090717/EU XXIV.GP
Eingelangt am 10/09/12

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Brussels, 10.9.2012
SWD(2012) 257 final

EU Youth Report

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

Status of the situation of young people in the European Union
Chapters 5-7

Accompanying the document

COMMISSION COMMUNICATION

Draft 2012 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (EU Youth Strategy 2010-2018)

{COM(2012) 495 final}
{SWD(2012) 256 final}

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5. SOCIAL INCLUSION

5.1. Introduction

Social inclusion is a process 'which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living and well-being that is considered normal in the society in which they live'[61].

Social exclusion at an early age has long-lasting consequences for both the individual and society as a whole. Besides poverty, it also refers to the process 'whereby certain individuals are pushed to the edge of society and prevented from participating fully by virtue of their poverty, or lack of basic competencies and lifelong learning opportunities, or as a result of discrimination'. Social exclusion brings about a vicious circle of unemployment or low-quality employment and poor living conditions with limited access to education and training, health care and 'social and community networks and activities'[62]. In short, it adversely affects all aspects of young people's lives.

5.2. Moving towards autonomy: young people leaving the parental home

Young people are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion and poverty as they move towards an independent life, which involves looking for work and establishing their own household. For many, this is far from easy: even if they find employment, they often start with low-paid jobs, which can make sustaining a household financially difficult.

The risk of becoming poor is closely linked to the timing of departure from the parental home. In fact, some studies have found that moving out of the parental household is the 'strongest predictor behind youth poverty'[63].

Figure 5-A shows that the average age of young people leaving the parental household varies substantially in Europe. On average, young people leave the parental household earlier in western and northern Europe, while they stay longer with their parents in eastern and southern Europe. Among the countries where data is available, the average age of leaving the parental household is lowest for both sexes in France, the Netherlands, Finland and the United Kingdom. Within the EU-27, both young women and young men establish their own household relatively late in Malta and Slovakia.

On average in the EU-27, young women leave the parental household more than two years earlier than men (at the ages of 25.1 and 27.5 respectively). This is partly but not fully attributable to the younger age at which women get married[64].

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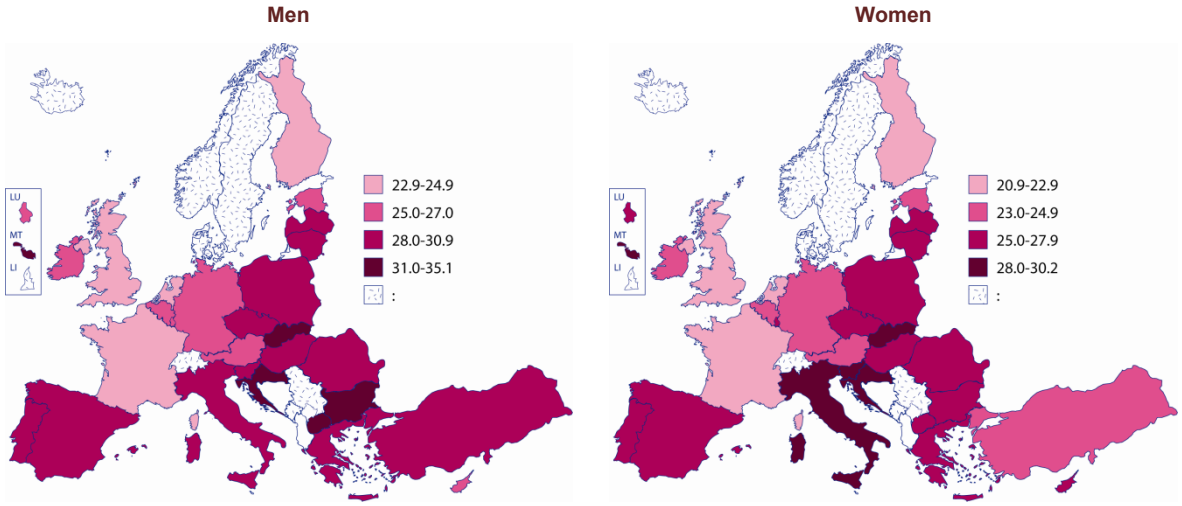
61 7101/04, p. 8.

62 7101/04, p. 8.

63 Aassve et al. 2007, p. 331.

64 Eurostat 2008.

Figure 5-A: EU youth indicator: Average age of young people when leaving the parental household, by country and by sex, 2010



Source: Eurostat. Online data code: not available.
Notes: This indicator tries to estimate the average age of young people when leaving the parental household by comparing for each age the percentage of young people not living anymore in the parental household. The exact age when leaving the parental home is not collected by current surveys. EU-27, EFTA and EU candidate countries covered except when not available.

The average age of leaving the parental home has remained quite stable over time since 2005, though countries differ widely in this respect (Figure 5-B). For example, the average age of moving out of the parental home decreased significantly in Estonia and Lithuania, but increased markedly in Bulgaria and Malta.

Figure 5-B: EU youth indicator: Changes in the average age of young people when leaving the parental household, by country and by sex, difference between 2005 and 2010

Source: Eurostat. Online data code: not available.

The likely reasons behind these differences are many and varied. According to the special Eurobarometer survey 2007 on youth, most young Europeans aged 15 to 30 listed financial reasons for staying with their parents: 44 % of respondents stated that they could not afford to move out, while 28 % said that there was not enough affordable housing. On average, young people move out later in countries in which respondents mostly blamed the lack of financial resources for staying longer with their parents.

A lack of financial resources may certainly explain why young people in eastern and southern European countries stay longer with their parents[65]. In these countries, there are high levels of youth unemployment, and wages for young people are relatively low. In addition, affordable housing opportunities are scarce[66]. However, in western and especially northern European countries, young people move out of the parental household early despite the fact that they are at greater risk of poverty, at least temporarily. Explanations for this include cultural factors such as social norms[67], predictable labour market structures and good employment opportunities for young people[68], and the targeted state support available to them[69].

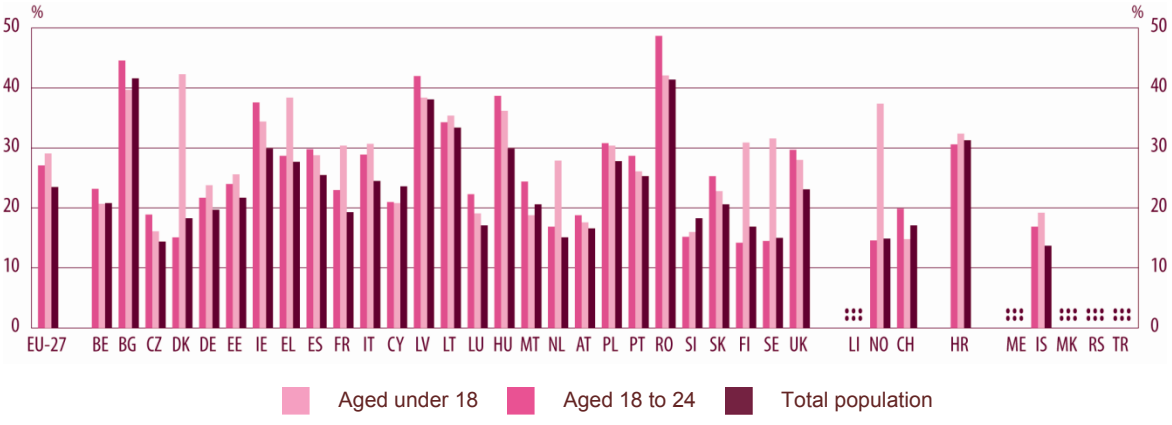
5.3. Levels of poverty and social exclusion

The main indicator of poverty and social exclusion is the composite indicator of 'at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion'. This indicator is based on three sub-indicators of poverty: at-risk-of-poverty, severe material deprivation and living in a household with very low work intensity. People at risk of poverty and social exclusion are defined as the share of the population that is at least in one of the three situations described in the three sub-indicators.

Figure 5-C shows that, in the EU-27, the at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate for young people (29.1 %) is higher than that of children (27.1 %) and the total population (23.5 %). In two-thirds of the countries examined, this ratio is higher for both children and young people than for the total population, showing that young people are more at risk of social exclusion. This highlights the importance of paying special attention to this segment of the population.

Countries with the highest levels of poverty and social exclusion are Bulgaria, Latvia and Romania. This is true both in the case of children and young people, and as will be shown below, is also measured by the different sub-indicators. The composite indicator of at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion also shows quite high values for Ireland, Lithuania and Hungary for both children and young people. Within the EU-27, the at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate is relatively low in the Czech Republic, Austria and Slovenia.

Figure 5-C: EU youth indicator: At-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate, by country and by age, 2010



Source: Eurostat – Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (SILC). Online data code: ilc_peps01

There is a group of countries in which young people seem to be especially vulnerable compared to other groups within the population. This concerns the Nordic countries and the

65 Aassve et al. 2002 and 2007.

66 Iacovou 2001.

67 Aassve et al. 2007; Iacovou 2001.

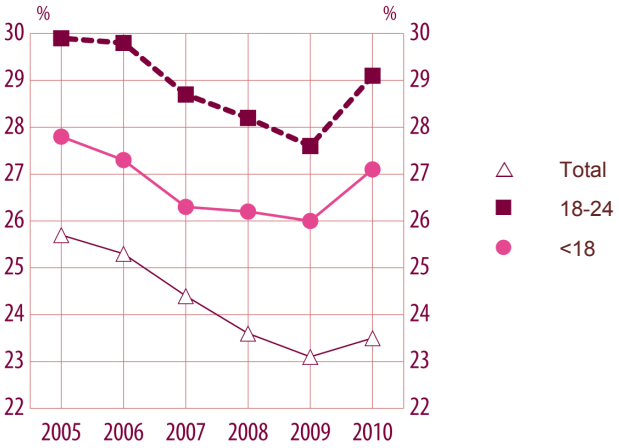
68 Aassve et al. 2007.

69 Aassve et al. 2002. See also discussion on housing in the following section.

Netherlands, and to some extent Greece and France. The existence of such different at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rates for young people indicates measurement issues that are peculiar to the 18 to 24 age group. As discussed above, the average age of establishing a household and the costs of such a move are different in the countries examined. Since poverty and exclusion are measured at household level, young people living with their parents benefit from the higher living standards derived from the total family income, while those living alone depend solely on their own resources. This means that youth poverty rates are higher in countries in which young people have access to their own resources through a job, housing, or study loans, and lower in countries in which achieving autonomy is more difficult (with the exception of Greece, in which youth poverty is relatively high despite the fact that young people tend to stay with their parents longer). Paradoxically this implies that better opportunities for young people produce higher levels of at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion among them, at least temporarily.

A comparison of at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rates over time in the EU indicates that the situation of children and young people improved between 2005 and 2009 (see Figure 5-D). However, between 2009 and 2010, the proportion of children and young people who were at risk of poverty or social exclusion increased substantially, more than within the general population. As will be shown below, this is especially owing to a marked increase in the share of the population living in jobless households, which is linked to increasing unemployment levels following the economic crisis (see also Chapter 3 on Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship). Between 2008 and 2010, the increase in the at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate for children was highest in Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania and Hungary; for young people aged 18 to 24 it was highest in Ireland, Latvia and Malta[70].

Figure 5-D: EU youth indicator: At-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate, EU-27 average, by age, 2005-2010



Source: Eurostat – SILC. Online data code: ilc_peps01
Note: 2005, 2006: Eurostat estimate.

5.3.1. The at-risk-of-poverty rate

One sub-indicator of the above composite indicator is the at-risk-of-poverty rate. This indicator measures poverty in relative terms: it defines a relative poverty threshold (60 % of the net median equivalised income) and regards the segment of the population below this threshold as being at risk of poverty.

[70] Eurostat – online datacode: ilc_peps01.

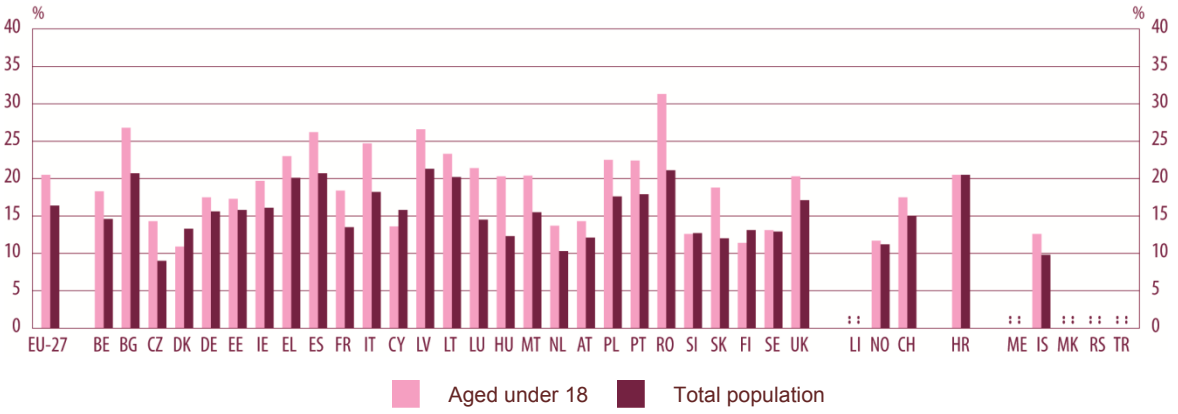
Equivalised income is a measure of household income that takes account of the differences in a household's size and composition, and thus is equivalised or made equivalent for all household sizes and compositions[71].

