

# GETTING YOUNG WORKERS ON BOARD OF THE EUROPEAN PILLAR OF SOCIAL RIGHTS (ESPR)



**The ESPR Action Plan through the youth lenses**  
The analytical report

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# KEY FINDINGS



**A genuinely youth centric approach in the Action Plan is missing.** Youth is treated as a separate policy theme, with actions proposed which have been around for some time such as the Youth Guarantee and which effectiveness is under question. Important priorities for youth are not reflected in the Action Plan.



Three **headline targets** in the Action Plan reflect some relevant youth issues such as reducing the NEET rate or early school leaving but do not adopt a genuine youth perspective. In particular, specific targets critical to the main challenges of young people are missing from the Plan, such as reducing youth unemployment and numbers of youth in poverty and socially excluded.



Focus on reinforced **Youth Guarantee** is relevant to youth concerns but misses a binding definition of quality standards for its support offers to the youth.



In the **ESF+**, all Member States should dedicate a specific proportion of the funding to addressing youth in precarious working conditions.



In the **area of creating jobs**, the actions proposed miss an opportunity to adopt a youth perspective. The existing instruments such as SURE and EASE are geared to support workers on standard contracts, whereas many young people are in precarious work contracts. Actions on energising Europe's industrial eco-systems, promoting social economy and fostering entrepreneurship do not have a youth perspective, even though this is relevant. Actions to energise social dialogue at the workplaces do not acknowledge that many young workers are not members of trade unions.



In the area of **working conditions**, actions on regulating the impact of digitalisation in the workplaces, do not reflect the youth perspective, although youth face specific challenges in relation to the digitalisation at work. Similarly, actions on occupational health and safety standards do not consider a youth perspective. However, young workers experience OSH issues differently in comparison to adults. Finally, actions are also proposed in relation to protecting mobile workers including seasonal workers. None of actions proposed recognise the youth dimension in intra-EU worker mobility including seasonal mobility. This is ignoring the fact that a significant proportion of mobile workers including seasonal workers are young people, who face a specific set of challenges in participating in intra-EU mobility.



In the **area of skills**, proposed actions are relevant and appropriate to the needs of youth but the Pact for Skills should take into account youth perspective on skills.



In the **area of equality**, proposed actions miss out a youth focus even though this is relevant. This relates for example to the actions combatting discrimination in the workplaces, where youth often face a less preferential treatment compared to more established workers. The implementation of the Work Life Balance Directive should also consider how the needs of young parents are met through measures adopted through the directive, such as increased paternity leave, and how this has contributed to more equality at work and at home between young women and men. The action proposed on Roma equality, inclusion and participation should also include a youth lenses.



None of the Plan actions proposed **in the social protection and inclusion area** explicitly acknowledges the significant challenges faced by young people in accessing the current social protection systems across the EU. Young people in particular face challenges in accessing the adequate social protection systems as they tend to be not adequately covered in the existing social security safety nets and thus more likely to “fall through the cracks”.



# 01 AIMS AND FOCUS OF THE REPORT

Across the EU, **young people are continuing to face a number of significant challenges to enter and get a stable position in the labour market.** They do not easily obtain good quality jobs with decent wages and are still faced with significant exclusion from regular employment, good-quality education, training opportunities as well as adequate inclusion and coverage in the national social protection systems. Young women and migrants are particularly affected. This results in significant challenges for young people to secure a stable foothold in good quality employment.

The precarious and unstable position of young people in employment and social protection **endangers the full implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights** (ESPR) and its core principles aimed to ensure equal opportunities and access to the labour market; fair working conditions; and adequate social protection and inclusion. Responding to the challenges faced by young workers, the EU has taken a series of legislative, policy and financial initiatives over the last years. Indeed, the ESPR is a major milestone at the EU level intended to anchor the social rights into the EU and national policy frameworks.

Most recently, **a dedicated Action Plan was adopted** (March 2021) to implement the EPSR, with high-level political commitments to implement the social objectives for upward convergence and a strong social Europe related to the 20 principles of the EPSR<sup>1</sup>. Such convergence should be achieved by setting indicators and an efficient monitoring method involving the EU institutions, Member States and EU/national Social Partners<sup>2</sup>.

This analytical **report assesses whether and to what extent the actions proposed by the European Commission in the Action Plan are relevant for young people** who struggle to find their place in the labour markets across Europe heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This analysis of the Action Plan looks particularly at the actions tackling economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and analyses their expected impact on young workers and highlight problems that might arise for them during the implementation of the Action Plan (such as the structural obstacles to access the social protection). The analysis leads to recommendations and evidence-based policy proposals on how the actions could be improved to be truly addressing the needs of young people and young workers.

The main aspects of the analysis in the report are as follows:

- (section 2.1) To what extent the Action Plan specifically and explicitly addresses the key structural challenges faced by youth in particular, as evidenced in the first phase of the research and new evidence sources;
- (section 2.2) To what extent the actions proposed in the Action Plan are specific, measurable, achievable and realistic and targeted (SMART) to the needs of youth, backed up by clear resource and responsibility allocation to the EC and the Member State governments;
- (section 3) To what extent the actions proposed in the Action Plan are relevant to the needs faced by youth;
- (section 4) What are the main gaps in terms of additional policy proposals which are not listed in the Action Plan where the needs for action have been identified in the first phase of the research and new evidence sources.

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<sup>1</sup>[The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/e300042c-3250-4f30-b01d-3bb61280ba01/attachment/data/2021/03/13/1336222.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.etuc.org/en/document/etuc-priorities-action-plan-implementing-european-pillar-social-rights>

The report is a final research deliverable summarizing the findings of the research undertaken in the framework of the ETUC project “Getting young workers on board of the European Pillar of Social Rights” 2019-2021<sup>3</sup>. The report is based on the following sources:

- Analysis of literature and labour market, social integration and poverty statistics of the key aspects of youth employment and the relevant trade union action;
- The analysis of the responses of ETUC members to the online survey implemented in the framework of the project in 2019;
- The discussions and exchanges at the project workshop in Frankfurt, Germany, in October 2019.



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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.etuc.org/en/issue/european-pillar-social-rights>



# 02

# WHERE IS YOUTH IN THE ESPR ACTION PLAN?

This section analyses firstly the youth aspects of the three headline targets in the ESPR Action Plan and secondly youth-dedicated actions in the Plan.

## 2.1. YOUTH AND THE THREE EU HEADLINE TARGETS

 **KEY MESSAGES:**

- Three headline targets in the Action Plan reflect some relevant youth issues such as reducing the NEET rate or early school leaving but do not adopt a genuine youth perspective.
- Targets critical to the main challenges faced by young people in the labour market and societal life are missing in the Action Plan, relating to reducing youth unemployment and numbers of youth in poverty and socially excluded.

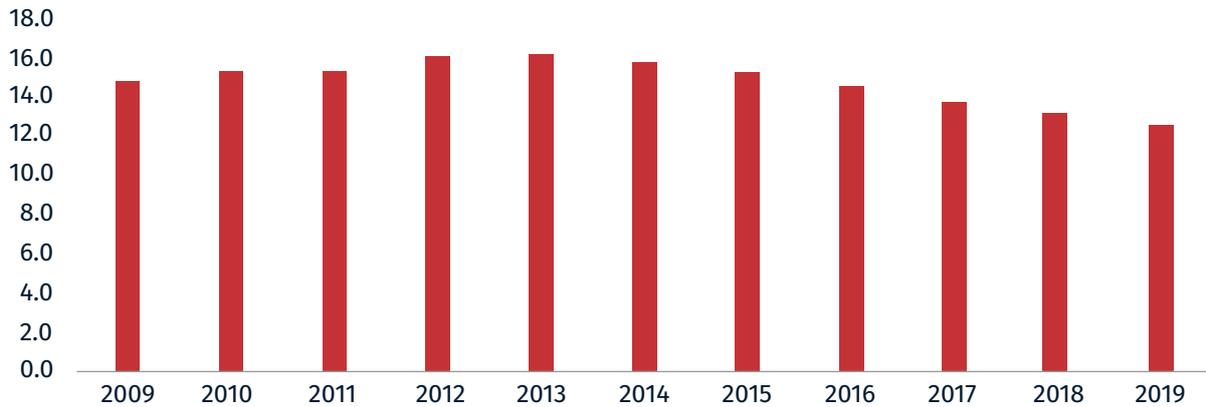
The Action Plan articulates three headline targets for the EU to be achieved by 2030, in the areas of employment, skills, and social protection, namely:

- **Target 1:** At least 78% of the population aged 20 to 64 should be in employment;
- **Target 2:** At least 60% of all adults should participate in training every year;
- **Target 3:** The number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion should be reduced by at least 15 million.

