75 percent during the second year. Remuneration cannot be lower than the national minimum wage and full social security coverage is guaranteed. In contrast, non-labour contract traineeships require only a written agreement between the employer and the trainee, in which duration and working time have to be declared. The duration of the traineeship has to be between three and nine months. These traineeships must offer a remuneration of at least 80 percent of IPREM (Public Income Indicator of Multiple Effects) as well as provide the social security coverage.

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<sup>14</sup> European Network of Public Employment Services (2021) Study on Remuneration of Open-Market Traineeships in EU-27.

# Youth Guarantee policies and youth policies in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan

## 5

The Youth Guarantee scheme in Spain was developed in line with the Entrepreneurship and Youth Employment Strategy, approved in February 2013. The Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan was presented on 19 December 2013, and the scheme started in July 2014. The Plan for the Implementation of the National Youth Guarantee System, approved in December 2013, committed the Spanish government to provide registered young people with a good offer of employment, education or an internship within four months of becoming unemployed or finishing their education. Around EUR 900 million were allocated to the YG scheme in the 2014-2020 period.

During 2016, the Department of Self-Employment, Social Economy and Corporate Social Responsibility of the Ministry of Employment and Social Security was responsible for the implementation of the YG and for coordinating partnerships across different levels and sectors. From July 2017, this

responsibility was transferred to the Spanish PES. In line with the regional competences model in Spain, the Autonomous Communities (regions) also have a key role in the implementation and management of the YG.

PES have been central players in the implementation of the YG with a wide range of responsibilities in the management, coordination and direct service provision for the YG.<sup>15</sup> The Spanish PES works with the network of the youth information centres (SIJ) of the Youth Institute (INJUVE). The SIJ network offers young people information on the YG scheme and supports them in registering on the scheme. Another partnership is with the Spanish Chamber of Commerce and its regional offices to reach out to young people and help them to register in the YG scheme. Currently, PES Spain have staff dedicated exclusively to work with the Youth Guarantee implementation.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> PES Network (2021) European Network of Public Employment Services 2021 PES Capacity Questionnaire Part II: Monitoring of PES support of the reinforced Youth Guarantee. [PES Knowledge Centre - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>16</sup> PES Network (2021) European Network of Public Employment Services 2021 PES Capacity Questionnaire Part II: Monitoring of PES support of the reinforced Youth Guarantee. [PES Knowledge Centre - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>17</sup> [The Youth Guarantee country by country - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#).





The assessment of the implementation of the Youth Guarantee by the European Commission noted good progress made in reaching out to a larger proportion of NEETs and attracting them to the national scheme.<sup>17</sup> The system for implementing the Youth Guarantee is very comprehensive, with a wide range of stakeholders and efforts made to include them all in the process.<sup>18</sup> Under the Youth Guarantee, there is a need for greater outreach to the inactive, low-skilled and most vulnerable. Also, the remaining

disparities in its implementation across the country, especially regarding the use of an individualised approach and the quality of measures need to be further addressed. Problems might arise regarding information sharing and coordination of efforts between different stakeholders at state, regional and local level. Improvement might be needed in the areas of providing mentors, limiting the duration of traineeships, ensuring transparency regarding hiring practices, and better adapting the offers to employer and target group needs.

Three in five (59.1%) of those leaving the YG in 2018 were known to be in a positive situation 6 months after exit (better than before). Long-term follow-up data from 2016 and 2017 show that these outcomes are generally maintained over time.<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, the Youth Guarantee has not had the expected results. Since, based on the information obtained from the Youth Guarantee 2014-2020 plan, it is estimated that at least 53.2% of the offers were for education or training, compared to 12% of the European average, while job offers only reached 31%, compared to 70% in the European average. It should also be borne in mind that the social partners do not have information on the working and educational conditions of these offers and therefore it cannot be established that they are at decent levels. Available assessments of YG in Spain also pointed out that YG design and implementation have not considered a thorough analysis of the situation faced by the youth

<sup>17</sup> [The Youth Guarantee country by country - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#).

<sup>18</sup> See Country Factsheet Spain, [The Youth Guarantee country by country - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#).