As indicated above, comparing the situation of young people by means of this indicator is particularly difficult because their levels of independence vary in the countries concerned. At-risk-of-poverty rates will be higher in countries in which young people generally set up their own household earlier, and lower in those in which they tend to live with their parents longer. For this reason, the list of EU youth indicators does not include this indicator when analysing the situation of the 18 to 24 age group[72]. This section is therefore devoted solely to examining the situation of children (defined as those aged under 18).

Like the composite indicator above, Figure 5-E shows that a bigger proportion of children are at risk of poverty (20.5 %) than that of the total population in the EU-27 (16.4 %). The at-risk-of poverty rate for children is again highest in Bulgaria, Latvia and Romania, as well as in Spain.

While the at-risk-of-poverty rate of children in the EU has been quite stable since 2005, the proportion of children at risk increased between 2008 and 2010 in the majority of countries examined[73].

Figure 5-E: EU youth indicator: At-risk-of-poverty rate, by country and by age, 2010



Source: Eurostat – SILC. Online data code: ilc_li02

5.3.2. Severe material deprivation

To complement the relative poverty indicator based on current income and take account of non-monetary resources, material deprivation indicators have been defined. Because the main indicator, the severe material deprivation rate, is based on a single European threshold, it is also a more absolute measure of poverty. It captures the differences in living standards between countries, as well as the impact of growth on those standards in a given country.

71 Eurostat 2012b.

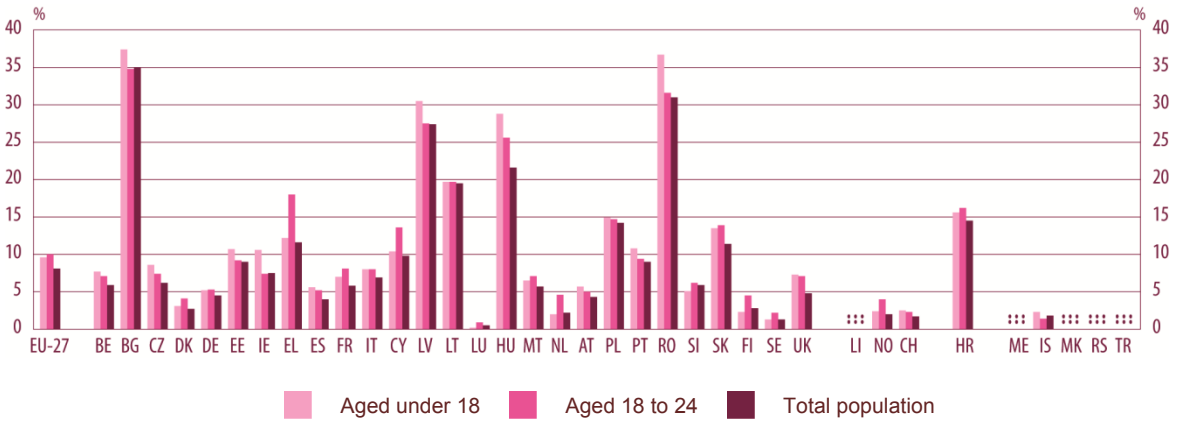
72 SEC(2011) 401.

73 Eurostat – online data code: ilc_li02.

The **severe material deprivation rate** is defined as the percentage of the population that cannot afford at least four of the following nine pre-defined deprivation items: 1) to pay their rent, mortgage or utility bills, 2) to keep their home adequately warm, 3) to face unexpected expenses, 4) to eat meat or proteins regularly, 5) to go on holiday, or to buy a: 6) TV, 7) refrigerator, 8) car, or a 9) telephone[74].

Figure 5-F on severe material deprivation confirms previous conclusions about children (9.6 %) and young people (10 %) being in a worse situation than the total population (8.1 %). As in the case of at-risk-of-poverty rates, the severe material deprivation rate in 2010 was highest in Bulgaria, Latvia and Romania, as well as in Hungary. Material deprivation rates were lowest in the Nordic countries and Luxembourg, though with slightly higher levels for those aged 18 to 24.

Figure 5-F: EU youth indicator: Severe material deprivation rate, by country and by age, 2010



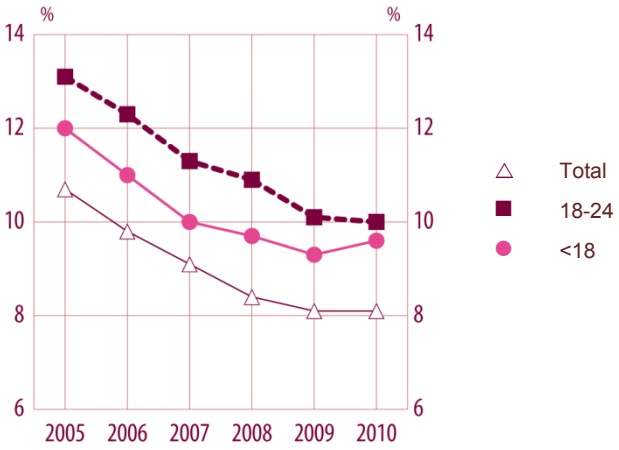
Source: Eurostat – SILC. Online data code: ilc_mddd11

In the EU, the severe material deprivation rate has been steadily falling since 2005, with a slight reversal in the case of children in 2010. For young people and the total population, the decline slowed down after 2009 (see Figure 5-G). However, this is solely due to the significant decrease in material deprivation levels in the 12 newer EU Member States between 2005 and 2008; in the former EU-15, levels of material deprivation have changed little over time[75].

74 SEC(2011) 401, p. 9.

75 Eurostat – online datacode: ilc_mddd11.

Figure 5-G: EU youth indicator: Severe material deprivation rate, EU-27 average, by age, 2005-2010



Source: Eurostat – SILC. Online data code: ilc_mddd11
Notes: 2005, 2006, 2009: Eurostat estimate.

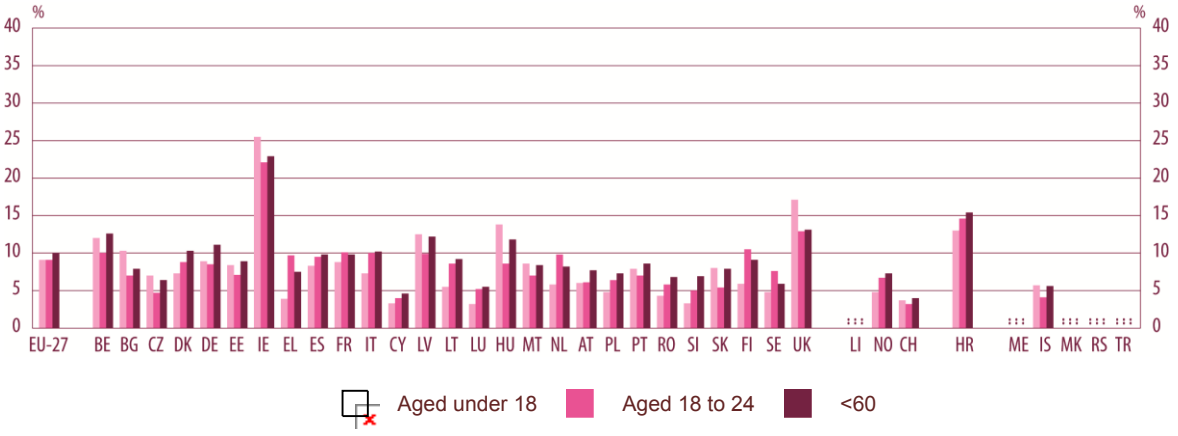
5.3.3. Households with very low work intensity

Since unemployment is one of the main determinants of poverty, this section focuses on children and young people living in households with zero or very low work intensity[76]. This is the third sub-indicator included in the main composite indicator.

Very low work intensity is defined as less than 20 % of a person's total work potential during the preceding year.[77]

Figure 5-H demonstrates that the proportions of children (those aged under 18) and young people (18 to 24) living in households with very low work intensity are similar (9.1 %), and somewhat lower than that of the population aged under 60 (10 %). In 2010, the proportions of people living in households with very low work intensity were greatest in Ireland (over 20 % for all age groups), followed by the United Kingdom.

Figure 5-H: EU youth indicator: Share of people living in households with very low work intensity, by country and by age, 2010



Source: Eurostat – SILC. Online data code: ilc_lvhl11

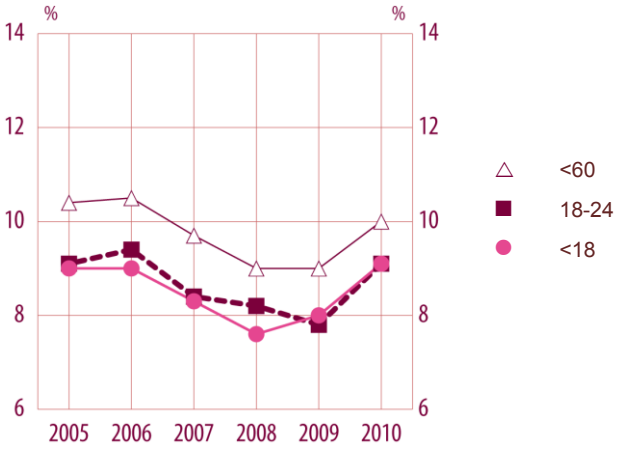
As to the change in this indicator over time, patterns for the EU are similar to those in several of the preceding indicators. There was a general improvement in the situation until 2009 (until

[76] Very low work intensity is defined as less than 20 % of a person's total work potential during the preceding year.

[77] Eurostat 2012e.

2008 in the case of children), but the economic crisis and the year 2010 brought about a worsening of the situation (see Figure 5-I). This deterioration was quite marked for this indicator, given its direct links with rising unemployment since 2008.

Figure 5-I: EU youth indicator: Share of people living in households with very low work intensity, EU-27 average, by age, 2005-2010



Source: Eurostat – SILC. Online data code: ilc_lvhl11
Notes: 2005, 2006: Eurostat estimate.

5.4. Aspects of poverty and social exclusion

Poverty and social exclusion are multidimensional, as they denote not only lower incomes but very limited access to many key services or areas of life.

5.4.1. Housing conditions and homelessness

Homelessness means marginalisation at the edge of society with no access to basic services, and often inability to exercise one's rights. Yet there are many aspects of homelessness which the word may cover. The European Typology of Homelessness and housing exclusion (ETHOS) distinguishes four main concepts of homelessness: inadequate housing, insecure housing, houselessness and rooflessness[78].

The severe housing deprivation rate is an important indicator measuring inadequate housing. Regarding the housing deprivation rate of children, Figure 5-J indicates a decrease (from 11.3 % to 8.3 %) in the EU between 2005 and 2010, as in the case of severe material deprivation rates. In 2010, the severe housing deprivation rate of children was highest in countries with the highest material deprivation rates, namely Bulgaria, Latvia, Hungary and Romania.

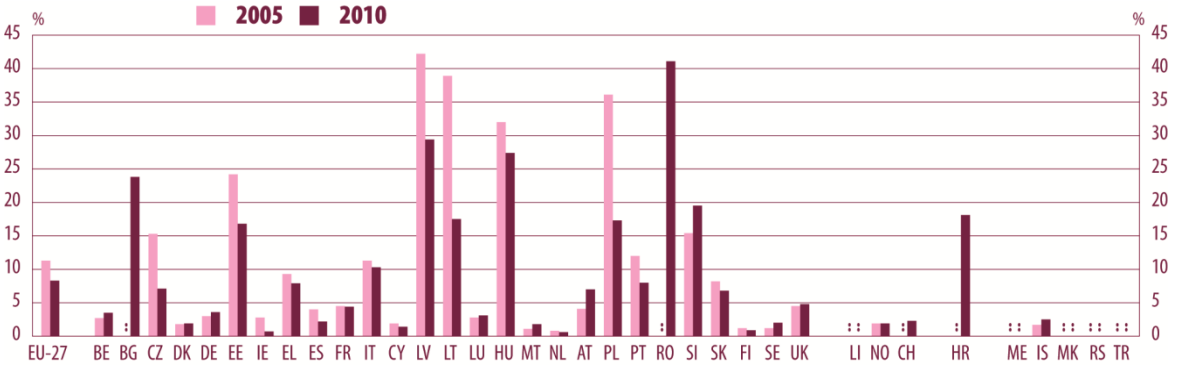
Severe housing deprivation rate: the percentage of population living in the dwelling which is considered as overcrowded, while also exhibiting at least one of the housing deprivation measures. Housing deprivation is a measure of poor amenities and is calculated by referring to those households with a leaking roof, no bath/shower and no indoor toilet, or a dwelling considered too dark[79].

78 For the definitions and description of the various situations, see FEANTSA n.d.

79 Eurostat 2012c.

Housing cost overburden rate: the percentage of the population living in households where the total housing costs ('net' of housing allowances) represent more than 40 % of disposable income[80].

Figure 5-J: Severe housing deprivation rate of children (aged under 18), by country, 2005 and 2010



Source: Eurostat – SILC. Online data code: ilc_mdho06a

Housing has a crucial significance for young people. Their progress towards full independence involves finding – and paying for – their own home. Their risk of poverty is strongly linked to the burden of sustaining their own household. This becomes especially difficult for those with low qualifications, who can only find relatively low quality and poorly paid jobs. As the CSEYHP[81] research project describes, low quality employment on low wages may quickly lead to a housing crisis, as young people concerned cannot afford adequate housing[82]. This section therefore also looks at the housing cost overburden rate for young people (aged 18 to 24, and 25 to 29).