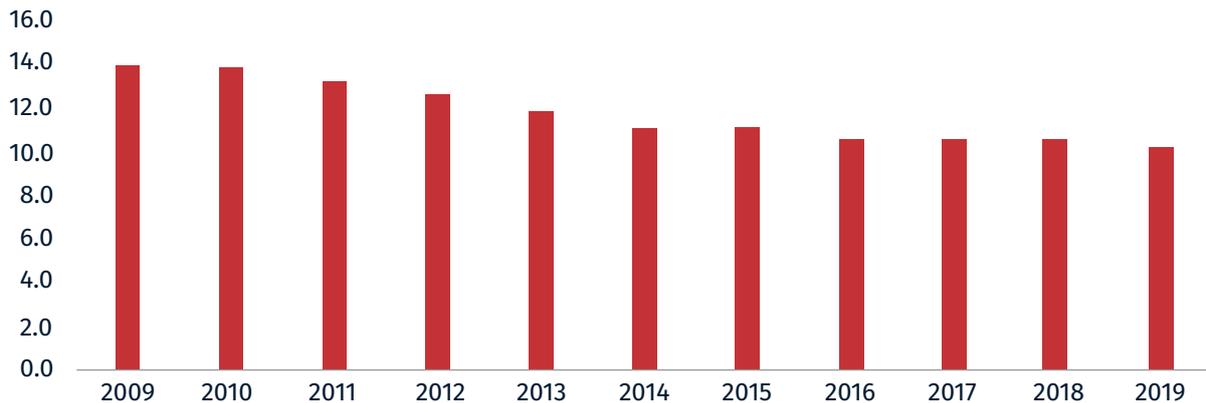
From a youth perspective it is appropriate that all three headline targets include a relevant youth dimension:

- To achieve Target 1, the Action Plan calls, amongst other things, to decrease the rate of young people neither in employment, nor in education or training (NEETs) aged 15–29 from 12.6% (2019) to 9%, namely by improving their employment prospects.
- To achieve Target 2, the Action Plan calls, amongst other things, to decrease the rate of early school leaving and increase participation in secondary upper education.
- To achieve Target 3, the Action Plan, amongst other things, also commits to lifting at least 5 million children aged 0-17 (i.e. those on the brink of becoming young adults and entering the labour market) out of poverty and social exclusion.

In relation to Target 1 “employment rate”, the challenge of reducing the NEET rate which is explicitly included in the headline target is to some extent relevant to addressing this challenge facing the youth. This is because the NEET rate across the EU has been high, albeit somewhat decreasing over the last decade, from 14.8% in 2009 to 12.8% in 2019 (see Figure 1). Similarly, in relation to Target 2, decreasing the rate of early school leaving is also relevant, as this has remained high over the last decade across the EU (see Figure 2, the rate has stabilised around 10% since 2014).

**FIGURE 1: NEET RATE IN THE EU, 2009-2019**

**Source:** Eurostat, Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex (NEET) [SDG\_08\_20], accessed 12/04/2021.

**FIGURE 2: RATE OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING IN THE EU, 2009-2019**

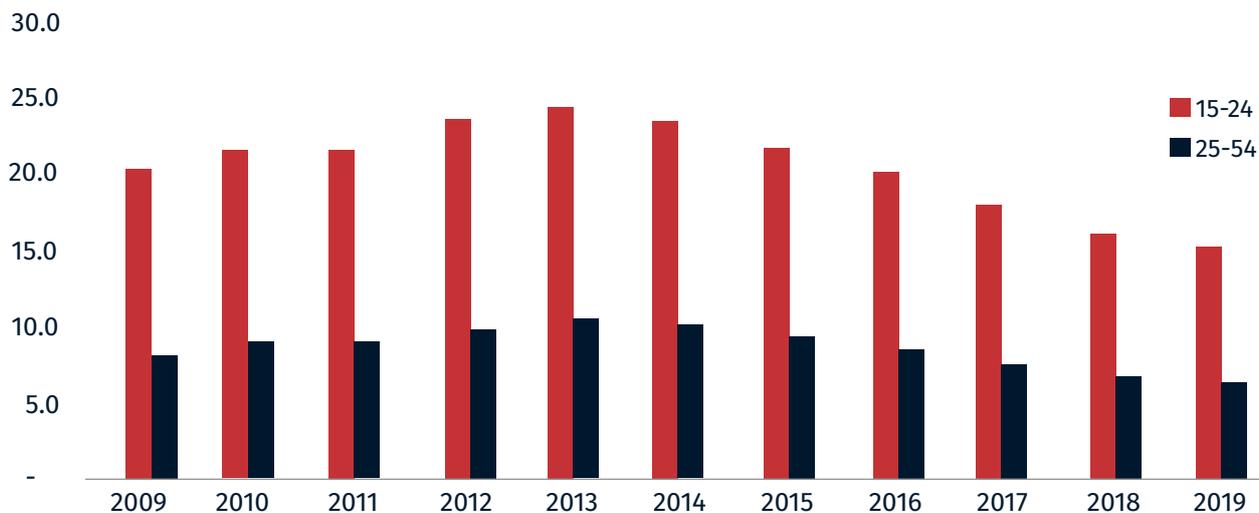
**Source:** Eurostat, Early leavers from education and training, age group 18-24 [TESEM020], accessed 12/04/2021.

Both challenges facing young people in the EU (the NEET rate and the rate of early school leaving) have been at the centre of concerted policy action at the EU and national levels over the last decade as well. The fact that both problems remain significant indicates that policy solutions applied so far require rethinking as they have not worked as well as intended to reduce the rates of early school leaving especially and further bring down the NEET rate.

These youth aspects in the headline targets are relevant to addressing the problems facing young people in today's European societies. Yet at the same time, the headline targets miss opportunities to reflect youth concerns in a more holistic way.

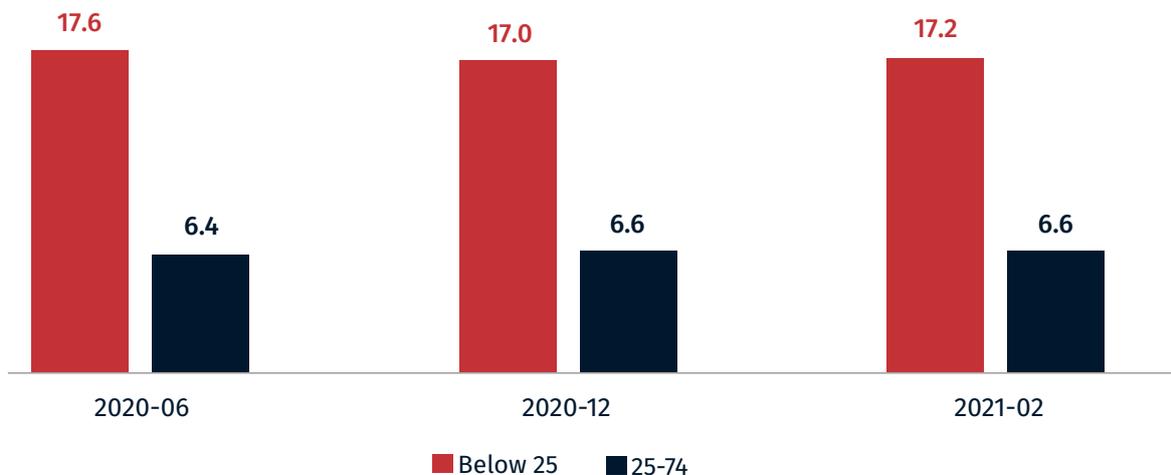
In relation to Target 1 on the employment rate, there is **a missed opportunity to address the significant extent of youth unemployment across the EU**. Even in the pre-COVID time of steady economic growth, youth unemployment rates have remained high, and above the general unemployment rates (see Figure 3). In 2019, the youth unemployment rate in the EU-27 was 2.5 times higher compared to the adult unemployment rate (15.1% and 6.3% respectively). The youth employment has remained consistently high, steadily twice above the rate of adult unemployment rate, over the last 10 year period, despite a decline from 20% in 2009 to 15.1% in 2019. Importantly, as shown in Figure 4, the impact of COVID-19 pandemic crisis has caused the youth unemployment rate to soar again, the latest data in February 2021 shows it at 17.2%.

**FIGURE 3: YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND ADULT UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE EU, 2009-2019**



Source: Eurostat, Unemployment rate by age [TEPSR\_WC170], accessed 12/04/2021.