<sup>19</sup> See Country Factsheet Spain, [The Youth Guarantee country by country - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#).

population from a comprehensive point of view that analyses these individuals' ways of life as well as their difficulties, with a YG focus on work ignoring aspects of health and housing.<sup>20</sup>

In the current period, the Youth Guarantee Plus 2021-2027 has been expanded with the funding of EUR 3 billion. It is structured in six axes (guidance, training, employment opportunities, equal opportunities in access to employment, entrepreneurship and improvement of the institutional framework) and 69 measures.<sup>21</sup> Seminar discussions showed that the current Youth Guarantee is a mix of new measures and continuation of measures implemented previously, with for example more emphasis on promoting equal opportunities and entrepreneurship. The official position is that a good quality offer is a complex issue as it depends on the receiver in the context of individualised offers. There is also increased emphasis on helping vulnerable young people, focussing on their individual characteristics, based on a series of good practices developed in the 2014-2020 period. There are currently 2.3 million young people registered in the Youth Guarantee system and it is acknowledged that there is no monitoring of those who leave the system. The available monitoring data show that the main reason for young people not carrying out the Youth Guarantee agreements is them getting an employment contract.



The National Recovery and Resilience Plan for Spain envisages a significant overall financial expenditure of around 5.77% GDP.<sup>22</sup> Policies in Pillar 6 of the Plan dedicated to children and youth, and education and skills, represent around 7.64% of the total Plan expenditure. Specific quality youth employment measures are foreseen, in the NRRP for Spain.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> See Cabasés, M. A., & Úbeda, M. (2021). The Youth Guarantee in Spain: A worrying situation after its implementation. *Economics and Sociology*, 14(3), 89-104. doi:10.14254/2071-789X.2021/14-3/5, available at [The Youth Guarantee in Spain: A worrying situation after its implementation \(economics-sociology.eu\)](https://www.economics-sociology.eu)

<sup>21</sup> [Plan de Garantía Juvenil Plus 2021-2027 \(sepe.es\)](https://sepe.es)

<sup>22</sup> [Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu)

<sup>23</sup> [Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu) ; also Simoes (2022) School to work transition in the Resilience and Recovery Facility framework. Youth oriented active labour market policies under Pillar 6. Study for the European Parliament, [School to work transition in the Resilience and Recovery Facility framework \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu)

Targeted investments seek to improve the situation of young workers, who are more often affected by precariousness. Component 23 (Labour Market) includes reforms to reduce temporary employment, particularly salient for young generations, and invests in upskilling and reskilling and an Action Plan against Youth Unemployment (EUR 765 million). The Plan targets young people through grants for work based training in public school workshops, first professional experience in public administration and the recruitment of young researchers. By focusing on recognizing existing skills and promoting upskilling towards more intermediate skills, measures in Component 20 (Vocational Training) contribute to improve the employability and job mobility of young people with lower skills. By setting out a continuum of short training courses/modules that can be combined, the possibility of accumulating skills over time enables life-long learning according to personalized upskilling and re-skilling paths that lead to new certified qualifications. These measures intend to facilitate the youth integration into the labour market, train them towards future-oriented sectors and offer reinforced and personalized support in their active job search.

The work of the National Youth Council in Spain was also discussed in the project seminar in Rome. It is an example of bottom-up participation of young people in the policy making, and active involvement of trade unions and young trade unionists in its work.

Supported by the trade unions, the Council identified and put forward proposals to increase wages and minimum wages, improve labour rights, expand the social housing and reduce the housing cost burden for young people. In Spain, 2.5% housing is social housing (against the EU average 9.5%), and for some young people housing can take up 80% of their wages. The Observatory in the Council<sup>24</sup> showed that 1 million of young people have difficulties in having a decent lifestyle due to low wages, and the main cause of death amongst young people in Spain is suicide, highlighting a significant mental health crisis and extreme poverty facing many young people.