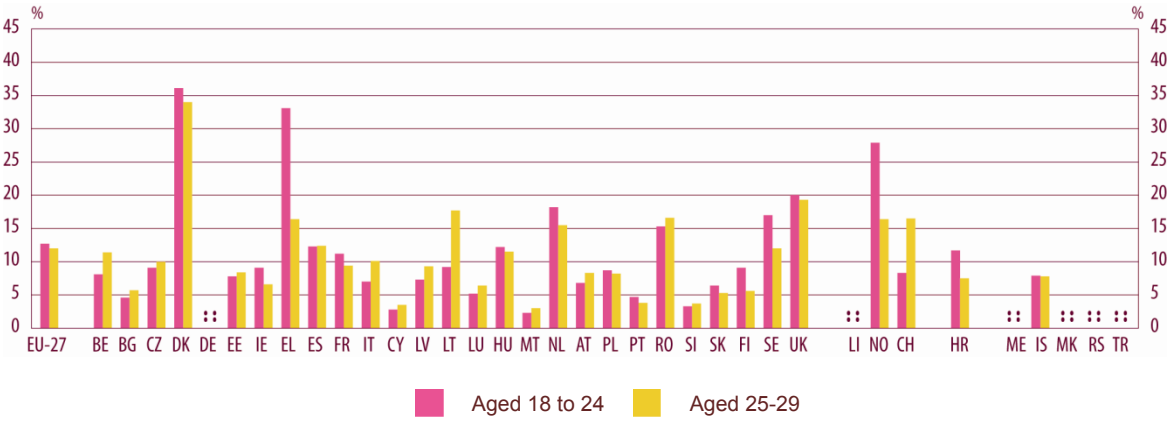
Figure 5-K shows that the housing cost overburden rate in the EU-27 in 2010 was higher for 18 to 24 year olds than for young people aged 25 to 29. For this younger age group, maintaining their own household was the most burdensome in Denmark, Greece, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, confirming the importance of housing in determining the risk of poverty. For 25 to 29 year olds, the housing cost overburden rate was highest in Denmark, Lithuania and the United Kingdom. For both age groups, and in line with the trend in preceding indicators, the rate declined until 2009, but rose again slightly between 2009 and 2010 (Figure 5-L).

80 Eurostat 2012b.

81 'Combating Social Exclusion among Young Homeless Populations: a comparative investigation of homeless paths among local white, local ethnic groups and migrant young men and women, and appropriate reinsertion methods', funded by the EU Seventh Framework Programme (MOVISIE 2012).

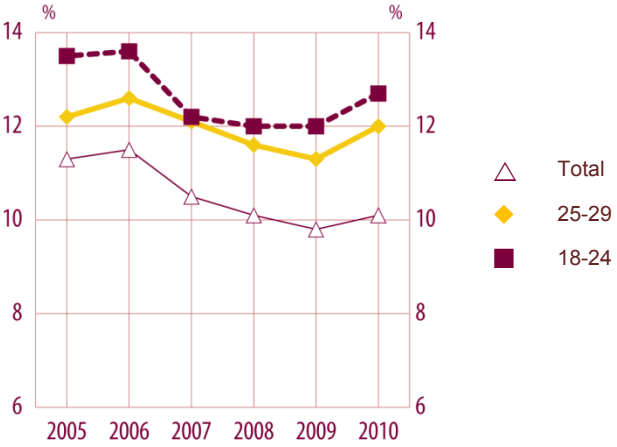
82 Kutsar and Helve 2012.

Figure 5-K: Housing cost overburden rate, by country and by age, 2010



Source: Eurostat – SILC. Online data code: ilc_lvho07a
Note: EU-27: Eurostat estimate.

Figure 5-L: Housing cost overburden rate, EU-27 average, by age, 2005-2010



Source: Eurostat – SILC. Online data code: ilc_lvho07a
Note: Eurostat estimates for all years.

On average in the EU-27 and the majority of countries examined, women are more likely to have difficulty in maintaining their own household. This is partly because they leave the parental home earlier on average than men (see Figure 5-A). Young people usually face difficulties when leaving their parents and, since women take this step earlier, their financial commitments are liable to be greater. In addition, women may also find it more difficult to provide for their own household because they earn less on average than men.

One way to overcome the housing problems of young people is to offer social housing to those with low incomes. The scale of social housing differs considerably within the EU. While it is extensive in the Netherlands (around 35 % of the total housing stock in 2005), it is almost non-existent in some other countries, and most notably in central and eastern Europe because of high home ownership rates since privatisation[83].

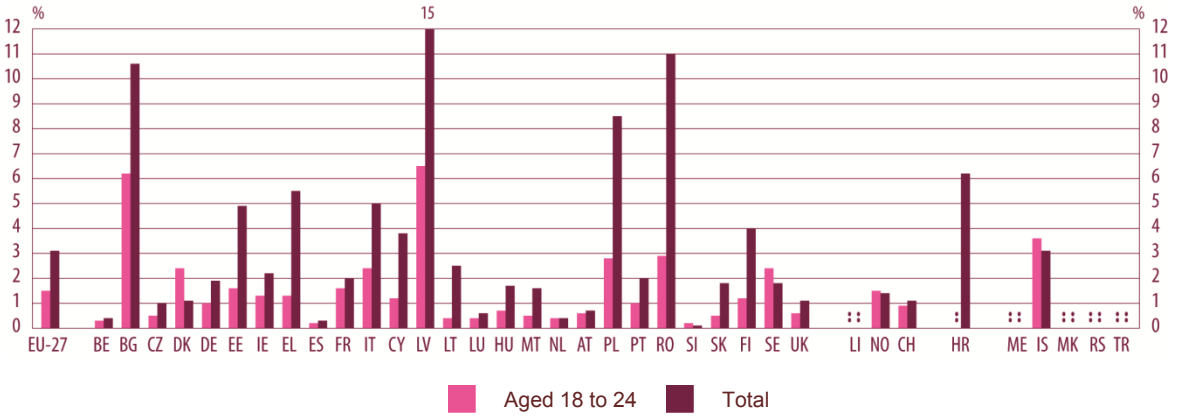
5.4.2. Access to health care

Access to health care is an important aspect of social inclusion. Therefore, the self-reported unmet need for medical care was included among the EU youth indicators as a further indicator on the social exclusion of young people.

[83] European Commission 2010b, p. 107.

Figure 5-M shows that a lower proportion of young people aged 18 to 24 (1.5 %) reported unmet needs for medical examination than among the total population (3.1 %). The exceptions were again the Nordic countries (except Finland) and to some extent Slovenia. Overall, the level of unmet need for medical care was among the lowest in these countries. By contrast, the proportion of young people reporting unmet needs for medical examinations was highest in Bulgaria and Latvia.

Figure 5-M: EU youth indicator: Self-reported unmet needs for medical examinations because of barriers to access, by country and by age, 2010



Source: Eurostat – SILC. Online data code: hlth_silc_03

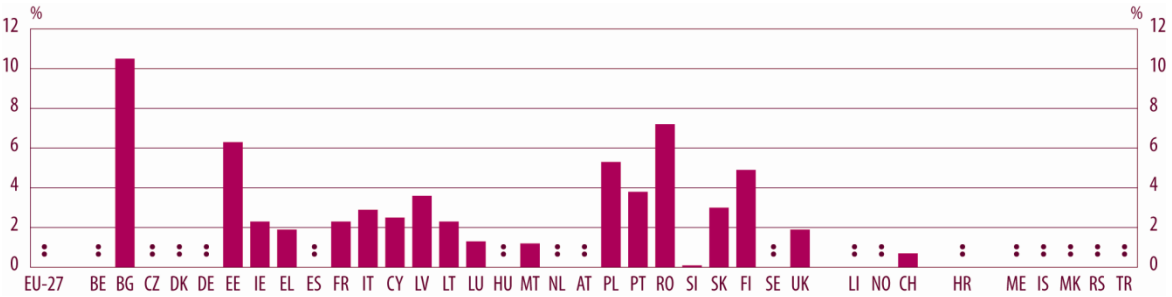
In the EU, the proportion of young people with such unmet needs has on average been decreasing since 2005 (Figure 5-N). Throughout these years, young women have been reporting higher levels of unmet medical needs than young men.

Figure 5-N: EU youth indicator: Self-reported unmet needs for medical examinations among young people (aged 18-24) because of barriers to access, EU-27 average, by sex, 2005-2010

Source: Eurostat – SILC. Online data code: hlth_silc_03

In the case of children (those aged under 18), data on unmet needs for medical care (as reported by their parents) is also available from some countries for the year 2009. Figure 5-O shows that the proportion of children with unmet needs for advice from a doctor was somewhere between that of young people and the total population in the majority of countries participating in data collection. In 2009, the proportion of children with such unmet needs was highest in Bulgaria, Estonia, Poland, Romania and Finland.

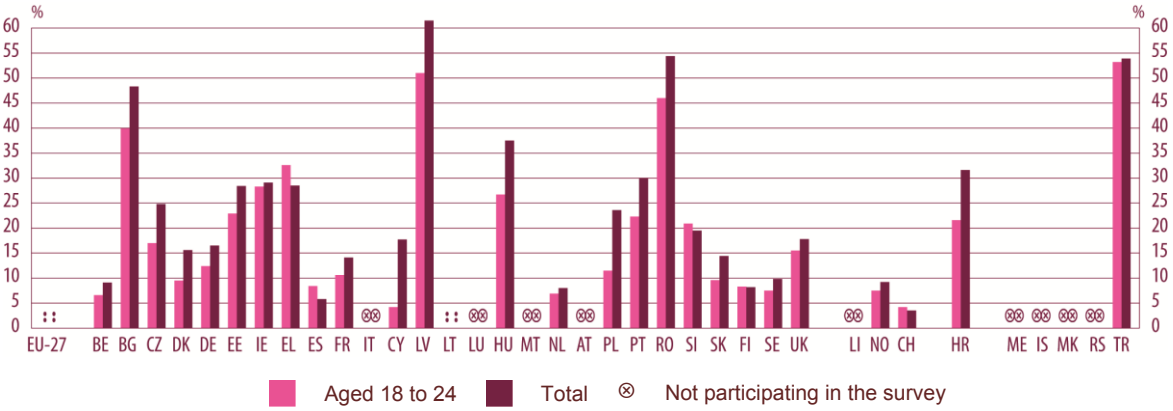
Figure 5-O: Unmet needs among children (aged under 18) for consulting a GP or specialist, excluding dentists and ophthalmologists, on at least one occasion in the preceding 12 months, 2009



Source: Eurostat – SILC, ad-hoc module on material deprivation, variable HD250

However, differences between the reported levels of unmet needs for medical examinations stem more from differences between the health conditions of younger and older generations than from differences between social exclusion levels. Smaller differences between young people and the total population were apparent in the perceived likelihood of not receiving medical examinations when needed (Figure 5-P).

Figure 5-P: Share of persons finding it likely or very likely not to receive necessary health care in the event of illness in the following 12 months, by country and by age, 2008



Source: European Social Survey 2008

Within the EU-27, perceived levels of non-access were highest in Bulgaria, Latvia and Romania. This confirms the findings based on the reported level of such unmet needs and points to relatively high levels of exclusion in these countries. At the other extreme, EU countries with the lowest share of respondents claiming they were likely or very likely not to receive assistance when needed were Belgium, Spain, the Netherlands, Finland and Sweden.

5.5. Groups at risk of social exclusion

5.5.1. Young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs)

The group of young people mainly at risk of poverty and social exclusion are the so-called NEETs. A part of this group dropped out of school early without any qualifications and thus cannot find employment. NEETs can be found across all qualifications and in a number of the countries (EL, LU, PT, RO, SK, SI, FI) NEET rates are higher for tertiary educates than lower educated[84]. The potentially long-term unemployment makes NEET youth dependent on social welfare, with substantial societal costs. Furthermore, their situation undermines their life

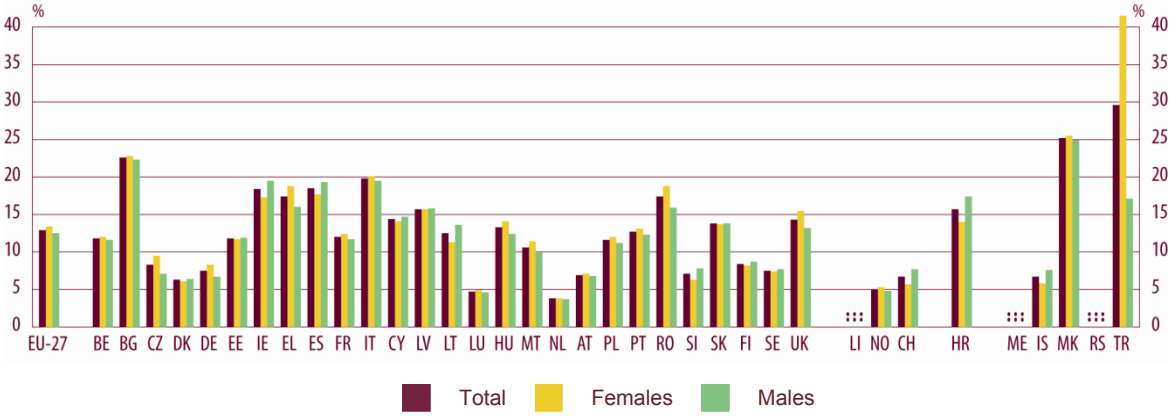
[84] European Commission 2010a, p. 131, and forthcoming study prepared for DG JUST on "Starting fragile"

prospects and leads to longer-term social and political marginalisation[85]. As the YOUNEX[86] research project has shown, long-term unemployed young adults face greater anxiety and are less happy, which leads to further (self-)exclusion from society[87].