**FIGURE 4: YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND ADULT UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE EU, SELECTED MONTHS IN 2020-2021**

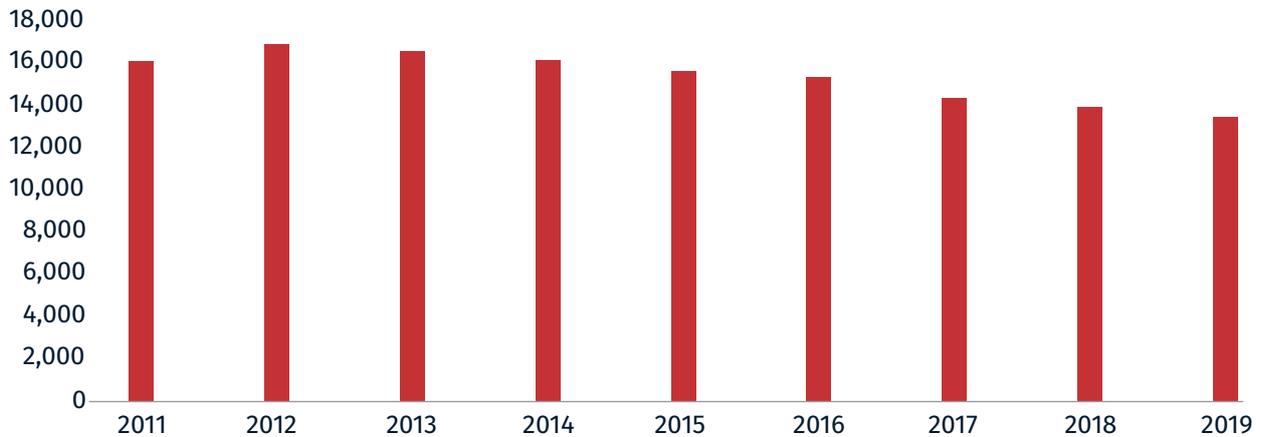


Source: Eurostat, Unemployment by sex and age – monthly data [UNE\_RT\_M\_\_custom\_802454], accessed 12/04/2021.

The Action Plan also does not acknowledge the gender dimension in youth unemployment, which can affect the gender employment gap of adults. Looking at the EU average, more young men tend to be unemployed compared to the young women (15.8% and 14.6% respectively, in 2019, Eurostat).

Similarly in relation to Target 3, there is **a missed opportunity to address the significant extent of poverty and social exclusion faced by young people**. Due to challenging access to the labour market, high extent of precarious working conditions and issues in obtaining social security coverage, the number of young people at risk of poverty and social exclusion remains high (see Figure 5). In 2019, across the EU, over 13 million young people were at risk of poverty and social exclusion. This has declined somewhat from 15.9 million such young people facing poverty and social exclusion 10 years ago, in 2009.

**FIGURE 5: YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OF POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION, AGED 16-29, EU-27, 2009-2019, THOUSANDS OF PERSONS**



Source: Eurostat, People at risk of poverty or social exclusion by age and sex [ilc\_peps01], accessed 11/04/2021.

## 2.2. HOW RELEVANT ARE THE YOUTH-SPECIFIC ACTIONS IN THE ESPR ACTION PLAN?



### KEY MESSAGES:

- The main youth specific policy answer in the Action Plan is a continued implementation of the reinforced Youth Guarantee, supported by the use of the existing EU funds (e.g. ESF+). Such focus on reinforced Youth Guarantee is relevant to youth concerns, but misses a binding definition of quality standards for its support offers to the youth.
- In the implementation of ESF+, all Member States should dedicate a specific proportion of the funding to addressing youth in precarious working conditions.

The ESPR Action Plan correctly draws attention to the scale of challenges facing young people: “*Special attention needs to be devoted to young people and the low skilled, who are more vulnerable to the fluctuations in the labour market. They need additional support because: many worked in the sectors most affected by the pandemic such as tourism; others, after finishing their studies, had fewer opportunities to enter the labour market for the first time; and others had to interrupt their education or training and could not obtain their qualifications as planned*”. p. 17.

The main youth specific policy answer in the Action Plan is **a continued implementation of the reinforced Youth Guarantee, supported by the use of the existing EU funds.**

Specifically, the Action Plan calls “*the Member States to implement the reinforced Youth Guarantee with a particular focus on quality offers that support a stable labour market integration, using EU financial support*” (p. 18). In places since 2013, the Youth Guarantee has made a contribution to offering a route into the labour market for young people. However, its ambition to offer an effective solution towards a stable labour market integration with a focus on quality employment remains to be realised. The key challenge remains to ensure that the offers to young people under the Youth Guarantee are of good quality and leading to good-quality jobs or sustainable routes to labour market. Without an explicit and binding definition of standards of what constitutes “good quality” under the Youth Guarantee, its potential needs to be further addressed. This is an opportunity missed under the Action Plan.

Furthermore, support to youth employment is also expressed in the Action Plan through a **call to the Member States under the ESF+ funding** to dedicate at least EUR 22 billion to youth employment support. The Action Plan also reiterates the new rule under ESF + in the 2020-2027 programming period that “*Member States will need to devote at least 12.5% for young persons not in employment, education, or training (NEETs) where the relative percentage falling in this group is above the EU average, whereas all other Member States will need to dedicate an appropriate amount to implement the reinforced Youth Guarantee.*” (p. 32). In this way, this requirement is stronger for the Member States where the NEET average is above the EU average.

Yet, using the EU average in this context is not fully reflecting the labour market reality of many young people. Many young people whilst not formally counted as NEETs, are in precarious working conditions or working part time on involuntary basis (see Box 1). Thus, using the NEET rate average masks the labour market realities of many young people. A more appropriate approach through the Action Plan would be to require all Member States to dedicate a specific percentage of ESF+ to address the needs of young people working under precarious working conditions – such working in a temporary or part time job because they cannot find a full-time permanent job.



### BOX 1: TOO MANY YOUNG PEOPLE IN PRECARIOUS WORKING CONDITIONS

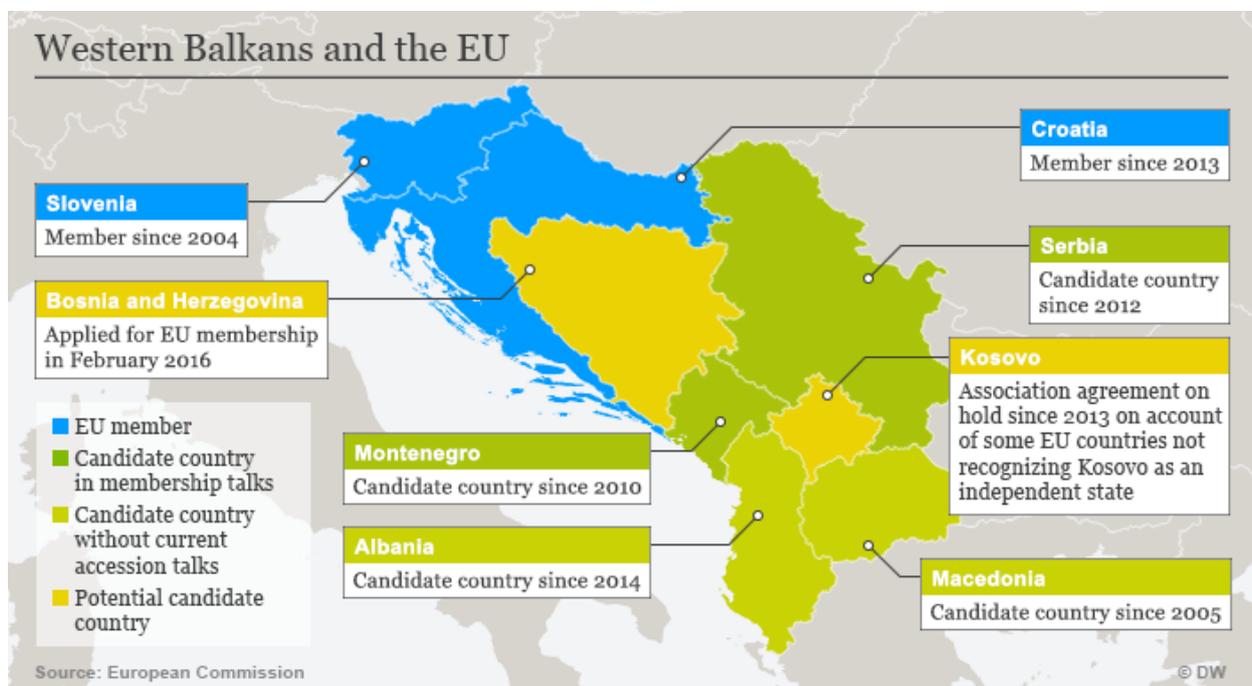
When young people do manage to enter the labour market, they are disproportionately affected by precarious working conditions.

**In 2020, as much as 46.5% of the young workers aged 15-24 in the EU had temporary work contracts** (only slightly down from 46.8% in 2009). For comparison in 2020, just below 12% of adult workers aged 25-54 (11.8% in 2009) and 6.1% (7.2% in 2009) of those aged 55 to 64 were employed under a temporary contract (Eurostat, Temporary employees as percentage of the total number of employees, by sex, age and citizenship (%) [lfsa\_etpgan]). The share of young workers aged 15-24 with a temporary contract in 2020 was particularly high in Spain (66.4%), Italy (58.9%), Portugal (56%), Slovenia (55.9), France (55.8%), Poland (54.7%), Sweden (53.8%) and the Netherlands (50.3%).