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<sup>24</sup> Consejo de la Juventud de España - Ofrecemos espacios de reflexión, trabajo conjunto, formación e interlocución. (cje.org)

# Conclusions and policy pointers

## 6

In general terms, the analysis of the employment policies adopted during the Covid-19 emergency in Spain shows positive results in relation to previous recession periods, so it is worth bearing in mind the special nature of the crisis resulting from the pandemic and the differences it presents with respect to the financial crisis that began in 2008. Hence, as mentioned above, according to current data, the youth employment rate is similar to that before Covid-19, although labour market inclusion is relatively worse than that of the general population. Similarly, compulsory teleworking and ERTes actively influenced the resilience and recovery of young workers. However, the current uncertainty of young people about the extent of the effects of the pandemic on the labour market in the medium and long term is evidence of the structural vulnerability they face, and hence their low capacity to adapt to

the circumstances ahead. Important in the context of Spain is also the impact of July 2023 national elections on the policy framework for young people, which needs to be monitored and reacted to in case of significant wins for the far-right parties. These have announced the potential roll-back of recent labour market reforms focussed on expanding the social rights and unwillingness to engage with the trade unions. The project seminar participants in Rome shared the experiences of facing the governments with a far-right presence in some regions, where attempts to downgrade the social dialogue structures are observed, as there is little interest to discuss solutions to social problems with trade unions, and calls to dismantle the youth committees are issued, affecting negatively the participation of young people in civil society structures.

### MAIN POLICY PRIORITIES TO PROMOTE QUALITY JOBS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



- ▶ Recognise that the so-called "scar effect of precariousness" acknowledging that the first work experiences of young people in the labour market tend to have medium and long-term effects not only at the individual level, with the loss of knowledge acquired during the training stage, but also at the societal level, as it increases the risk of poverty and social exclusion.



▶ Need to improve the work of PES with respect to youth, broaden their scope and focus on young people too, and ensure they address the needs of young people in employment, who might be seeking to change jobs, as opposed to being unemployed. It seems that the PES need to target to a greater extent those who are outside the labour market as well as those who are in the labour market and it seems necessary to open PES to those who are employed, not just unemployed.



▶ Improving the quality of offers, outreach and outcomes under the Youth Guarantee, making it more available and accessible to more and especially vulnerable young people. Social partners should receive more information about the quality of its offers, and longer term monitoring and evaluation information. More effort should be made by the government to define what a good quality offer is to the young people.



▶ Making good use of funds available under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan for Spain for supporting youth.



▶ Review the adoption of the Statute of Non-Labour Practices; reviewing the employment protection legislation and the current cost to companies of terminating the employment of younger workers compared to those with more seniority; the adoption of a Minimum Interprofessional Wage based on the cost of living; a Youth Employment Plan agreed with social partners; or a Social Housing Plan especially aimed at young people, among others.



▶ Trade unions need to engage more young people, as they are perceived as old rigid organisations which do not offer added value to young people. The ideas discussed at the seminar included nominating more young people to unions' positions, instituting specific quotas for young people, communicating the unions to young people in a positive and modern way, including the information about trade unions and labour rights in the educational curricula. Trade unions can highlight the concrete positive results from their work to young people, such as affirming the labour rights of workers and securing a series of benefits in employment. Important is also to demonstrate that trade unions also engage with the new forms of employment such as platform work or digital economy, especially popular amongst young people. Trade unions also need to offer open spaces for young people to discuss their problems and rights. In this respect, the experience of RUGE in Spain as a cross-union initiative specifically focussed on youth can be interesting to other countries to exchange practice and learn from.

# Annex 1

## Detailed picture on young people situation on the labour market

In the two crises, many young people were left out of the labour market. Youth unemployment rates across the EU-27 have not declined when comparing the two crisis periods. On the contrary, in 2021, youth unemployment rate in the EU-27 at 13% was higher compared to 12.3% rate in 2008. The situation in the individual project countries is as follows. Spain and Italy continue to have the highest youth unemployment rates in the EU, which increased in the COVID crisis and do not show signs of improvement since 2020. Romania and Slovenia have lower overall rates, but they have increased in 2020-2021 compared to the 2008-2010 period. Here the situation is also not showing signs of improvement. In contrast, youth unemployment declined in Hungary and Romania, however, the rates are relatively high.