NEETs are a mixed group, drawing attention to the multidimensional nature of disadvantage. According to a Eurofound report[88], the following factors influence the probability of becoming NEET: disablement; an immigrant background; a low educational level; living in remote areas; a low household income; parents who experienced unemployment; parents with low level of education; divorced parents.

Figure 5-Q gives the percentage of NEETs (aged 15 to 24) in 2011. As inferred in Chapter 3 on Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship, the 15 to 24 age group is the one for which NEET rates are usually calculated. In 2011, 12.9 % of young people in the EU-27 were classified as NEETs, with the severest situations in Bulgaria, Ireland, Greece, Spain, Italy and Romania. However, the highest proportion of NEETs among 15 to 24 year olds occurred in two EU candidate countries, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey.

Figure 5-Q: EU youth indicator: Share of young people (aged 15 to 24) not in employment, education or training (NEET rate), by country and by sex, 2011



Source: Eurostat – LFS. Online data code: edat_lfse_20
Notes: Luxembourg: unreliable data; Sweden: provisional data.

Similar to the majority of indicators above, the percentage of NEETs in the EU decreased between 2005 and 2008 on average, but started increasing again in 2009 (Figure 5-R and Figure 5-S). As Figure 5-S shows, this trend appears to have been driven by changes in the unemployment ratio of young people. While the proportion of inactive persons within the NEET group has changed little, data on unemployed young people reflect a trend similar to the overall NEET one. Much the same applies if NEETs are separated into those actively seeking employment and those not wanting to work. The proportion of the latter has remained quite stable and relatively low within the EU. By contrast, people who are actively looking for a job constitute the majority of NEETs, and patterns of change look similar to the unemployment figures. This highlights the importance of labour market structures and job prospects in influencing NEET rates.

85 Eurofound 2011b, p. 5.

86 'Youth, Unemployment, and Exclusion in Europe: A multidimensional approach to understanding the conditions and prospects for social and political integration of young unemployed', funded by the EU Seventh Framework Programme (Université de Genève 2012).

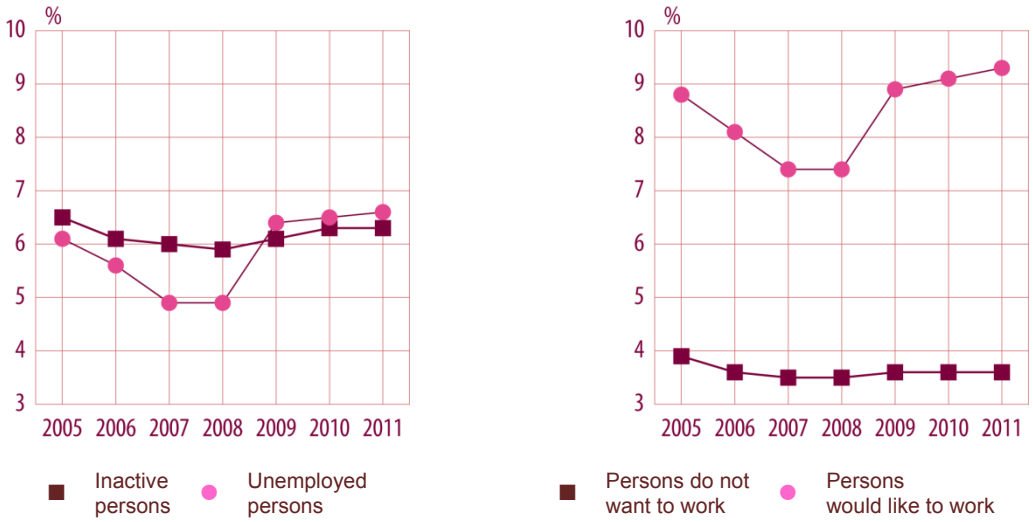
87 Kutsar and Helve 2012.

88 Eurofound 2011b, pp. 3-4.

Figure 5-R: EU youth indicator: Share of young people (aged 15 to 24) not in employment, education or training (NEET rate), EU-27 average, by sex, 2005-2011

Source: Eurostat – LFS. Online data code: edat_lfse_20

Figure 5-S: EU youth indicator: Share of young people (aged 15 to 24) not in employment, education or training (NEET rate), EU-27 average, by labour market status and attitudes towards work, 2005-2011



Source: Eurostat – LFS. Online data code: edat_lfse_20

In the EU-27, NEET rates are slightly higher for young women than for young men. However, differences between the sexes decreased between 2005 and 2011, with male NEET rates catching up with female NEET rates (Figure 5-R).

5.5.2. Migrants and ethnic minorities

Migrants and ethnic minorities (most importantly the Roma) are among the groups most vulnerable to social exclusion. They usually have multiple disadvantages leading to persistent poverty and a marginalised position in society. The European EDUMIGROM[89] research project lists several interrelated factors contributing to the exclusion of migrants and ethnic minorities. Migrant families often lack the social capital needed to integrate into society[90]. They tend to have weaker connections and ties to the local non-migrant community and can find it more difficult to obtain information about institutions, systems (education, health care,

89 'Ethnic differences in education and diverging prospects for urban youth in an enlarged Europe', funded by the EU Seventh Framework Programme (Szalai 2011).

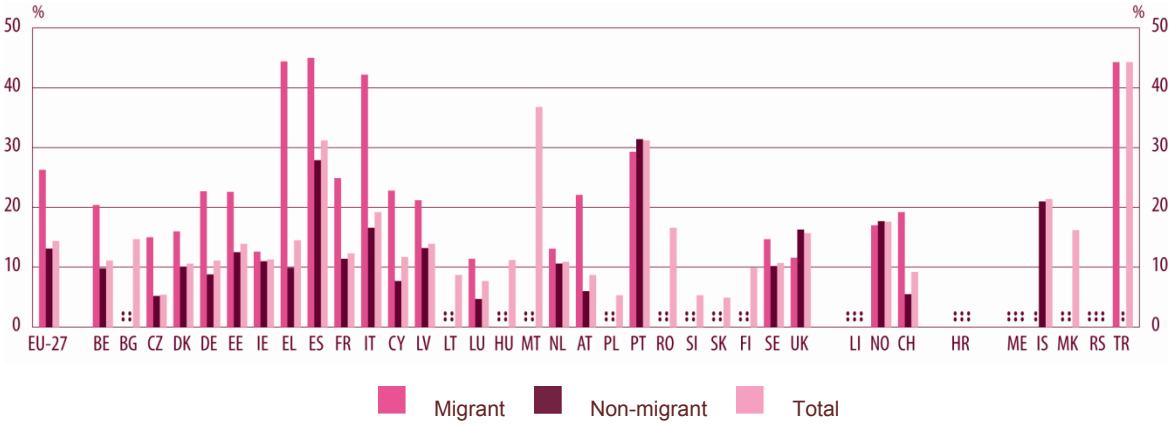
90 Kutsar and Helve 2012, p. 24.

etc.) and opportunities. The first generation also often has problems understanding the national language[91]. Given this lack of social capital, information and language skills, migrants and ethnic minorities often have limited access to good quality education – especially early childhood education – which in turn reduces later educational opportunities.

Early disadvantages are reinforced by the fact that ethnic minority pupils are largely educated in segregated environments[92], in the 'disadvantageous segments' of education systems[93]. This – apart from increasing the isolation of migrants and ethnic minorities – can mean that children and young people are 'inside school but outside learning'[94]. Such ethnic segregation and separation affects pupils' performance, aspirations and possibilities.

School segregation and discrimination can lead to frustration and drop-out. As noted in the previous section, leaving school early can be regarded as the main source of marginalisation for young adults[95]. Data on early school-leaving confirms that a higher percentage of first generation migrants than of non-migrants drop out of school in the majority of European countries (Figure 5-T). In 2009 in the EU-27, early school leavers constituted 26.3 % of the migrant population and 13.1 % of the non-migrant population. The differences are particularly striking in Greece (a difference of 34.5 percentage points), Italy (25.6 percentage points) and Spain (17.1 percentage points).

Figure 5-T: Early school leavers as a percentage of the migrant, non-migrant and total population, by country, 2009



Source: Eurostat – LFS. Online data code: not available
Notes: Early school leaver is defined as a person aged 18 to 24 with at most lower secondary education and who is not in further education or training.
Migrant is defined as a person for whom the country of birth is not the reference country.

On the assumption that parental involvement influences children's success at school, many countries have adopted measures to enhance communication between schools and immigrant families in general education[96]. Such measures can take three main forms: first, providing written information on the school systems in the language of origin of immigrant families; second, using interpreters in various situations in school life; and third, appointing resource persons such as mediators to be responsible for communication between the school and families. Half of the European countries surveyed rely on all three measures, and the majority

91 Ibid., p. 26.
92 Szalai 2011.
93 Kutsar and Helve 2012, p. 28.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid, p. 31.
96 Eurydice/EACEA 2009a.

of them make use of two or three different channels of communication between schools and immigrant families. Several countries also pay special attention to the mother tongue tuition of immigrant children.

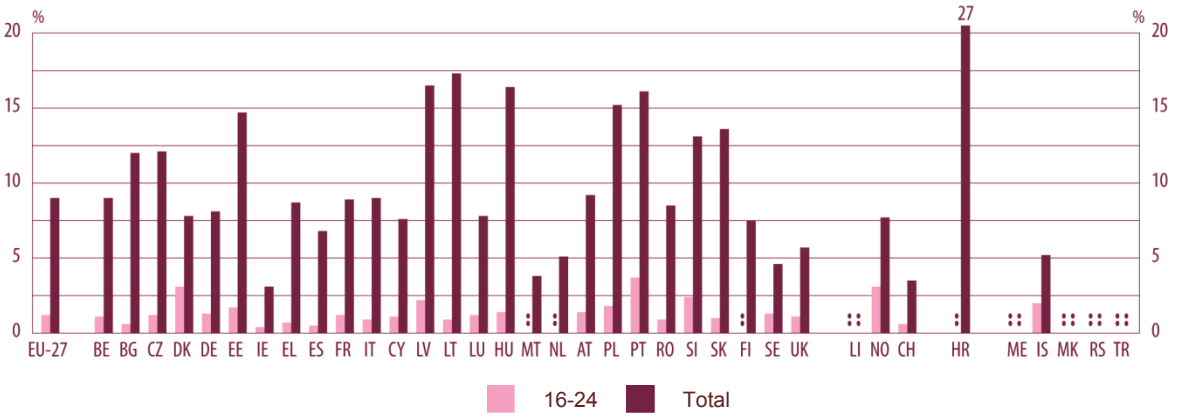
6. HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

6.1. Health and risks

Young people are in a better health condition and feel healthier than older age groups[97]. As Figure 6-A shows, a much smaller proportion of young people aged 16 to 24 feel that they are in bad or very bad health than respondents within the total population. Differences between the two age groups were the largest in Bulgaria and Lithuania, and the smallest in the Nordic countries. Within the EU-27, the proportion of young people feeling in a bad or very bad health was the highest in Denmark and Portugal (over 3 %) and the lowest in Ireland and Spain (less than 0.5 %). Within the EU, the proportion of the population feeling in a bad or very bad health condition has remained quite stable since 2005, both among young people and within the total population.

However, certain health risks (e.g. drug use or involvement in road accidents) are more pronounced in the case of young people than for older age groups, often due to lack of information or peer pressure. Research has shown that risk behaviours are related to each other; for example, smoking during adolescence is associated with higher levels of alcohol consumption, unhealthy eating, early sexual initiation, injuries and low life satisfaction[98]. Such health risks can have long-term, life-long consequences if they start at a young age.

Figure 6-A: Self-perceived health, feeling bad or very bad, by country and by age, 2010



Source: Eurostat – SILC. Online data code: hlth_silc_02
Notes: Aged 16-24, unreliable data for LT, CZ; Aged 16-24 and total population: unreliable data for EE, HR.

6.1.1. Obesity

Overweight and obesity are serious health risks. Being overweight is usually associated with lower socio-economic status in industrialised countries[99]. Childhood obesity has long-lasting consequences, often throughout one's whole life. Within the EU-27, the share of obese young people is the greatest in Malta, where almost 9 % of young people are affected. In contrast, less than 2 % of the youth are considered as obese in Bulgaria and Romania (Figure 6-B).