**A significant proportion of young people were also working part-time although they did not wish so** (Eurostat, Involuntary part-time employment as percentage of the total part-time employment, by sex and age (%) [lfsa\_eppgai]). Across the EU, in 2020, over 25% (as compared to 32% in 2009) of all young workers aged 15-29 were affected by involuntary part-time employment, with particularly high rates in Italy (78.3%), Romania (65.1%), Greece (62.5%), Cyprus (59.7%) and Spain (51.6%).

**This high extent of young people working part-time not by choice is confirmed by the analysis of the main reasons why young people are working part-time** (Eurostat, Main reasons for part-time employment of young people by sex and age [yth\_empl\_070]). In 2020, the share of young people aged 15-24 who worked part-time because they could not find a full-time job declined slightly from 27.6% in 2009 to 21.5% in 2020. This rises to 32% (compared to 38.4% in 2009) of young people aged 25-29, when they can be expected to have completed their initial education phase. In the age group 25-29, not being able to find a full-time job is also the main reason for young people to work part-time, even though they wish so.

Finally, the Action Plan also **envisages youth-specific action in Europe's neighbourhood of Western Balkans**. Specifically, "*the Instrument of Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) III will provide increased funding for human capital development and a flagship initiative to implement youth guarantee schemes to address the high NEETs rates in the region*" (p. 38). This aspect of the Action Plan is adding value to addressing the youth specific challenges in the countries aspiring to become members of the EU. In the implementation of this aspect, the Commission and national governments should pay attention to apply the lessons learnt from the Youth Guarantee in the EU. This would mean ensuring binding quality standards are applied in the Youth Guarantee for the Western Balkans. The experiences of "what works" in addressing the high NEET rates in the EU should be reflected and adopted to the context of the Western Balkan region. In this context, evaluations of the EU's Youth Guarantee pointed out a number of useful messages<sup>4</sup>. In particular, despite some progress in reducing the youth unemployment and NEET rate, the key challenge remains in reaching out and activating the most vulnerable young people (in particular young people with disabilities, those with a migrant background and in those with low skills) in many Member States. Also, to a large extent, the Youth Guarantee has not successfully managed to overcome large regional disparities in labour market opportunities for young people in some Member States, often correlating with regional disparities in education attainment, early leaving from education and training, or the quality and availability of integrated services for the inactive and unemployed.



<sup>4</sup> European Commission (2020), COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Accompanying the document Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a Bridge to Jobs - reinforcing the Youth Guarantee {COM(2020) 277 final}.

European Commission (2016) COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Accompanying the document Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, The Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative three years on.



# 03

# WHAT IS THE YOUTH RELEVANCE OF OTHER ACTIONS IN THE PLAN?

This section analyses other actions proposed in the ESPR Action Plan from the youth perspective, based in turn on the three areas of the ESPR.

## 3.1. MORE AND BETTER JOBS



### KEY MESSAGES:

- In **the area of creating jobs**, the actions proposed miss an opportunity to adopt a youth perspective. The existing instruments such as SURE and EASE are geared to support workers on standard, regular and secure employment contracts, whereas many young people have precarious work contracts and work arrangements.
- Actions on energising Europe's industrial eco-systems, promoting social economy and fostering entrepreneurship do not have a youth perspective, even though this is relevant.
- Actions to energise **social dialogue** at the workplaces do not acknowledge that many young workers are not members of trade unions.
- **In the area of working conditions**, actions on regulating the impact of digitalisation in the workplace, do not reflect the youth perspective, although youth face specific challenges in relation to the digitalisation at work.
- Similarly, actions on **occupational health and safety standards** do not take into account a youth perspective. However, young workers experience OSH issues differently in comparison to adults.
- Finally, actions are also proposed in relation to **protecting mobile workers** including seasonal workers. None of actions proposed recognise the youth dimension in intra-EU worker mobility including seasonal mobility. This is ignoring the fact that a significant proportion of mobile workers including seasonal workers are young people, who face a specific set of challenges in participating in intra-EU mobility.

As a first area of action, the Action Plan proposes the following actions in order to create **job opportunities in the real economy**, with their relevance to youth issues assessed in turn below.

**TABLE 1: ACTIONS PROPOSED UNDER THE “CREATING JOBS”**

AREA OF ACTION	ACTIONS PROPOSED IN THE ACTION PLAN <sup>5</sup>
<p><b>Creating job opportunities in the real economy</b></p>	<p><b>The Commission will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review in 2022 the Council Recommendation on the <b>Quality Framework for Traineeships</b>, notably as regards working conditions.</li> <li>• Building on the implementation of the 2020 Industrial strategy and on the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, update the new <b>Industrial Strategy for Europe in Q2 2021</b>.</li> <li>• Adopt an <b>Action Plan on the Social Economy</b> in Q4 2021, and tap into the potential of the social economy to create quality jobs and contribute to fair, sus-tainable and inclusive growth.</li> <li>• Evaluate the experience of <b>the European instrument for temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE)</b>.</li> </ul> <p><b>The Commission encourages:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Member States to design and implement coherent packages of measures promoting <b>Effective Active Support to Employment (EASE)</b> following the COVID-19 crisis, making full use of the EU funds available for this purpose.</li> <li>• Member States to implement the reinforced <b>Youth Guarantee</b> with a particular focus on quality offers that support a stable labour market integration, using EU financial support.</li> <li>• National authorities and social partners to ensure the <b>information and consultation of workers during restructuring processes</b> as required by EU rules and to <b>promote the participation of workers at company level</b> with a view to fostering workplace innovation.</li> <li>• National, regional and local authorities to support <b>entrepreneurship</b>, including female entrepreneurship, and contribute to the creation of an enabling environment for the digitalisation, sustainability and resilience of SMEs.</li> <li>• National, regional and local authorities, together with industry, including SMEs, social partners and researchers, to contribute to the Commission’s work on <b>industrial ecosystems</b> – with a focus on cross-border and cross-ecosystem collaboration, including through the Industrial Forum.</li> </ul>

<sup>5</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-action-plan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-action-plan_en)

As shown in section 2, the action on **the reinforced Youth Guarantee and the implementation of the Council Recommendation on the Quality Framework for Traineeships** are relevant to the needs of young people entering the labour market, but miss a binding approach to anchoring the good quality standards of offers and traineeships. All too often, young people continue to experience a series of poorly paid, dead-end work experiences including traineeships which do not offer a genuinely quality route into the labour market.

Actions are also proposed in relation **to the implementation of the European instrument for temporary support to mitigate unemployment risks in an emergency (SURE) and Effective active support to employment (EASE)**, both adopted as part of the response to counteract the significant negative labour market effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Research has shown that young people have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, given that they are often working in non-standard jobs, precarious working conditions and are exposed to exploitation.

Across the EU, unemployment among youth under 25 years increased by 2.3 % during the pandemic, from 14.9% in March 2020 to 17.2% in February 2021, while among the adult population (aged 25 and over), it increased by 1%, from 5.6% to 6.6%. (Eurostat, Unemployment by sex and age – monthly data [une\_rt\_m]). Furthermore, young workers across the EU feel most insecure in their jobs. According to Eurofound's E-survey "Living, Working and COVID-19", 12% of the young workers in the EU considered it 'very likely' or 'rather likely' that they would lose their job in the following three months, compared to 9% of older workers who had the same fears<sup>6</sup>.

At the same time, policy responses supported by SURE and EASE are geared towards supporting workers in standard forms of employment. **They miss out a targeted approach to supporting young workers (and other groups) which are working in temporary, informal, part time or zero hour contracts.**

Actions proposed are also relating to **energising Europe's industrial eco-systems, promoting social economy and fostering entrepreneurship**. There is no indication that such actions will take into account a youth focus, for example, through special measures to foster youth entrepreneurship. Some of the main challenges for youth entrepreneurship in the EU include unawareness among young people of its potential, lack of necessary skills, finance and networks for entrepreneurship as well as lack of work experience and credit history. Hence, specific, youth-focused measures are necessary to foster youth entrepreneurship in the EU. These should include raising awareness about the potential of entrepreneurship, introducing subjects related to entrepreneurship at all educational levels, offering entrepreneurship training and coaching outside of education, improving access to finance and supporting the development of entrepreneurship networks for young people<sup>7</sup>.

This could also include supporting Europe's industries to offer work-based training routes into employment for young people on an appropriate scale reflecting the negative impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on the youth. Here, a targeted youth approach is required, otherwise, the industrial renewal strived for across Europe will bypass the young people.

Finally, there is a call for action in relation to **promoting worker participation** at the company level, as well as information and consultation of workers in the restructuring situations. Research has shown that often the concerns of young workers are not reflected in the social dialogue processes at the company level, also due to the low level of unionisation amongst the young workers (see also Box 2). Young people are considered to be the most difficult to reach to attract them into trade unions. Young workers tend to spend far longer moving between precarious jobs in the formative stages of their working lives and hence they are less likely to settle down in regular employment. Thus, they are also less likely to become aware of the trade unions in the course of these unstable working patterns.