**FIGURE 1** YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT RATE, ALL, EU-27 AND SELECTED COUNTRIES, SELECTED YEARS



**Source:** Eurostat, Youth unemployment by sex, age and educational attainment level [YTH\_EMPL\_090\_\_custom\_3603201], aged 15-29, accessed 17/10/2022.

Youth unemployment has also a gender dimension. In the project countries, consistently, more young women remained unemployed compared to young men, comparing both crisis periods.

**TABLE 1** YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT RATE, MEN AND WOMEN, EU-27 AND SELECTED COUNTRIES, SELECTED YEARS

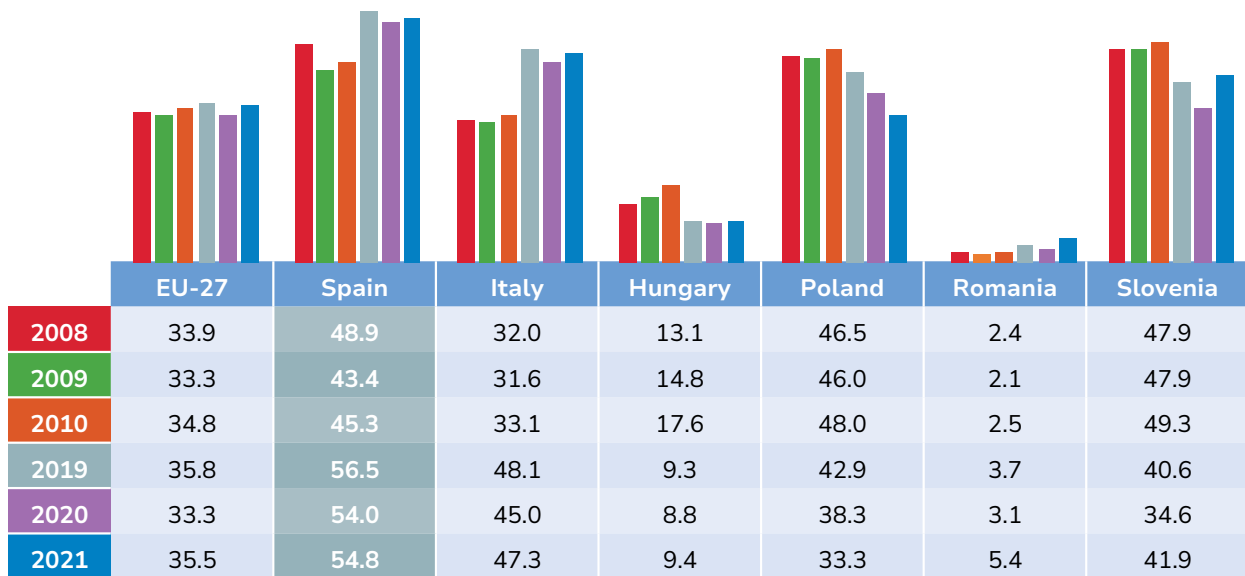
| Gender   | 2008 |      | 2009 |      | 2010 |      | 2019 |      | 2020 |      | 2021 |      |
|----------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
|          | ♀    | ♂    | ♀    | ♂    | ♀    | ♂    | ♀    | ♂    | ♀    | ♂    | ♀    | ♂    |
| EU-27    | 12.8 | 11.9 | 15.3 | 16.4 | 16.6 | 17.5 | 11.8 | 12.0 | 13.3 | 13.3 | 13.0 | 13.0 |
| Spain    | 18.5 | 17.9 | 26.6 | 30.2 | 30.0 | 33.3 | 25.4 | 24.1 | 29.9 | 28.5 | 27.2 | 26.8 |
| Italy    | 17.7 | 13.5 | 20.4 | 16.8 | 21.8 | 19.2 | 23.9 | 21.2 | 23.6 | 21.0 | 23.5 | 21.4 |
| Hungary  | 13.2 | 12.3 | 16.2 | 18.1 | 17.6 | 19.7 | 6.9  | 7.6  | 9.3  | 8.2  | 8.6  | 7.9  |
| Poland   | 13.5 | 10.7 | 15.0 | 13.6 | 17.7 | 16.2 | 7.2  | 6.0  | 7.3  | 6.9  | 7.3  | 7.2  |
| Romania  | 10.3 | 13.0 | 12.0 | 15.2 | 14.2 | 15.5 | 9.4  | 10.8 | 11.1 | 11.9 | 12.4 | 13.6 |
| Slovenia | 9.7  | 7.2  | 12.2 | 11.2 | 13.5 | 13.9 | 9.0  | 6.3  | 11.0 | 8.7  | 11.4 | 8.3  |

**Source:** Eurostat, Youth unemployment by sex, age and educational attainment level [YTH\_EMPL\_090\_custom\_3603201], aged 15-29, accessed 17/10/2022.