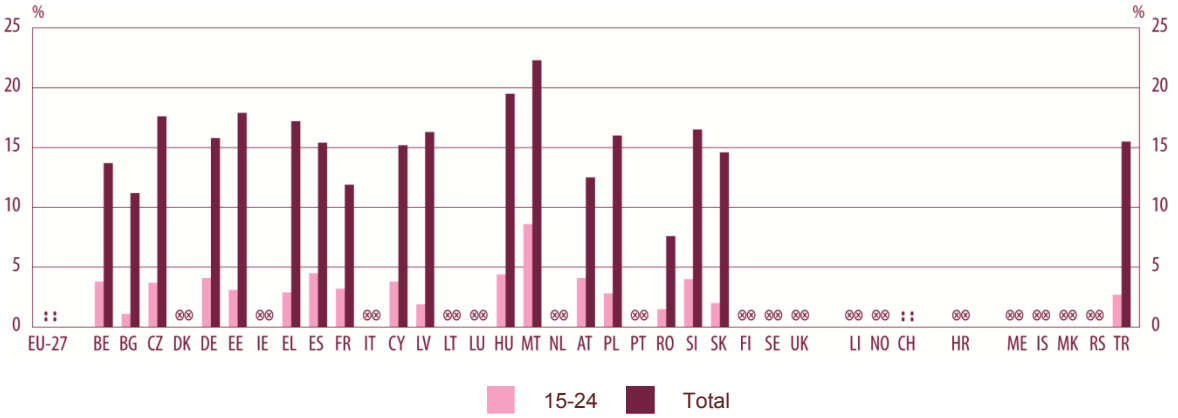
97 Eurostat – online datacode: hlth_silc_02.

98 WHO Regional Office for Europe 2012, p. 141.

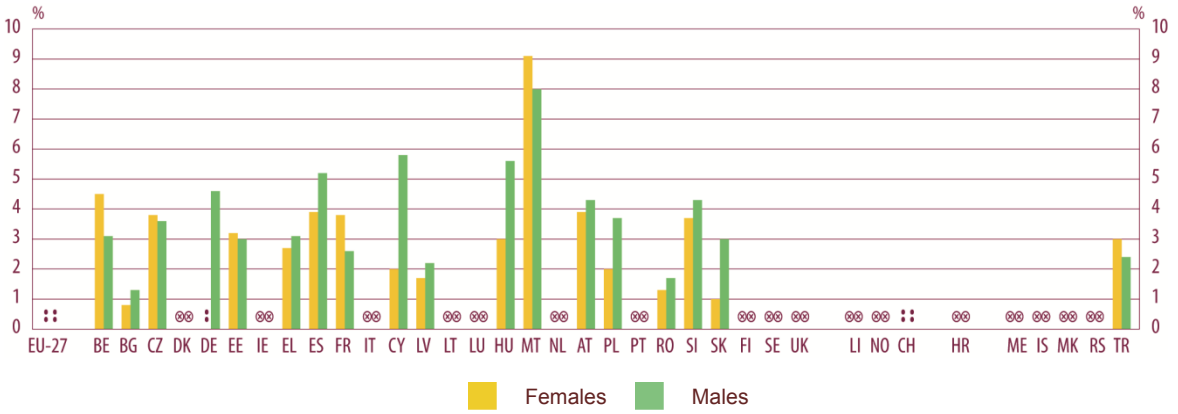
99 WHO Regional Office for Europe 2009.

Figure 6-B: EU youth indicator: Share of obese persons, by country, 2008

a) by age



b) share of obese young people (aged 15-24), by sex



Source: Eurostat – European Health Interview Survey (EHIS). Online datacode: not available
Notes: Obesity is defined by having a Body Mass Index (BMI) greater than 30.
Data collection took place in different years for participating countries: EE, AT: 2006; SI: 2007; BE, BG, CZ, FR, CY, LV, MT, RO, TR: 2008; DE, EL, ES, HU, PL, SK: 2009. Germany: the age group for young people is 18-24.

In the majority of countries with available data, the share of obese young men is larger than the share of obese young women. Reasons for such divergence include differences in eating habits or societal and family pressure for controlling weight[100]. However, there are countries where more young women are affected by obesity: Belgium, France, Malta and Turkey.

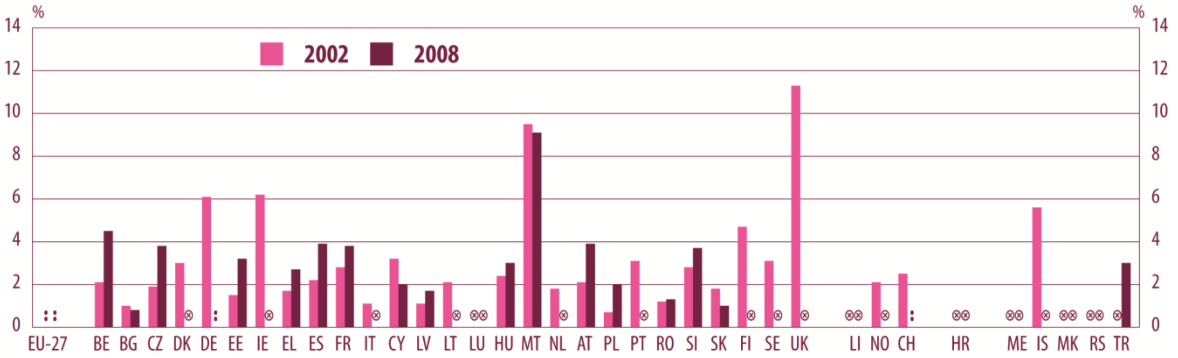
Looking at trends, obesity is a rapidly rising problem among young people in the EU-27. The share of obese young people aged 15 to 24 increased almost everywhere, for both women and men (Figure 6-C). The exceptions are Bulgaria and Malta. In some countries, the proportion of obese young people doubled or even tripled between the 2002 round of the Health Interview Survey (HIS) and the 2008 round of the European Health Interview Survey (EHIS)[101]. In the case of young women, the situation worsened the most in Belgium, Estonia and Poland; among young men, obesity increased the most in Cyprus, Latvia, Poland and Romania. This signals an increasingly serious problem, which needs to be addressed by prevention measures such as the promotion of healthy eating and physical activity.

100 WHO Regional Office for Europe 2012.

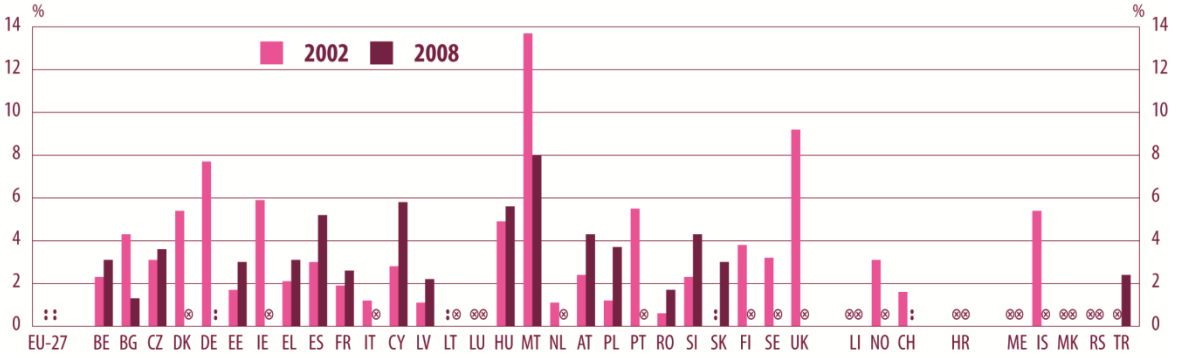
101 For the purpose of comparison, note that HIS and EHIS are different data collections.

Figure 6-C: EU youth indicator: Share of obese young people (aged 15-24), by country and by sex, 2002 and 2008

a) Women



b) Men



Source: Eurostat – Health Interview Survey (HIS) 2002 and EHIS 2008. Online data code: hlth_ls_bmie (2003)
Notes: Data collection for the two surveys took place in different years for participating countries.
HIS: EE, PL: 1996; DE, IS: 1998; AT, PT: 1999; DK, FR, RO: 2000; BE, BG, SI: 2001; NL: 2001/02; CZ, IE, EL, LT, MT, SK, UK, NO, CH: 2002; SE: 2002/03; ES, CY, LV, HU, FI: 2003; IT: 1999/2000 and 2002
EHIS: EE, AT: 2006; SI: 2007; BE, BG, CZ, FR, CY, LV, MT, RO: 2008; EL, ES, HU, PL, SK: 2009.
Data collection did not include all age groups in all countries in the HIS survey: DK, MT, SE, UK, NO: 16+; DE, IE, HU, SI, IS: 18+; LT: 20-64.

6.1.2. Smoking

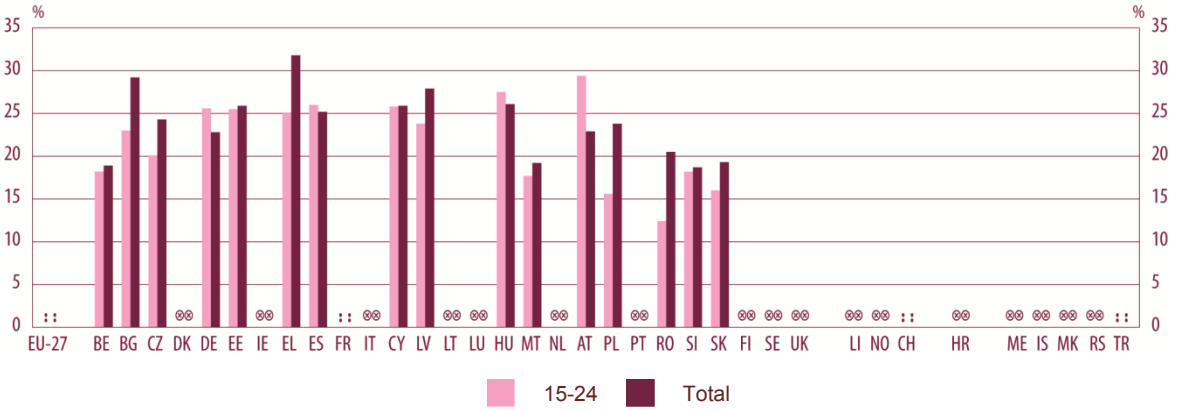
Smoking is a well-known health risk and the leading cause of preventable death[102]. In the majority of countries, the share of daily smokers among young people is slightly lower than within the total population. However, as Figure 6-D shows, in Germany, Spain, Hungary and Austria there are more regular smokers amongst young people than in the total population. In these countries, as well as in Estonia, Greece and Cyprus, more than one quarter of young people aged 15 to 24 smokes daily.

Young men are more prone to become regular smokers than young women, with the exception of Greece. In Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia and Romania, more than twice as many young men smoke as young women, with more than 35 % of young men smoking daily in the first two countries. Countries with the smallest difference between young men's and women's smoking habits are Germany, Greece, Spain and Austria, where a high proportion of young women are also regular smokers.

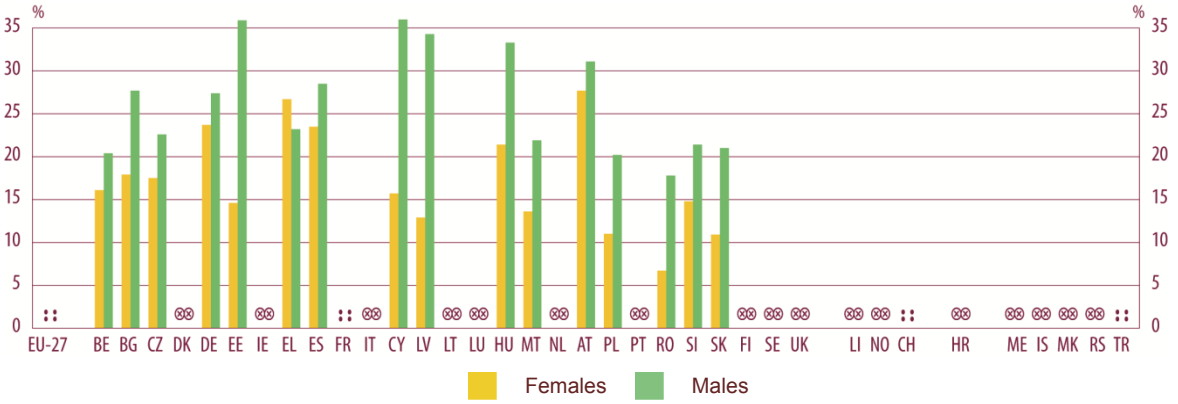
102 WHO Regional Office for Europe 2012 p. 141.

Figure 6-D: EU youth indicator: Share of daily smokers, by country, 2008

a) by age



b) share of daily smokers among young people (aged 15-24), by sex

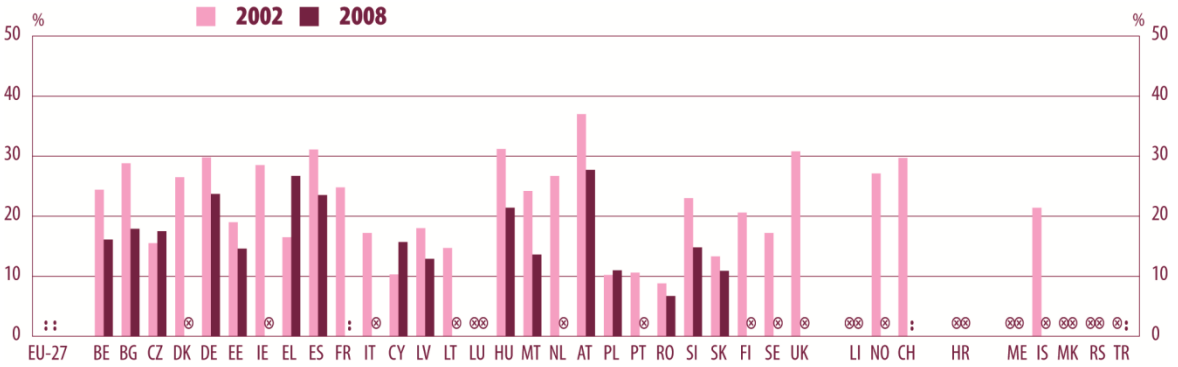


Source: Eurostat – EHIS. Online data code: hlth_ehis_de3
Notes: Data collection took place in different years for participating countries: EE, AT: 2006; SI: 2007; BE, BG, CZ, FR, CY, LV, MT, RO: 2008; DE, EL, ES, HU, PL, SK: 2009.