The high extent of precariousness of working conditions faced by young workers can affect their likelihood to become trade union members in several ways. In particular, young people experiencing long periods of precarious employment increasingly consider it too risky to organize via a trade union, for example, because their wages are contingent on getting favourable assessments from managers or because they live in constant fear of losing their temporary jobs<sup>8</sup>. Young precarious workers may also be more likely to organize to act against

<sup>6</sup> Eurofound (2020), 'Is history repeating itself? The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on youth' blog.

<sup>7</sup> OECD/European Commission (2020), "Policy brief on recent developments in youth entrepreneurship" (p. 5), OECD SME and Entrepreneurship Papers, No. 19, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5f5c9b4e-en>.

<sup>8</sup> Simms et al 2018.

the lack of paid employment ensuring their economic independence and stability. Across the EU, only 40% of workers below 35 reported working for an organization with a trade union or another type of worker representation. For older workers, this figure was higher at 50%. Young workers exposure to trade unions is especially low in Greece, Lithuania or Poland where only 20% of young workers reported working for an employer with an organized worker representation body. In contrast, over 60% young workers in Sweden, Belgium, France and Finland working in such an organization<sup>9</sup>.

Here, there is a missed opportunity in the Action Plan to adopt a youth centric approach in supporting the social dialogue processes at the workplaces sensitive to the needs of young workers.



## BOX 2: YOUTH AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING PROCESSES

National trade unions have been active to address the challenges and needs of youth in general and young workers in particular. We have identified several examples of successful collective agreements and other social dialogue activities which have improved working, training and education conditions for youth. This demonstrates a direct link to a more effective implementation of the EU Pillar of Social Rights and its relevant core principles to provide young people with equal opportunities and access to the labour market; ensure their fair working conditions; and provide adequate social protection and inclusion.

Successes have also identified internally within the national trade unions to reflect and engage better with young people – including actions to adopt a more strategic approach to youth, develop strong dedicated youth-specific structures internally and take an in-depth look at the actual needs of youth.

However, gaps remain. First of all, there is a low tendency to cover youth issues in binding collective agreements. Having said that, the coverage of youth issues in other softer social dialogue activities is broader, indicating the unions are in general aware of the needs of youth.

At the same time, youth relevant issues and challenges are not systematically embedded and reflected in the collective bargaining processes and outcomes across all national trade unions. Therefore, collective bargaining outcomes do not systematically reflect the alarming situation and multiple challenges of youth faced in the labour market. This is especially alarming in those countries where youth face particularly extensive precarious working, training and education-to-work transition conditions.

Collective agreements and other social dialogue activities also suffer from thematic gaps in missing out to address all the core challenges faced by youth. Issues such as the smaller minimum wage paid to young workers, conversion of temporary and flexible contracts into more permanent employment relationships, access to good-quality training are included in the collective agreements on a sporadic basis.

Internally, several trade unions have taken a strategic approach to address the needs of young people, build and develop strong internal youth-specific actions and undertake profound assessments of the needs of youth. However, these actions are not undertaken systematically across the majority of ETUC affiliates and this gap could be further closed.

**Source:** ETUC project “getting young workers onboard of the European Pillar of Social Rights”, survey of ETUC members, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Eurofound, EWCS 2015, accessed 16/03/2020.

The second focus area in this priority is on the working conditions. An overview of these actions is provided below, followed by their assessment from the youth perspective.

**TABLE 2: ACTIONS PROPOSED UNDER THE “WORKING CONDITIONS”**

AREA OF ACTION	ACTIONS PROPOSED IN THE ACTION PLAN <sup>10</sup>
<p><b>Making work standards fit for the future of work</b></p>	<p><b>The Commission will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present in Q4 2021 a <b>legislative proposal on the working conditions of platform workers</b>, following the consultation of social partners.</li> <li>• Put forward an initiative in Q4 2021 to ensure that <b>EU competition law</b> does not stand in the way of collective agreements for (some) self-employed.</li> <li>• Following the White Paper on Artificial Intelligence, propose an <b>EU regulation on AI</b> in Q2 2021, for the uptake of trustworthy AI use in the EU economy, including in the workplace for all forms of work.</li> <li>• Present in 2022 a report on the <b>implementation of the Working Time Directive</b>.</li> <li>• Ensure an appropriate <b>follow-up to the European Parliament Resolution</b> with recommendations to the Commission on the <b>right to disconnect</b>.</li> </ul> <p><b>The Commission encourages:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social partners to follow-up on their <b>Autonomous Framework Agreement on Digitalisation</b>, notably in relation to the modalities for connecting and disconnecting, and to explore: 1) measures to ensure fair telework conditions and 2) measures to ensure that all workers can effectively enjoy a right to disconnect.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Occupational safety and health standards for a new world of work</b></p>	<p><b>The Commission will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present in Q2 2021 a <b>new Occupational Safety and Health Strategic Framework 2021–27</b>, to update protection standards for workers and tackle traditional and new work-related risks.</li> <li>• Subject to the outcome of the ongoing consultation of social partners, present legal proposals in 2022 to <b>further reduce workers’ exposure to hazardous chemicals including asbestos</b>.</li> </ul> <p><b>The Commission encourages:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public authorities and social partners to ensure the <b>application and enforcement of existing rules</b>.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Labour mobility</b></p>	<p><b>The Commission will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with the European Labour Authority (ELA) on the proper implementation and enforcement of EU labour mobility rules, on capacity building for information and labour inspections at national level, and on the protection of mobile workers, including seasonal workers. <b>In 2024, the Commission will evaluate the Authority’s performance in relation to its objective and tasks and potentially re-assess the scope of its mandate.</b></li> </ul> <p><b>The Commission encourages:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The European Parliament and the Council to conclude negotiations on the <b>revision of social security coordination rules</b>.</li> <li>• Public authorities and social partners to cooperate in order to <b>protect the rights of mobile workers, including seasonal workers</b>.</li> </ul>

To start with, a significant area of action relates to regulating **the impact of digitalisation in the workplaces**, such as the working conditions of platform workers, the right to disconnect or the regulation of AI in the workplaces. None of the initiatives proposed reflect the youth perspective, although youth face specific challenges in relation to the digitalisation at work.

For example, the legislative proposal on the working conditions of platform workers needs to take into account that most of platform workers across Europe are young people. For them, such platform work offers a possibility to earn a side income and gain work experience (see Box 3). At the same time, they are often exploited in relation to wages and working conditions faced in platform mediated work.



### BOX 3: YOUTH AND ONLINE PLATFORM WORK IN THE COLLABORATIVE ECONOMY

Several research studies found that platform workers are, on average, younger. This leads to them being subject to a higher risk of occupational accidents and injuries. Several studies find that young platform workers are not always able to assess the health and safety risks related to a task or are unaware of and uninformed about potential risks, and receive limited or no training on health and safety.

Furthermore, compared to other forms of work, adverse behaviour and discrimination may be more prevalent in platform work, as these workers are younger and many are from minority backgrounds, and may be less aware of how to address these issues.

At the same time, platform work can help reduce discrimination by offering opportunities to those who may face discrimination in the traditional labour market, for example young workers, long-term unemployed, or individuals with certain disabilities or health conditions.

**Sources:** CEPS, EFTHEIA, and HIVA-KU Leuven (2020) Study to gather evidence on the working conditions of platform workers. Huws, U. et al. (2019), "The Platformisation Of Work In Europe: Highlights from research in 13 European countries", Foundation for European Progressive Studies. Eurofound (2018), "Employment and working conditions of selected types of platform work", Digital Age, Eurofound, Luxembourg.

Furthermore, proposed actions on **occupational health and safety standards** do not take into account a youth perspective. However, research has shown that young workers experience OSH issues differently in comparison to adults. In addition to being more likely to develop occupational illnesses due to poor working conditions, data show that young workers aged 18-24 are also more likely to have a serious accident at work than older workers. Factors contributing to that include young workers' insufficient experience, lack of physical and psychological maturity, and unawareness of their rights and their employer's obligations<sup>11</sup>. All this requires proposed actions on occupational health and safety standards to have a youth focus.

Finally, actions are also proposed in relation to **protecting mobile workers including seasonal workers**. None of actions proposed recognise the youth dimension in intra-EU worker mobility including seasonal mobility. This is ignoring the fact that a significant proportion of mobile workers including seasonal workers are young people, who face a specific set of challenges in participating in intra-EU mobility (see Box 4). Many such young workers are not formally and effectively covered in the social protection systems in their home country, and hence likely to face challenges to access such systems in their destination countries. Young people are less unionised and hence less likely to be able to access advice and support structures from trade unions, in their home or destination country. Also, young people are more prone to obtain relevant information for mobile work including seasonal work through online or social media channels, rendering the traditional outreach channels by public authorities less effective.