Even when able to get a job, young people continue to experience precarious work conditions on the labour market.

Across the EU, over a third of young people employed are working on temporary work contracts. This is particularly high in Spain, Italy, Slovenia and Romania, where almost half of young people are employed on a temporary basis. The situation is somewhat better in Hungary and less of an issue in Romania (albeit on a rise).

**FIGURE 2** TEMPORARY YOUTH EMPLOYMENT RATE, ALL, EU-27 AND SELECTED COUNTRIES, SELECTED YEARS



Source: Eurostat, Youth employment by sex, age and educational attainment level [YTH\_EMPL\_090\_custom\_3603201], aged 15-29, accessed 17/10/2022.



Also, part-time employment amongst young people is on the rise. This is the case across the EU and in the selected countries. Part time employment is especially high amongst young people in Italy, Spain and Slovenia.

**FIGURE 3**

**PART-TIME YOUTH EMPLOYMENT RATE, ALL, EU-27 AND SELECTED COUNTRIES, SELECTED YEARS**

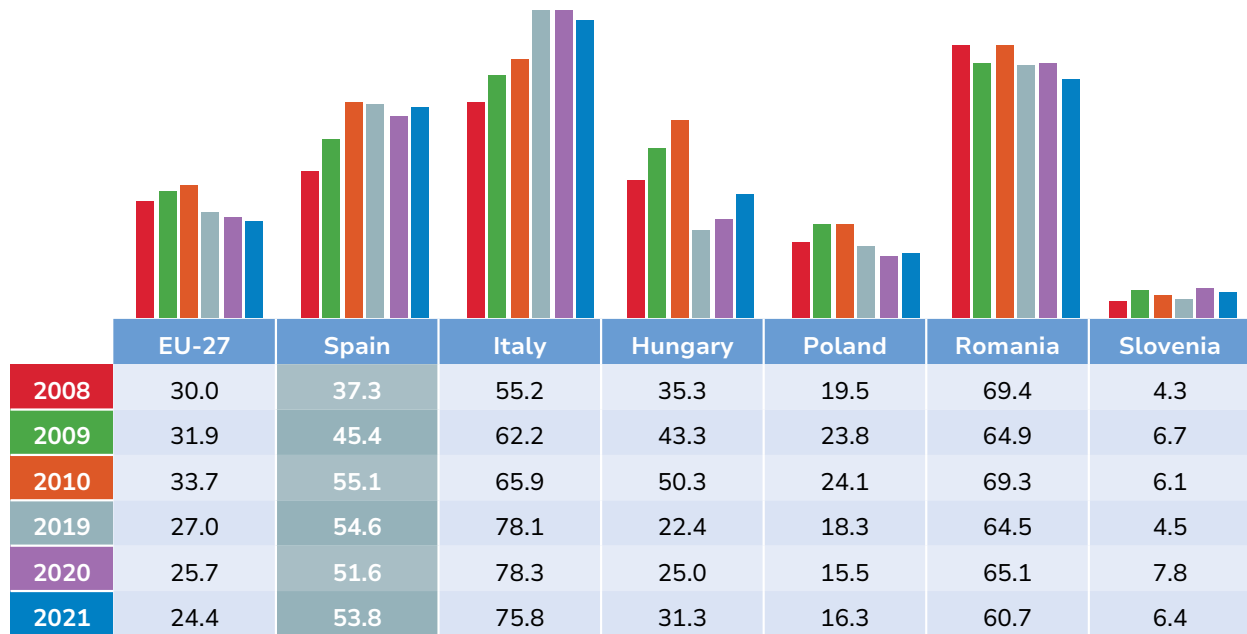


Source: Eurostat, Part-time employment as percentage of the total employment for young people by sex, age and country of birth [YTH\_EMPL\_060\_custom\_3604126], accessed 17/10/2022.