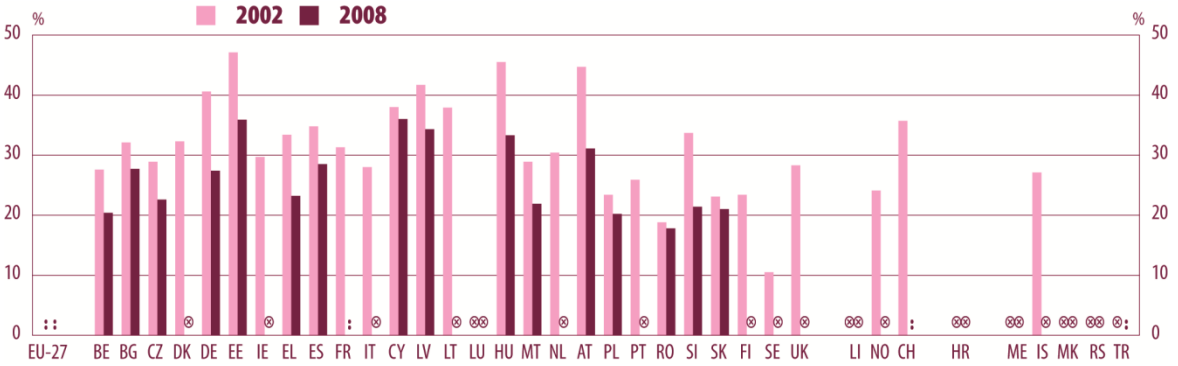
A potential effect of anti-smoking campaigns can be detected through a comparison between the HIS and EHIS surveys. This comparison reveals an improvement in the share of daily smokers among young people. In almost every country, with the exception of Greece and Cyprus, the proportion of regular smokers within the 15 to 24 age group decreased in the period between the two survey rounds, in some cases quite significantly. In Greece and Cyprus, the larger proportion of daily smokers in 2008 is due to an increasing share of female smokers; the proportion of regular smokers among young men also declined in these countries (Figure 6-E).

Figure 6-E: EU youth indicator: Share of daily smokers among young people (aged 15-24), by country and by sex, 2002 and 2008

a) Women



b) Men



Source: Eurostat – HIS 2002 and EHIS 2008. Online datacodes: hlth_ls_smke and hlth_ehis_de3
Notes: Data collection for the two surveys took place in different years for participating countries.
HIS: EE, PL: 1996; DE, IS: 1998; AT, PT: 1999; DK, FR, RO: 2000; BE, BG, SI: 2001; NL: 2001/02; CZ, IE, EL, LT, MT, SK, UK, NO, CH: 2002; SE: 2002/03; ES, CY, LV, HU, FI: 2003; IT: 1999/2000 and 2002
EHIS: EE, AT: 2006; SI: 2007; BE, BG, CZ, CY, LV, MT, RO: 2008; DE, EL, ES, HU, PL, SK: 2009.

6.1.3. Drunkenness

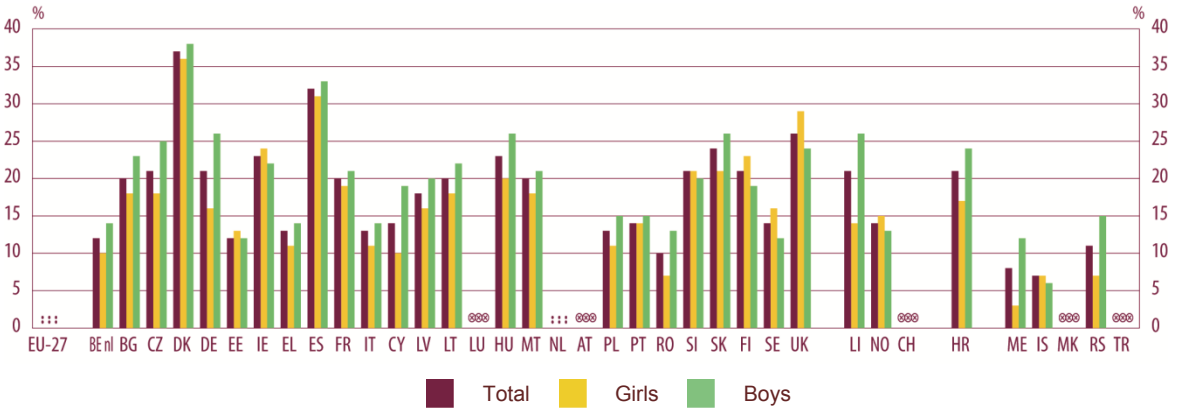
Alcohol is the most consumed psychoactive substance[103]. Nevertheless, there are differences between the levels of alcohol consumption: while some young people drink alcohol relatively rarely, others regularly experience drunkenness. Figure 6-F depicts the share of 16 year old students who have been drunk at least once in the last 30 days based on the 2011 ESPAD[104] survey. As the figure shows, in 2011, experiencing drunkenness was the most widespread in Denmark, with 37 % of students reporting it. The share of students who reported being drunk in the last 30 days was also quite high in Ireland, Spain, Hungary, Slovakia and the United Kingdom. Within the EU-27, the lowest share of students reporting drunkenness was in Belgium (Flemish Community), Estonia and Romania.

Boys were more affected by such high levels of alcohol consumption than girls in most countries. The only EU-27 countries where the alcohol consumption of 16 year old girls was higher than that of boys were Estonia, Ireland, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

103 WHO Regional Office for Europe 2009, p. 82.

104 European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs.

Figure 6-F: EU youth indicator: Share of students turning 16 in 2011 who reported to have been drunk at least once during the past 30 days, by country and by sex, 2011

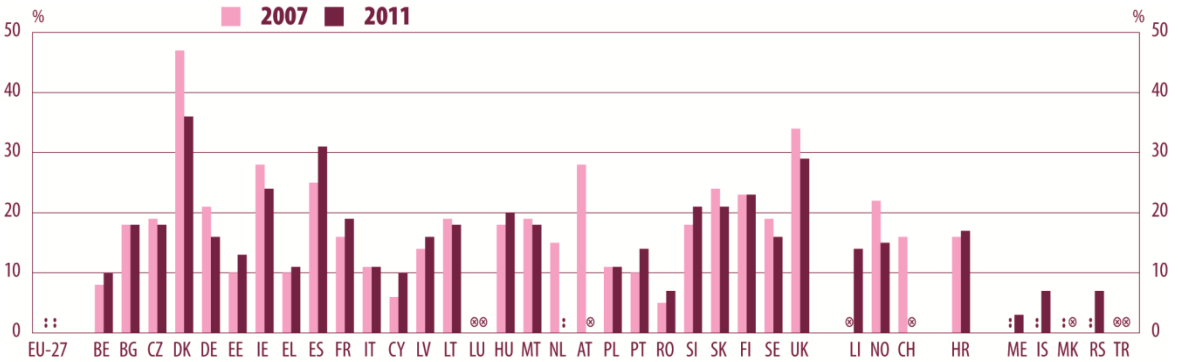


Source: ESPAD 2012
Notes: The target group was students who turned 16 in the year of the data collection (2011), thus were born in 1995. The estimated mean age was 15.8 years at the time of data collection.
Belgium: data collection was limited to the Flemish Community of Belgium.
Germany: data collection was limited to five out of sixteen states (Bundesländer): Bavaria, Berlin, Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Thuringia.
Spain: data is from the Spanish national school survey.
United Kingdom: limited comparability of data due to the low school-participation rate.

Looking at trends, the alcohol consumption of young people did not change significantly[105] in most EU-27 countries between 2007 and 2011. In the case of boys, reported drunkenness decreased significantly in Denmark, Romania, Sweden and the United Kingdom and increased in Spain, Cyprus and Hungary. In the case of girls, significant changes took place in Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom on the one hand (decrease) and in Spain, Cyprus and Portugal on the other hand (increase).

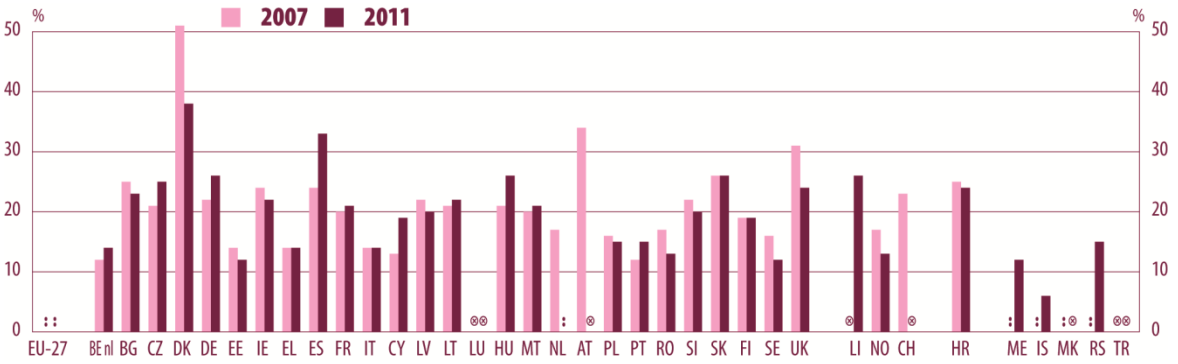
Figure 6-G: EU youth indicator: Share of students turning 16 in the year of the data collection who reported to have been drunk at least once during the past 30 days, by country and by sex, 2007 and 2011

a) Girls



105 According to the methodological notes of the ESPAD survey, changes below four percentage points between previous data collections are not recognised as real changes (ESPAD 2012, p. 10).

b) Boys



Source: ESPAD 2009, 2012
Notes: Belgium: data collection was limited to the Flemish Community of Belgium.
Germany: data collection was limited to seven out of sixteen states (Bundesländer) in 2007 and to five in 2011.
Denmark (2007): limited representativeness and comparability of data due to small net sample (result of a combination of a small gross sample and a high school-dropout level).
Spain: data are from the Spanish national school survey.
Finland (2007): only half of the students answered this question due to a split-half test.
United Kingdom (2011): limited comparability of data due to the low school-participation rate.

Peer pressure is a more important factor influencing alcohol consumption than the socio-economic status of young people and their families. This might be the reason why school-based intervention programmes are usually successful in reducing the alcohol consumption of adolescents[106].

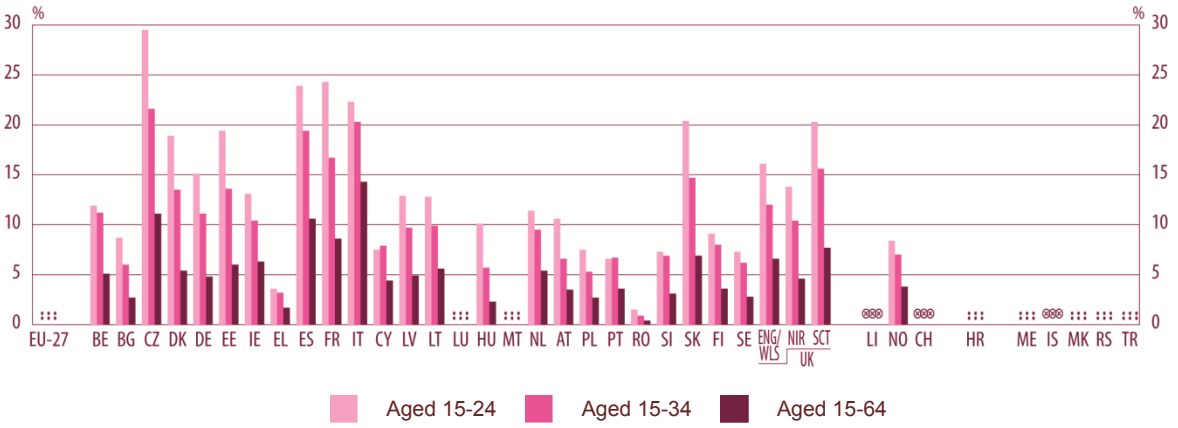
6.1.4. Drug use

Young people and especially teenagers are vulnerable to substance use and substance use disorders. At this age, peer pressure can be strong enough to 'force' young people to start using various types of drugs[107].

Cannabis is the most popular drug among young people aged 15 to 24[108]. On average 6 % of 15 to 16 year old school children had tried one or more of the following substances: ecstasy and amphetamines (most common, ca. 3 % of children used each of them), cocaine, crack, LSD or other hallucinogens, heroin and GHB[109]. Cannabis is often the first illegal substance used. Although the majority of cannabis users does not take other drugs, they are between 4 and 25 times more likely to report the use of cocaine than is the general population[110]. The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) found that cannabis consumption is the highest among the youngest age group (Figure 6-H). Among young people aged 15 to 24, cannabis use is the most prevalent in the Czech Republic, Spain, France, Italy, Slovakia and the United Kingdom (Scotland). In these countries, more than 20 % of young people consumed this substance at least once in the preceding 12 months. Cannabis use is the least widespread in Greece and Romania.