<sup>11</sup> EU-OSHA Website: Young people and safety and health at work; <https://osha.europa.eu/en/themes/young-workers>.



#### BOX 4: YOUTH AND INTRA-EU MOBILITY

Young people are more than adults likely to move to another EU country for work. Throughout the past decade, in all major sending countries, people aged 20 to 39 moved more than other age groups. Among those who strongly intend to move, 75% are below 35 years old. The demographic structure of the overall population in the EU and of EU-28 movers (the mobile citizens) differs. There are many more working-age individuals among EU-28 movers (73%) than in the overall population (58%). In particular, those aged 65 and older are underrepresented in the mobile population. The difference is largest for younger working-age groups, with the proportion of 20-34-year-olds among EU-28 movers being 10 p.p. higher than among nationals, and 35-49-year-olds 9 p.p. higher.

Also, according to Eurobarometer results, 25-39-year olds 'are most likely to have worked or currently work in another European country (12%), compared to those in the 40-54 age group (9%) and those older than 55 years (7%). Finally, many studies (using individual data) show that the highest probability for migrating is between the ages of 20 and 30 years old.

**Source:** European Commission (2021) Annual report on intra-EU labour mobility 2020 (2021).

## 3.2. SKILLS AND EQUALITY



### KEY MESSAGES:

- **In the area of skills**, proposed actions are relevant and appropriate to the needs of youth but the Pact for Skills should take into account youth perspective on skills.
- In the area of **equality**, proposed actions miss out a youth focus even though this is relevant. This relates for example to the actions combatting discrimination in the workplaces, where youth often face a less preferential treatment compared to more established workers.
- The implementation of the Work Life Balance Directive should also consider how the needs of young parents are met through measures adopted through the directive, such as increased paternity leave, and how this has contributed to more equality at work and at home between young women and men.
- The action proposed on Roma equality, inclusion and participation should also include a youth lenses.

Actions proposed in the area of Skills are summarised below.

**TABLE 3: ACTIONS PROPOSED UNDER THE “SKILLS”**

AREA OF ACTION	ACTIONS PROPOSED IN THE ACTION PLAN <sup>12</sup>
<p><b>Investing in skills and education to unlock new opportunities for all</b></p>	<p><b>The Commission will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Propose in Q4 2021 a <b>Transformation Agenda for Higher Education</b> to unlock the full potential of higher education institutions for a recovery geared towards a sustainable, inclusive, green and digital transition.</li> <li>Propose in Q4 2021 an <b>initiative on Individual Learning Accounts</b> to overcome barriers to access to training and to empower adults to manage career transitions.</li> <li>Propose in Q4 2021 a <b>European approach to micro-credentials</b> to facilitate flexible learning pathways and labour market transitions.</li> <li>Propose in Q4 2021 a <b>Skills and Talent package</b>, including a revision of the Long-term Residents Directive (Directive 2003/109) to create a true EU long-term residence status, a review of the Single Permit Directive (Directive 2011/98) to simplify and clarify its scope (including admission and residence conditions for low and medium skilled workers), as well as setting out the options for developing an EU Talent Pool for third-country skilled workers.</li> </ul> <p><b>The Commission encourages:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In the spirit of the <b>Pact for Skills</b>, regions and companies, including SMEs, within industrial eco-systems and value-chains, to cooperate, share information and develop joined skills intelligence and tailored up-skilling solutions.</li> <li>Member States to work towards implementing the VET policy and EU-level objectives set out in the <b>Council Recommendation on VET</b>, and deploy relevant actions and investments.</li> <li>Member States to develop comprehensive policies to provide <b>access to quality education</b> for all in line with the relevant Council Recommendations and provide targeted support to disadvantaged learners to compensate for the negative impact of the crisis.</li> </ul>

In the area of Skills, a number of actions proposed to strengthen the European education systems will benefit the young people in education, preparing them to enter the labour market as well as become informed, active and critical citizens in Europe. Hence, the actions for transforming the VET, higher education and fostering access to quality education are appropriate and relevant to the needs of youth.

Where a youth perspective is missing is in relation to the action on the Pact for Skills. Here, regions and companies should adopt a youth perspective in sharing information, developing joined skills intelligence and upskilling solutions reflecting the needs of the youth.

<sup>12</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-action-plan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-action-plan_en)

Furthermore, actions are proposed to build a Union of equality, summarised below.

**TABLE 4: ACTIONS PROPOSED UNDER THE “EQUALITY”**

AREA OF ACTION	ACTIONS PROPOSED IN THE ACTION PLAN <sup>13</sup>
<p><b>Building a Union of equality</b></p>	<p><b>The Commission will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publish in Q1 2021 a <b>joint report on the application of the Employment Equality Directive</b> and the Racial Equality Directive and present, by 2022 any legislation required to address shortcomings, in particular to strengthen the role of equality bodies.</li> <li>• Present in 2022 a <b>revision of the Barcelona targets</b> on early childhood education and care.</li> <li>• Propose in Q4 2021 <b>legislation to combat gender-based violence against women</b>, including work harassment on grounds of sex.</li> </ul> <p><b>The Commission encourages:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Member States to advance and conclude the negotiations in Council on the Commission proposal for a horizontal <b>Equal Treatment Directive</b>.</li> <li>• Member States to adopt and implement the proposal for a <b>Council Recommendation on Roma equality, inclusion and participation</b>.</li> <li>• Member States to transpose the <b>Work-life balance Directive</b> by August 2022.</li> <li>• Member States to advance and conclude the negotiations in Council on the Commission proposal for a Directive on women on boards.</li> <li>• Member States to provide accessible and affordable education and care to all young children across Europe in line with the <b>Council Recommendation on High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems</b>.</li> <li>• Companies to put in place mechanisms to <b>combat discriminatory practices</b> in recruitment, selection and promotion, and promote diversity in the workplace.</li> </ul>

None of the actions proposed includes a youth-specific perspective. On one hand, this reflects the fact that some actions, such as on early childhood education and care, are not directly relevant to the needs of young people.

At the same time, some relevant actions miss out a youth focus even though this is relevant. This relates for example to **the actions combatting discrimination in the workplaces**, where youth often face a less preferential treatment compared to more established workers. A recent survey finds that young workers in the EU are among the groups more likely to be discriminated against<sup>14</sup>.

**The implementation of the Work Life Balance Directive** should also consider how the needs of young parents are met through measures adopted through the directive, such as increased paternity leave, and how this has contributed to more equality at work and at home between young women and men. Article 5.4 of the Directive, for instance, sets out the requirement of a length of service of up to one year to qualify for the leave. This, however, suggests that young parents and carers are less likely to benefit from parental leave, given that, as noted above and also by COFACE, young people are often employed with temporary and atypical contracts, with low job security<sup>15</sup>.

Finally, **action proposed on Roma** equality, inclusion and participation should also include a youth lenses. In addition to other actions, making Roma equality, inclusion and participation a reality requires specific measures to address the challenges faced by Roma youth. This is including the Roma youth's lack of participation in policy and decision-making processes, discrimination, inability to access social rights as well as limited capacity and sustainability of Roma youth organisations<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/europe-an-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-action-plan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/europe-an-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-action-plan_en)

<sup>14</sup> p.78, Eurofound (2017), *Sixth European Working Conditions Survey – Overview report (2017 update)*, p. 70, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg).

<sup>15</sup> COFACE Families Europe: *Assessment of the EU work-life balance directive by COFACE Families Europe*, p.12, 15th March 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Council of Europe, *Guidelines for implementation of the Roma Youth Action Plan 2016 – 2020*, Strasbourg, 30 March 2016.

### 3.3. SOCIAL PROTECTION AND INCLUSION



#### KEY MESSAGES:

- None of the Plan actions proposed in the social protection and inclusion area explicitly acknowledges the significant challenges faced by young people in accessing the current social protection systems across the EU.
- Young people in particular face challenges in accessing the adequate social protection systems as they tend to be not adequately covered in the existing social security safety nets and thus more likely to “fall through the cracks”.

The Action Plan proposes the following actions to ensure better social protection and inclusion.