Furthermore, when working part time, many young people have to do so although they do not want to – because full time jobs are not available. The situation has not improved significantly between the two crisis periods. On the contrary, involuntary part time employment for young people has risen substantially in Italy and Spain. Only minor declines are observed in Hungary and Romania (which has the highest rate in the EU at 60%).

**FIGURE 4**

**INVOLUNTARY PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT AS PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, ALL, EU-27 AND SELECTED COUNTRIES, SELECTED YEARS**



**Source:** Eurostat, Involuntary part-time employment as percentage of the total part-time employment for young people by sex and age [YTH\_EMPL\_080\_custom\_3604033], accessed 17/10/2022.

Next, a significant proportion of young people has remained outside the labour market and formal education across the two crisis periods. Across the EU, this figure has remained similar both in 2008 and 2021, indicating a lack of significant progress. The rate remains high especially in Italy and Romania, and has declined only slightly in Spain, Hungary and Slovenia. The proportion of such young people has risen in Romania.

**FIGURE 5** YOUNG PEOPLE NEITHER IN EMPLOYMENT NOR IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING, EU-27 AND SELECTED COUNTRIES, SELECTED YEARS



Source: Eurostat, Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex, age and labour status (NEET rates) [EDAT\_LFSE\_20\_custom\_3605489], accessed 17/10/2022.

Also, the proportion of young people experiencing poverty whilst working has remained unchanged in the EU. It is particularly high in Romania, Spain and Italy. Whilst lower in Slovenia, Romania and Hungary, the trend of decrease has not been significant.

**TABLE 2** IN-WORK AT-RISK-OF-POVERTY RATE, PROPORTION OF EMPLOYED 16-29 AGE GROUP, EXPERIENCING POVERTY

|          | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|----------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| EU-27    | 9.3  | 9.8  | 11.1 | 10.8 | 11.0 | 10.5 | 10.4 | 9.8  | 9.8  | 9.7  |
| Spain    | 9.8  | 9.9  | 16.2 | 15.8 | 15.1 | 20.0 | 16.3 | 16.7 | 10.9 | 13.0 |
| Italy    | 11.8 | 11.5 | 12.2 | 12.6 | 12.0 | 12.4 | 13.1 | 12.0 | 11.4 | 13.1 |
| Hungary  | 4.8  | 7.6  | 6.3  | 9.5  | 9.2  | 6.6  | 4.4  | 5.9  | 5.4  | 8.5  |
| Poland   | 8.4  | 8.7  | 8.5  | 10.0 | 9.0  | 7.7  | 8.8  | 8.3  | 6.6  | 7.2  |
| Romania  | 21.0 | 21.7 | 22.6 | 22.4 | 23.9 | 19.0 | 16.2 | 16.7 | 18.4 | 15.8 |
| Slovenia | 7.1  | 7.2  | 6.5  | 7.4  | 8.2  | 6.3  | 5.6  | 5.5  | 4.6  | 4.2  |

Source: Eurostat, In-work at-risk-of-poverty rate by age and sex - EU-SILC survey [ILC\_IW01\_custom\_4422115], accessed 09/01/2023.

Similarly, the proportion of young people at risk of poverty and social exclusion remains high in the EU, affecting around a quarter of young people. This is particularly high in Romania, Italy and Spain, less so in Hungary, Romania and Slovenia.