106 WHO Regional Office for Europe 2012, p. 161.
107 WHO Regional Office for Europe 2009, p. 80.
108 Ibid, p. 84.
109 ESPAD 2012, p. 9.
110 EMCDDA 2009, p. 25.

Figure 6-H: EU youth indicator: Last 12 months prevalence of cannabis use, by country and by age, year of the last available national survey

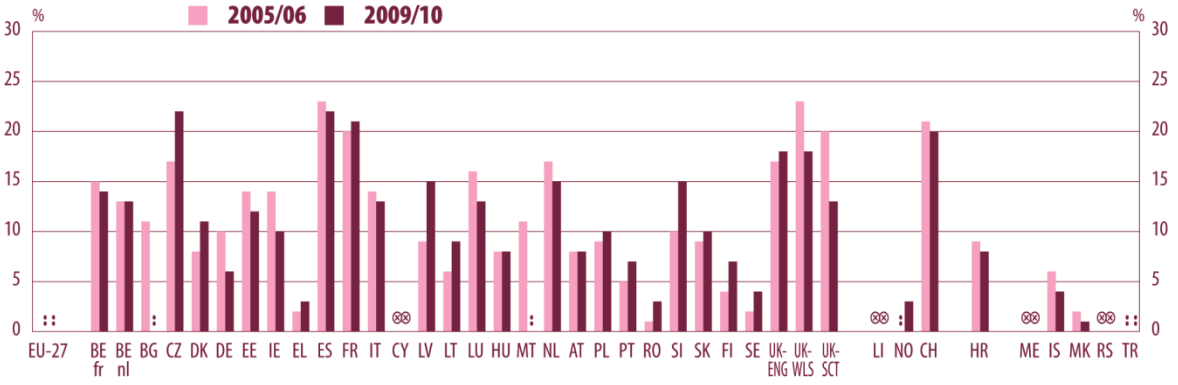


Source: EMCDDA
Notes: Years of national surveys: EL, NO: 2004; FR, NL: 2005; PL, SK, FI: 2006; IE: 2006/07; LV, HU, PT, RO, SI: 2007; BE, BG, EE, IT, LT, AT, SE: 2008; UK-NIR, UK-SCT: 2008/09; CZ, DE, ES, CY: 2009; UK-ENG/WLS: 2009/10; DK: 2010.
Countries were asked to report results using, as far as possible, EMCDDA standard age groups (all adults: 15 to 64, young adults: 15 to 34). In countries where age ranges are more restrictive, prevalence estimates may tend to be slightly higher. Some countries have recalculated their prevalence figures using the EMCDDA standard age groups.
The most recent General population surveys reported by the Czech Republic display a wide variation in results, the reason for which is being explored, but may be due to differing sampling methods. The data is provided for information, but given the lack of comparability between surveys should be treated with caution.
In the United Kingdom, data collection was separate for England & Wales; Northern Ireland and Scotland.
For methods and definitions, see General population surveys of drug use.

Based on the HBSC[111] survey, the WHO reports that boys are using cannabis more frequently than girls[112]. In all education systems except England, more 15 year old boys reported to have been using cannabis in the past year than girls (Figure 6-I).

Figure 6-I: EU youth indicator: Last 12 months prevalence of cannabis use among 15 year olds, by country and by sex, 2005/06 and 2009/10

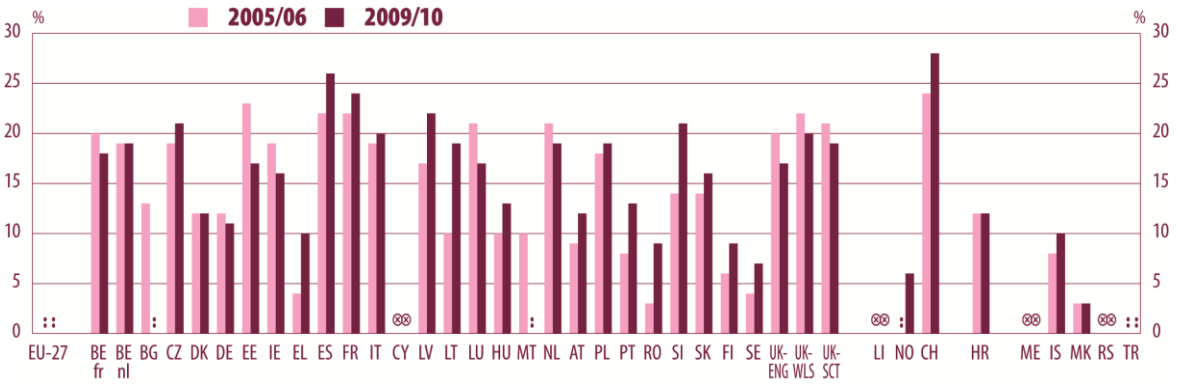
a) Girls



111 Health Behaviour In School-Aged Children, WHO Collaborative Cross-National Survey.

112 WHO Regional Office for Europe 2012, p. 170.

b) Boys



Source: HBSC survey, WHO (WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2008, 2012)
Note: Young people (15 year olds only) were asked whether they had used cannabis in the last 12 months. Response options ranged from 'never' to '40 times or more'. The findings presented here show the proportions that reported using cannabis at least once in the last 12 months.
Data collection was separate for the French and Flemish Communities of Belgium as well as for England, Wales and Scotland within the United Kingdom.

The reported cannabis consumption among 15 year olds grew in the majority of education systems, especially in the case of boys. Figure 6-I illustrates that among boys, the reported use of cannabis increased in 2009/10 compared to 2005/06. This was especially the case in Greece and Romania, where the proportion of cannabis users was among the lowest in 2005/06. The proportion of 15 year old girls who reported using cannabis dropped in comparison with the earlier survey.

Multiple substance (polydrug) use is a common trend in the EU. Alcohol use and cigarette smoking, followed by cannabis use, were the most prevalent forms of substance use consistently reported by young adults in all countries. Among 15 to 16 year old school children, about one in four had used both alcohol and tobacco in the last month and a very small proportion had used two or more illicit drugs[113]. Among young adults (aged 15 to 34), frequent or heavy alcohol users were, in general, between two and six times more likely to report the use of cannabis compared to the general population and between two and nine times more likely to use cocaine.[114]

Young people in a disadvantaged position are generally more prone to start using drugs. In 2008, the EMCDDA concluded that the number of countries implementing intervention measures targeting vulnerable youth did not increase in the EU between 2004 and 2007. Furthermore, while the drug use of certain groups, for example young people in care institutions, gained attention in this period, others like young offenders fell out of policy focus. Moreover, countries relied predominantly on office-based services instead of trying to reach vulnerable young people pro-actively[115].

6.1.5. Risky behaviour: road accidents

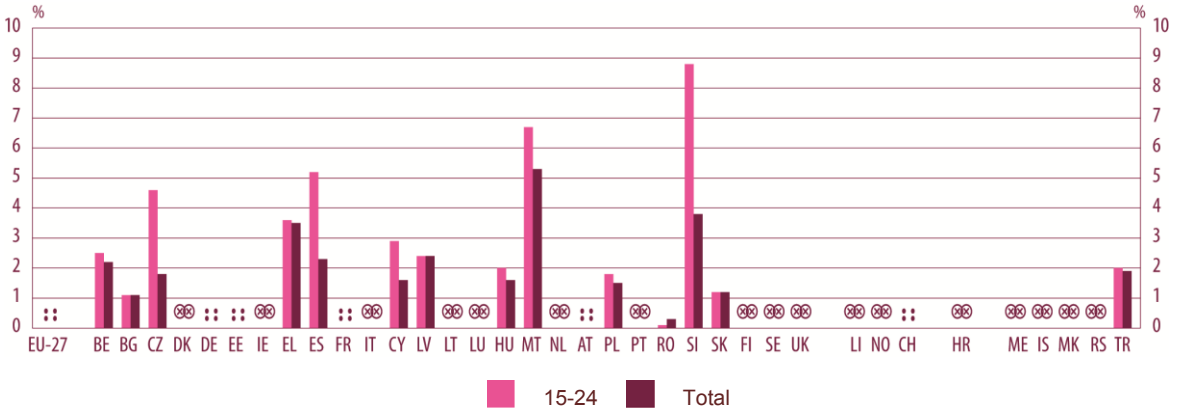
Injuries are the leading cause of death and disability among young people[116]. Data reveals that often a much larger proportion of young people are involved in road accidents resulting in injury than the relevant share of the total population (Figure 6-J). The difference between young people and the total population is substantial for example in the Czech Republic, Spain,

113 EMCDDA 2009, p. 25.
114 Ibid, p. 12.
115 EMCDDA 2008, p. 29.
116 WHO Regional Office for Europe 2009, p. 36.

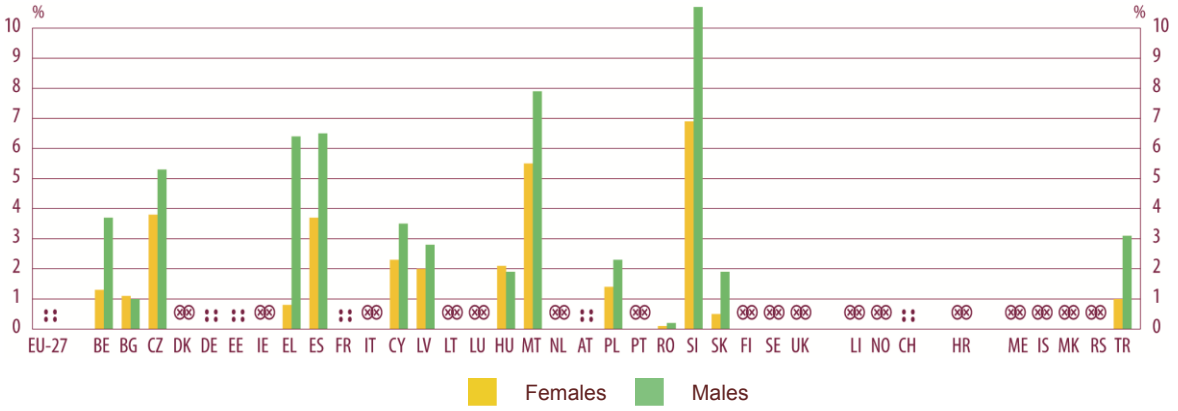
Cyprus and Slovenia. In 2008 in Slovenia, almost 9 % of young people aged 15-24 reported having had an accident in the preceding 12 months. In contrast, accidents involving young people were relatively rare in Romania. Young men are more frequently involved in road accidents than young women.

Figure 6-J: EU youth indicator: Proportion of people declaring having had an accident resulted in injury during the past 12 months, by country, 2008

a) by age



b) proportion of young people (aged 15-24) declaring having had an accident, by sex



Source: Eurostat – EHIS. Online data code: hlth_ehis_st2
Notes: Data collection took place in different years for participating countries: EE, AT: 2006; SI: 2007; BE, BG, CZ, FR, CY, LV, MT, RO, TR: 2008; DE, EL, ES, HU, PL, SK: 2009.

6.1.6. Health risks of sexual activity

Sexual and reproductive health is linked to safe and healthy sexual behaviour. Regarding the age of having the first intercourse, there are big differences between European countries due to the diversity of cultural and religious backgrounds[117].

Sex education and personal relationships education are included in curricula in almost every country in Europe, at least at lower secondary and upper secondary levels[118]. Sex education and personal relationships education usually include both biological and emotional aspects of sexuality, e.g. sexual health, responsible sexual behaviour, the processes of human reproduction and awareness of different sexual orientations[119].

117 WHO Regional Office for Europe 2009, p. 92.
118 Eurydice/EACEA 2010, p. 60.
119 Ibid, p. 59.

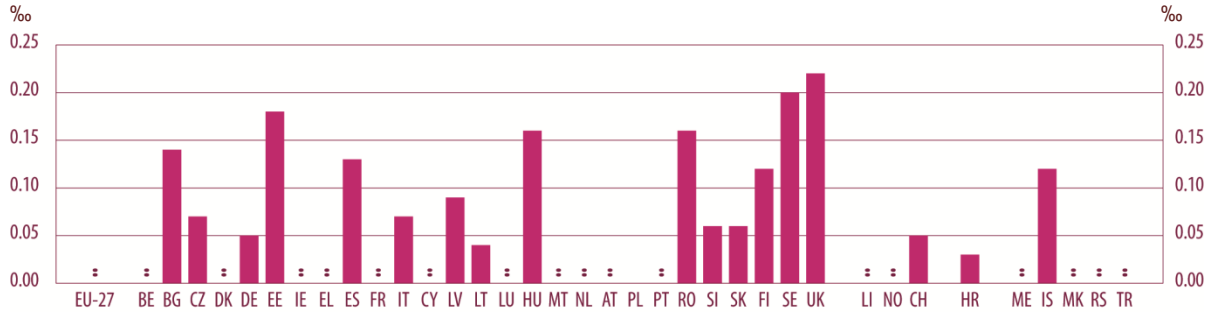
The WHO reports widespread condom use in Europe among 15 year olds (between 60 and 90 %, based on data from 2009/10)[120]. Contraceptive pills are less prevalent and differences between countries are larger (2 % of 15 year old girls used the pill at their last intercourse in Greece, while this proportion is 62 % in Germany)[121]. A minority of young girls and boys still does not use any means of contraception[122].