**TABLE 5: ACTIONS PROPOSED UNDER THE “SOCIAL PROTECTION AND INCLUSION”**

AREA OF ACTION	ACTIONS PROPOSED IN THE ACTION PLAN <sup>17</sup>
<p><b>Living in dignity</b></p>	<p><b>The Commission will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Propose in Q1 2021 a <b>EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee</b> to ensure that children at risk of poverty and social exclusion have effective access to key services such as healthcare and education.</li> <li>• Propose a <b>Council Recommendation on minimum income</b> in 2022 to effectively support and complement the policies of Member States.</li> <li>• Launch in Q2 2021 a <b>European Platform on Combating Homelessness</b> to support Member States, cities and service providers in sharing best practices and identifying efficient and innovative approaches.</li> <li>• Launch in Q2 2021 the <b>Affordable Housing Initiative</b> piloting 100 renovation districts.</li> <li>• Present in Q2 2021 <b>Guidance Notices on Public Procurement of Innovation and on Socially Responsible Public Procurement</b>.</li> <li>• Present in 2022 an <b>EU report on access to essential services</b>.</li> </ul> <p><b>The Commission encourages:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public authorities to ensure the <b>effectiveness and coverage of social safety nets</b> and access to enabling services for those in need.</li> <li>• National, regional and local authorities to increase the uptake of <b>socially-responsible criteria in public procurement</b> and to promote their use, in line with the Commission’s forthcoming guidance notices.</li> </ul>

<sup>17</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-action-plan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-action-plan_en)

AREA OF ACTION	ACTIONS PROPOSED IN THE ACTION PLAN
<p><b>Promoting health and care</b></p>	<p><b>The Commission will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Propose an <b>initiative on Long-Term Care</b> in 2022 to set a framework for policy reforms to guide the development of sustainable long-term care that ensures better access to quality services for those in need.</li> <li>Propose new tools to better <b>measure barriers and gaps in access to healthcare (2021–2022)</b>.</li> <li>Propose in Q4 2021 the <b>European Health Data Space</b> to promote access to health data for better healthcare, research and policy-making, and to foster the development, deployment and application of digital services for the provision of healthcare.</li> </ul> <p><b>The Commission encourages:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Member States to invest in <b>health and care workforce</b>, improving their working conditions and access to training.</li> <li>Member States to boost the <b>digitalisation of their health systems</b> and tackling health inequalities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Making social protection fit for the new world</b></p>	<p><b>The Commission will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Launch a <b>High-Level Expert Group</b> to study the future of the welfare state, its financing and interconnections with the changing world of work and to present a report by end 2022.</li> <li>Start a pilot in 2021 to explore by 2023 launching a digital solution to facilitate the interaction between mobile citizens and national authorities, and improve the portability of social security rights across borders (<b>European Social Security Pass</b>), building on the initiative for a trusted and secure European e-ID (Q2 2021).</li> </ul> <p><b>The Commission encourages:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Member States to further extend access to social protection, in line with the <b>Council Recommendation on Access to social protection</b>, and to submit their plans by 15 May 2021 setting out their national measures.</li> </ul>

**None of the Plan actions proposed in the social protection and inclusion area explicitly acknowledges the significant challenges faced by young people in accessing the current social protection systems across the EU.** As an example which illustrates this gap, the Council Recommendation on Access to social protection does not include any specific explicit references to young people, calling for formal and effective coverage of all workers and self-employed<sup>18</sup>. Hence, it is unlikely that those Member States implementing the Recommendation would pay attention to the specific challenges of young people in accessing social protection.

This is a major gap in the Action Plan and a missed opportunity to address a range of social protection challenges in relation to the exclusion of young people from the current social safety nets, their restricted access to the standard social benefits such as unemployment benefits and nationally set minimum wages which are lower for youth compared to adults.

Young people in particular face challenges in accessing the adequate social protection systems as they tend to be not adequately covered in the existing social security safety nets and thus more likely to “fall through the cracks”. This is often due to the access to social security being based on the employment status, including often regular employment. As shown above, young people face significant challenges in accessing such employment. Young people, often overrepresented in these non-standard forms of employment, may be formally covered or

<sup>18</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019H1115\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019H1115(01)&from=EN)

have the legal possibility to opt for access to social security benefits. However, often this does not translate into actual social security access in the sense of being able in practice of working to build and take up adequate entitlements to social security benefits and services. This is because it may be difficult for young people to meet the benefit entitlement criteria of employment hours/duration, income level, contribution periods etc. or because they may be disadvantaged by the existing rules of benefit calculation (European Commission 2017).

Based on this analysis of access to social security benefits by the European Commission, a number of situations of the potential and actual lack of coverage of young people in the social security systems can be identified (see Annex 1 for full details). It reflects the key types of social security relevant to the situation of typical young persons, such as the need for healthcare, getting sick, becoming unemployed or having a child. This shows that often certain categories of workers, typically widespread amongst the young people, such as freelancers, casual or seasonal workers, have no access to certain benefits.

In particular, in a number of countries young people de facto have limited access to **the unemployment benefits**. For example, in Austria, marginal part-timers have no access to the unemployment benefit, in Hungary and Sweden employees on non-standard contracts have no such access, and in Latvia and Romania this relates to seasonal workers. As shown in section 1, young people are significantly overrepresented amongst part-time, non standard and seasonal work, thus denying them the opportunity to benefit from the access to the unemployment benefit.

Similar challenges for young people to access **the sickness benefit** are noted in several countries. For example, casual and seasonal workers in Hungary and Lithuania do not have access to the sickness benefit, in Portugal this is the case for workers on temporary contracts and in Slovakia for persons with irregular income.

Another challenge relates to **the eligibility conditions** often relating to the requirement of having worked for a certain time period or having reached a particular income threshold. For example, in relation to access to the sickness benefit, a number of countries have a threshold of having been in employment for a certain period of time, which disadvantages labour market entrants such as young people. This is the case for example in Belgium, Bulgaria, France or Italy. Again, this often puts young workers at a disadvantage and in very precarious personal and societal situations in accessing the social security benefits.

Another aspect relevant in considering the situation of young people is also their access to the regular **minimum wage**. According to Eurofound's *Minimum wages in 2020: Annual review*, in six EU Member States, the national minimum wage has been lower for young people, compared to adults. This was the case for example in the following countries:

- In Belgium, lower rates are applied to younger workers.
- In Ireland, a special lower rate of minimum wage is applicable to young (under 20) workers. In France, sub-national minimum wage applies to workers aged under 18, apprentices and workers below 18 with less than 6 months of work experience.
- In Germany, since 1 January 2020, apprentices in their first year receive 33% of the statutory minimum wage, which will increase by 18% and 35% in the second and third year of the apprenticeship, respectively.
- In Luxembourg, the minimum wage for under 18s is 20% lower than the full amount, and a 25% reduction is applied to young people between 15 and 17 years old. In return, a 20% surplus has to be paid to qualified employees.
- In the Netherlands, in 2019, the sub-minimum wage rates were raised for younger workers aged 18-20 and the full minimum wage rate became applicable for employees aged 21.

This is also confirmed in the national minimum wage information compiled by Eurostat<sup>19</sup>. As of 1 January 2021, a number of countries maintained lower national minimum wages for younger workers. As shown in Table below, 9 EU countries maintained rules which allowed lower national minimum wage rates to be applied for young people on the basis of their age, being in vocational training, in the first period of employment.

<sup>19</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/Annexes/earn\\_minw\\_esms\\_an1.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/Annexes/earn_minw_esms_an1.pdf)

**TABLE 6: LOWER NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGES FOR YOUNG WORKERS, EU, 2021**

MS	MINIMUM WAGE FOR YOUNG WORKERS
<b>Belgium</b>	Lower rates are applied to younger workers.
<b>Germany</b>	Young people aged under 18 who have not completed any vocational training, and apprentices are exempted from minimum wage regulations. Since 1 January 2020, apprentices in their first year shall receive 33% of the statutory minimum wage, which will increase by 18% and 35% in the second and third year of the apprenticeship, respectively.
<b>Ireland</b>	Sub-minimum wage rates apply where an employee is under age 20 or undergoing a prescribed course of study or training.
<b>France</b>	Lower rates can be applied to apprentices, workers below 18 with less than 6 months of work experience.
<b>Latvia</b>	Special hourly rates exist for employees aged under 18.
<b>Luxembourg</b>	Different rates apply as follows: 80% of the national minimum wage is due to a worker aged 17-18 years, 75% to a worker aged 15-17 years.
<b>Malta</b>	Lower rates apply to workers younger than 17 years and to those aged 17-18.
<b>Netherlands</b>	Lower rates apply to employees aged 15-20. As of July 2019, workers aged 21 are eligible to 100% of the full adult rate (previously 85%) <sup>20</sup> .
<b>Portugal</b>	Apprentices and stagiaires can have a reduction up to 20%, for a period that cannot exceed 1 year.

Equally important is **the missing gap in the Action Plan to acknowledge youth specific challenges in relation to accessing healthcare<sup>21</sup> systems across the EU.**

There are considerable inequalities among young people in Europe in terms of accessing healthcare. Across Europe, for example, cost is a problem for nearly three-quarters of those aged 18–24 in Cyprus. In Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Latvia and the UK, deterioration was reported on most dimensions of access between 2011 and 2016, while in Italy and Slovakia some improvements can be seen. Overall, in the EU, young people with disability or chronic illness are more likely to report difficulties in accessing healthcare – especially in terms of delays, waiting time and finding time to get to the doctor.