**TABLE 3** PROPORTION OF PEOPLE IN THE 16-29 AGE GROUP, AT THE RISK OF POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

|          | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|----------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| EU-27    | 28.1 | 28.3 | 26.7 | 25.5 | 24.3 | 25.3 | 25.3 |
| Spain    | 36.7 | 36.6 | 34.4 | 33.3 | 31.3 | 28.6 | 31.3 |
| Italy    | 33.3 | 32.7 | 30.9 | 31.2 | 28.4 | 29.9 | 30.2 |
| Hungary  | 32.6 | 30.9 | 26.6 | 21.9 | 19.7 | 18.0 | 20.3 |
| Poland   | 24.4 | 23.1 | 19.4 | 19.9 | 19.2 | 18.0 | 17.6 |
| Romania  | 47.7 | 48.3 | 45.9 | 39.8 | 37.2 | 37.6 | 36.1 |
| Slovenia | 19.0 | 18.2 | 15.5 | 14.1 | 12.3 | 12.2 | 11.5 |

Source: Eurostat, Persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion by age and sex [ILC\_PEPS01N\_custom\_4441552], accessed 09/01/2023.

Earnings data available for young people show a slow increase in the wages for young people across the EU, over the years. In 2018, on average the annual earnings for young people were around EUR 22,000. Young people in Italy, Spain and Slovenia were earning wages around the EU average. In contrast, earnings for young people in Romania, Hungary and Romania were twice below the EU average, around EUR 11,000.

**TABLE 4** MEDIAN ANNUAL EARNINGS, FOR PEOPLE AGED BELOW 30, IN EURO

|          | 2002   | 2006   | 2010   | 2014   | 2018   |
|----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| EU-27    | :      | :      | 18,912 | 20,274 | 22,402 |
| Spain    | 15,462 | 17,375 | 20,274 | 20,697 | 21,203 |
| Italy    | :      | 21,151 | 23,291 | 25,649 | 26,001 |
| Hungary  | 4,960  | 6,543  | 8,113  | 8,415  | 11,103 |
| Poland   | 5,522  | 6,747  | 8,353  | 9,079  | 11,297 |
| Romania  | 1,732  | 3,345  | 5,093  | 5,699  | 10,424 |
| Slovenia | 9,787  | 12,467 | 16,876 | 17,802 | 19,608 |

: missing data

**Source:** Eurostat, Structure of earnings survey: annual earnings [EARN\_SES\_ANNUAL\_custom\_4442459], accessed 09/01/2023.

**TABLE 5****AVERAGE NUMBER OF USUAL WEEKLY HOURS OF WORK IN MAIN JOB, YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 15-34**

|          | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|----------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| EU-27    | 36.7 | 36.5 | 36.4 | 36.4 | 36.3 | 36.3 | 36.2 | 36.2 | 36.1 | 36.0 |
| Spain    | 36.8 | 36.2 | 36.0 | 36.0 | 35.9 | 35.8 | 35.8 | 35.6 | 35.7 | 35.3 |
| Italy    | 36.5 | 36.3 | 36.3 | 36.3 | 36.3 | 36.4 | 36.6 | 36.4 | 36.3 | 36.6 |
| Hungary  | 39.5 | 39.6 | 39.9 | 40.0 | 39.7 | 39.8 | 39.7 | 39.7 | 39.5 | 39.4 |
| Poland   | 40.4 | 40.4 | 40.4 | 40.5 | 40.4 | 40.2 | 40.2 | 40.2 | 40.0 | 40.1 |
| Romania  | 40.4 | 40.3 | 40.3 | 40.0 | 40.1 | 39.8 | 39.7 | 40.0 | 39.8 | 40.2 |
| Slovenia | 38.0 | 38.1 | 37.7 | 37.7 | 38.0 | 37.5 | 37.7 | 38.2 | 38.6 | 38.3 |

Source: Eurostat, average number of usual weekly hours of work in main job, by sex, age, professional status, full-time/part-time and economic activity (from 2008 onwards, NACE Rev. 2) [LFSA\_EWHUN2\_custom\_4444349], accessed 09/01/2023.

**TABLE 6****SHARE OF SELF-EMPLOYED WITHIN TOTAL EMPLOYMENT, 2021**

|          | 15-29 age group | 15-64 age group |
|----------|-----------------|-----------------|
| EU-27    | 6               | 13              |
| Spain    | 5               | 6               |
| Italy    | 12              | 20              |
| Hungary  | 6               | 11              |
| Poland   | 10              | 18              |
| Romania  | 9               | 11              |
| Slovenia | 5               | 12              |

Source: Eurostat, accessed 09/01/2023.



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