Another area of challenges facing young people is the risk of poor mental health, bullying and other psycho-social challenges<sup>22</sup>. Mental well-being challenges affect many young people in Europe. 14% of Europeans aged 18–24 were at risk of depression. Young people in Sweden were most at risk of depression, followed by those in Estonia, Malta, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The proportion of young people who are chronically depressed is lower. Data for 2014 show that 4% of Europeans aged 15–24 were chronically depressed. The highest rates were in Ireland (12%), followed by Finland (11%), Sweden (10%) and Germany (9%).

Socioeconomic status has a strong impact on whether young people are at risk of depression. Those living in households in the lowest income quartile are more likely to be at risk. There is also a strong gender dimension to issues of mental health, with young women (15–24 years) being more prone to depression.

Given that issues around health and mental well-being are affecting young people, access to relevant services is key to addressing their needs. Yet a significant proportion of young people have difficulties in accessing services. Regarding health care, the most important access issues are delays in getting an appointment and long waiting times on the day.

<sup>20</sup> Eurofound, *Minimum wages in 2020: Annual review*, p. 18

<sup>21</sup> Eurofound (2019) Inequalities in the access of young people to information and support services, <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2019/inequalities-in-the-access-of-young-people-to-information-and-support-services#tab-02>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.



## 04

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



**“ACTION PLAN NEEDS CONCRETE AND BINDING ACTION TO ENSURE THAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE AT THE CENTRE OF THE GREEN AND DIGITAL TRANSITIONS AND PATH OF ECONOMIC RECOVERY ACROSS EUROPE.”**

The ambition of the Action Plan is to put into practice, through a set of actions at the EU and Member State level, the overall goal of the European Pillar of Social Rights and ensure the unique social and economic model in the EU offers opportunities for all Europe’s citizens to enjoy what the Plan sees as *“the most equal societies in the world, the highest standards in working conditions, and broad social protection”* (p. 5). As a principle, this should also include young people across the Union who form a sizeable proportion of Europeans and will determine the future development of the economic and social model in the EU.

However, the Action Plan does **not have a genuinely youth centric approach**. Issues of young people are treated as a separate policy theme, with actions proposed which have been implemented for some time and which effectiveness is under question (e.g. the Youth Guarantee). No new actions specific to addressing the challenges of young people in the EU are envisaged. On the other hand, genuine new opportunities to address critical youth issues such as their over-representation in precarious work or the lack of youth access to adequate social protection are left out from the Plan.

**Three headline targets** in the Action Plan reflect some relevant youth issues such as reducing the NEET rate or early school leaving but do not adopt a genuine youth perspective. In particular, specific targets critical to the main challenges of young people are missing from the Plan. This gap particularly relates to an explicit target related to reducing youth unemployment and the numbers of youth in poverty and socially excluded.

The focus in the Action Plan on **reinforced Youth Guarantee is relevant to youth concerns, but misses a binding definition** of quality standards for its support offers to the youth. In the implementation of ESF+, all Member States should dedicate a specific proportion of the funding to addressing youth in precarious working conditions – as opposed to current approach where this applies only to those Member States where the youth unemployment is above EU average.

**In the area of creating jobs**, the actions proposed in the Plan miss an opportunity to adopt a youth perspective. The existing instruments such as SURE and EASE are geared to support workers having standard employment contracts, whereas many young people are in precarious work contracts and thus miss out on the support offered. Actions on energising Europe’s industrial eco-systems, promoting social economy and fostering entrepreneurship do not have a youth perspective, even though this is relevant. Actions to energise social dialogue at the workplaces do not acknowledge that many young workers are not members of trade unions and thus not systematically covered in the collective bargaining processes.

**In the area of working conditions**, actions on regulating the impact of digitalisation in the workplaces, do not reflect the youth perspective, although youth face specific challenges in relation to the digitalisation at work. Similarly, actions on occupational health and safety standards do not take into account a youth perspective. However, young workers experience OSH issues differently in comparison to adults. Finally, actions are also proposed in relation to protecting mobile workers including seasonal workers. None of actions proposed recognise the youth dimension in intra-EU worker mobility including seasonal mobility. This is ignoring the fact that a significant proportion of mobile workers including seasonal workers are young people, who face a specific set of challenges in participating in intra-EU mobility.

In the area of skills, proposed actions are relevant and appropriate to the needs of youth but the Pact for Skills should take into account youth perspective on skills.

**In the area of equality**, proposed actions miss out a youth focus even though this is relevant. This relates for example to the actions combatting discrimination in the workplaces, where youth often face a less preferential treatment compared to more established workers. The implementation of the Work Life Balance Directive should also consider how the needs of young parents are met through measures adopted through the directive, such as increased paternity leave, and how this has contributed to more equality at work and at home between young women and men. The action proposed on Roma equality, inclusion and participation should also include a youth lenses.

Finally, **none of the Plan actions proposed in the social protection and inclusion area** explicitly acknowledges the significant challenges faced by young people in accessing the current social protection systems across the EU. Young people in particular face challenges in accessing the adequate social protection systems as they tend to be not adequately covered in the existing social security safety nets and thus more likely to “fall through the cracks”. This is a particularly important area of action missed in the Plan.

To sum up, **important priorities for youth remain missing from the Action Plan** and require further urgent action, both at the EU and national levels. This is to some extent taken forward in the Porto Declaration on social affairs adopted by the members of the European Council on 8 May 2021<sup>23</sup>. Importantly, the Declaration commits to “*prioritise action to support young people, who have been very negatively affected by the COVID-19 crisis, which has profoundly disrupted their participation in the labour market as well as their education and training plans.*” This is also echoed in the Porto Social Commitment signed by the EU institutions and social partners, calling for “*to take measures to improve the functioning of labour markets so that they contribute to sustainable economic growth, international competitiveness, foster decent working conditions and fair pay for all, and promote the integration of women, young people (emphasis added) and vulnerable categories in the labour market*”<sup>24</sup>.

In this context, policy pointers identified in this report should be used for **a stronger youth-centric approach in the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan**, including concrete and binding action to ensure that young people are indeed at the centre of green and digital transitions and path of economic recovery across Europe.

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<sup>23</sup> [The Porto declaration - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/05/08-porto-declaration/)

<sup>24</sup> [Microsoft Word - Porto Social Commitment formatado \(2021portugal.eu\)](https://www.porto-social-commitment.eu/)

# ANNEX 1: ACCESS TO SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS AND EXAMPLES OF ELIGIBILITY CONDITIONS

**TABLE A1: ACCESS TO SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEMS, EXAMPLES OF ELIGIBILITY CONDITIONS AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL, 2017**

SICKNESS BENEFIT	UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT	MATERNITY/PATERNITY BENEFIT	HEALTHCARE
<b>AT:</b> Freelancers are not eligible to sick leave.	<b>AT:</b> No access for Marginal part-timers income < 415.72/m.	<b>CZ:</b> Access for agreement to perform work/job conditioned upon min earnings thresholds (CZ 2.500/10000).	<b>DE:</b> Min earnings threshold of € 450 (threshold for mini-jobs).
<b>BE:</b> Salaried persons must have worked 120 days (or assimilated) during period of 6 months prior to obtaining cash sickness benefits. Part-time employees must have worked at least 400 hours during qualifying period of 6 months.	<b>EE:</b> working period conditions for non contributory/ Voluntary for contributory one.	<b>IT:</b> Problems in de facto access to childcare services for non-standard workers.	<b>HU:</b> Casual and seasonal workers opt in upon an income threshold.
<b>BG:</b> Social security contributions to be paid for at least 6 months (not consecutive).	<b>ES:</b> No access: Domestic workers.	<b>LT:</b> No access for casual and seasonal workers (Voucher-based workers).	<b>PL:</b> No access for civil law contracts for a specified task.
<b>ES:</b> Specific calculation of the contributing period for part-time work ("general rate" for parttime).	<b>HU:</b> Non-standard workers are often effectively not covered by unemployment benefits.	<b>PT:</b> No access for: workers on temporary contracts who have not worked for at least six months before the request.	
<b>FR:</b> Specific contributory and working hours conditions for non standard employees.	<b>LV:</b> No access for seasonal workers.		
<b>HU:</b> No access for: Casual and seasonal workers.	<b>RO:</b> No access for casual and seasonal workers.		
<b>IT:</b> 3 months contributions within the year preceding the sickness.	<b>SE:</b> NSE may de facto have difficulties fulfilling eligibility condition.		

SICKNESS BENEFIT	UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT	MATERNITY/PATERNITY BENEFIT	HEALTHCARE
<b>LT:</b> No access for Casual and seasonal workers (Voucher-based workers).	<b>UK:</b> for contribution based must reach lower earnings threshold for contributions.		
<b>PT:</b> No access for: workers on temporary contracts who have not worked for at least six months before the request.			
<b>RO:</b> Conditioned upon: monthly income equal or higher than 35% of the average gross salary; (about 4 average salaries per/y).			
<b>SI:</b> No access for civil law contracts (not consecutives).			
<b>SK:</b> No access for persons with irregular income (employees on “work agreements” on irregular income).			

**Source:** European Commission 2017, Annex I.



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