Unwanted pregnancies can be measured by fertility and abortion rates. Fertility and abortion rates of 15 to 19 year old girls are very low but vary greatly within Europe (Figure 6-K). In 2010 in the EU-27, fertility rates were the highest in Bulgaria and Romania and the lowest in the Netherlands, Denmark and Slovenia. The number of legally induced abortions per 1 000 women aged 15 to 19 was the greatest in the United Kingdom and Sweden and the smallest in Poland, where there were only a few dozens of reported cases (Figure 6-L). However, it should be noted that differences in the number of legally induced abortions can be partly due to differences in legal frameworks.

Figure 6-K: Fertility rate of young women (aged 15-19), by country, 2010

Source: Eurostat. Online datacode: demo_frate
Notes: The fertility rate for women aged 15 to 19 is the number of births to mothers of age 15 to 19 divided by the average female population of age 15 to 19.
Data is from 2009 for the European Union, Belgium, Cyprus, Romania and the United Kingdom.

Figure 6-L: Legally induced abortions per 1 000 young women (aged 15-19), by country, 2010

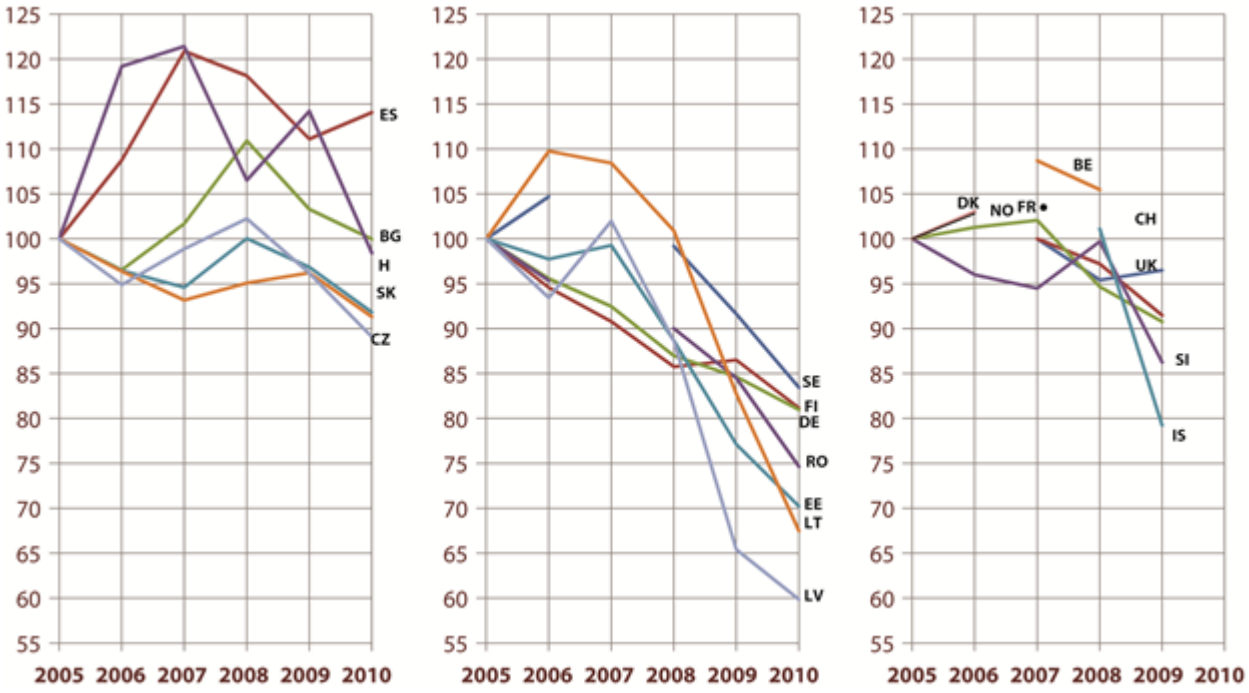


Source: Eurostat. Online datacodes: own calculation based on demo_fabort and demo_pjangroup
Notes: Data is from 2009 for Italy, Slovenia, the United Kingdom and Iceland.

There is a downward trend in the number of legally induced abortions since 2005 (Figure 6-M). In almost all countries, there were fewer abortions per 1 000 women aged 15 to 19 in 2010 than in 2005. In the Baltic countries and Romania, this reduction is quite substantial. The exception is Spain, where there were proportionally more abortions in 2010 than in 2005, but there is no obvious trend showing a clear direction of developments.

120 WHO Regional Office for Europe 2012, p. 179.
121 WHO Regional Office for Europe 2012, p. 179.
122 Ibid., p. 182.

Figure 6-M: Trends in the number of legally induced abortions per 1 000 young women (aged 15-19), between 2005 and 2010 (2005 = 100 %)



Source: Eurostat. Online datacodes: own calculation based on demo_fabort and demo_pjangroup
Notes: United Kingdom and Switzerland: 2007 = 100 %; Iceland: 2006 = 100 %.

6.2. Mental and psychological distress

Mental and psychological distress is still less prevalent among young people than within the total population. Nevertheless, mental disorders are more and more common among young people as well[123]. Young people have to face many challenges related to the transition from childhood to adulthood, when societal and family pressures can be difficult to cope with. The economic crisis also influences the mental health of children and young people, both through the situation of their parents and through their own difficulties[124]. For this reason, special attention has to be paid to develop appropriate measures of detection of, and early intervention on situations of mental and psychological difficulty.

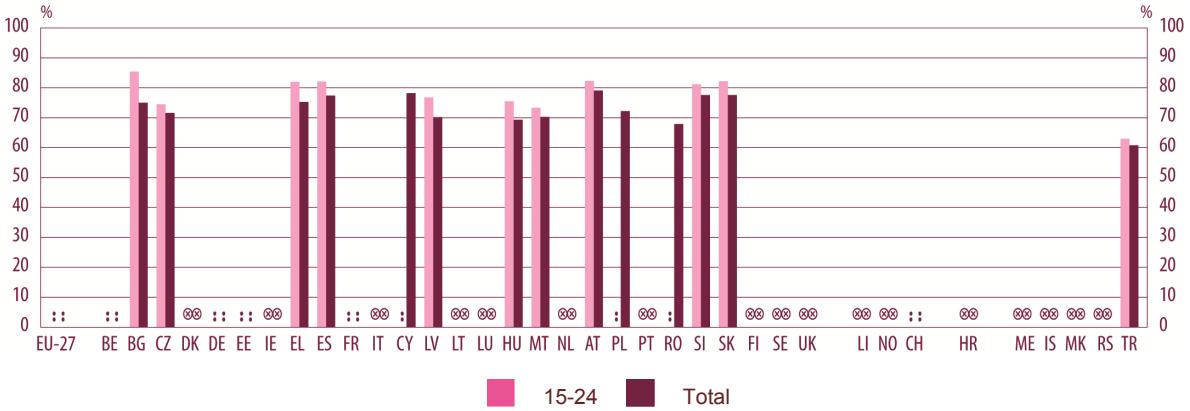
Figure 6-N shows that young people had higher average psychological distress scores in 2008 than the total population, which means that they are less affected by psychological distress. Within the EU-27, countries with the lowest average psychological distress scores among young people were the Czech Republic and Malta. Average psychological distress scores are lower among young women than among young men.

123 WHO Regional Office for Europe 2009, p. 41.

124 WHO Regional Office for Europe 2011.

Figure 6-N Average psychological distress scores, by country, 2008

a) by age



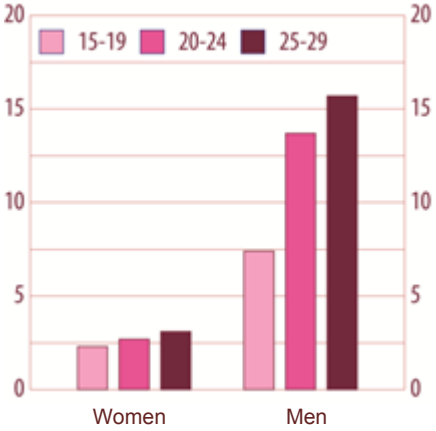
b) young people (aged 15-24), by sex

Source: Eurostat – EHIS. Online datacode: not available
Notes: Data collection took place in different years for participating countries: EE, AT: 2006; SI: 2007; BE, BG, CZ, FR, CY, LV, MT, RO, TR: 2008; DE, EL, ES, HU, PL, SK: 2009.
The Mental Health Inventory (MHI-5) has a score of 0 to 100, where a score of 100 represents optimal mental health. In order to have a comparable scale for all countries, (national) quintile distribution of the score is disseminated. Percentages in these figures represent the average scores by country, by age and by sex.

However, when it comes to the most serious outcome of mental sufferance, suicide, men are more affected than women. In 2009, on average in the EU-27, three times as many young men as women aged 15 to 19 committed suicide (Figure 6-O). This ratio is five to one in the 20 to 24 and 25 to 29 age groups. For young men aged 15 to 24, suicide rates were the highest in the Baltic countries, Ireland and Finland. The largest proportion of women aged 15 to 24 committed suicide in Finland and Sweden. Suicide rates in this age group were the lowest for men in Greece and Luxembourg, for women in Denmark, Greece, Spain, Portugal and Slovakia (Figure 6-P).

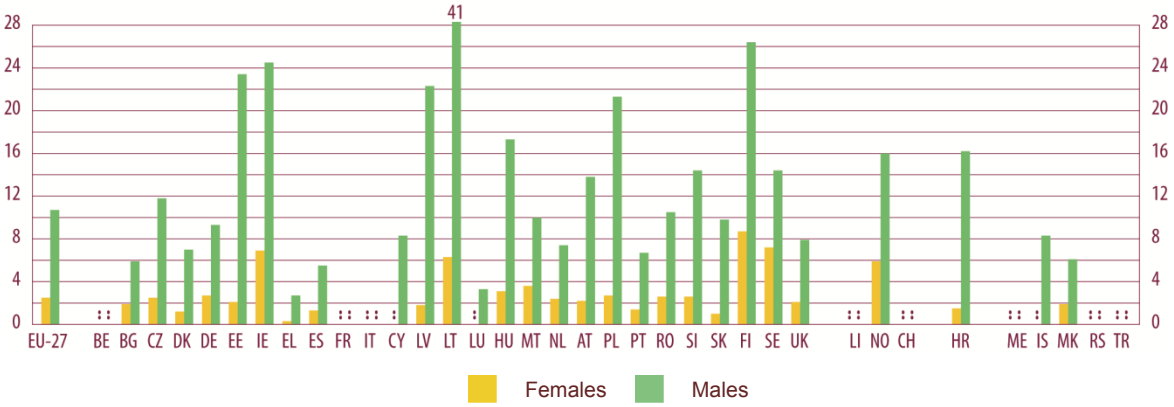
Suicide rates are increasing with age. Among young people, suicide rates are the highest among the 25 to 29 age group and lowest amongst the 15 to 19 year olds (Figure 6-O).

Figure 6-O: EU youth indicator: Death by intentional self-harm, crude death rate (per 100 000 inhabitants), EU-27 average, by age and by sex, 2009



Source: Eurostat. Online datacode: hlth_cd_acdr

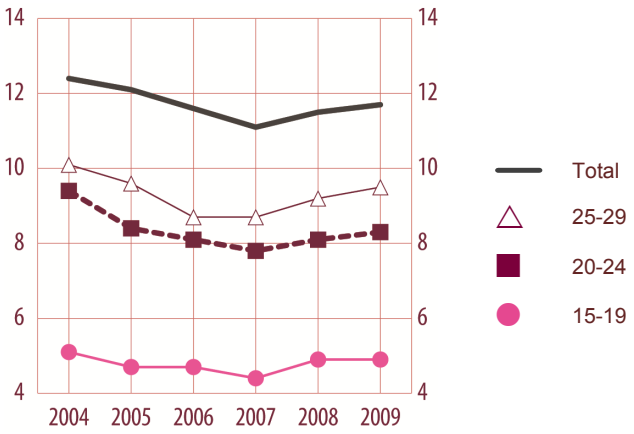
Figure 6-P: EU youth indicator: Death by intentional self-harm of young people (aged 15-24) year olds, crude death rate (per 100 000 inhabitants), by country and by sex, 2009



Source: Eurostat. Online datacode: hlth_cd_acdr.

For all age groups, suicide rates have been relatively stable over time in the EU, decreasing slightly until 2007 and increasing a little in 2008 and 2009 (Figure 6-Q).

Figure 6-Q: EU youth indicator: Death by intentional self-harm, crude death rate (per 100 000 inhabitants), EU-27 average, by age, 2004-2009



Source: Eurostat. Online datacode: hlth_cd_acdr

7. YOUTH PARTICIPATION

7.1. Introduction

The transition from youth to mature adulthood is a complex experience affecting all areas of a person's life. Becoming acquainted with the social and political environment, learning the 'rules of the game' in a democratic society, and developing personal political views are basic and challenging steps in the process. In order to support young people during this transition, all European countries have established 'citizenship education' or 'education in civics' as a subject within the school curriculum. Schools also commonly ensure that pupils and students take part in the management of school activities[125]. Similarly, national or local youth information centres exist in the vast majority of European countries to help circulate information on political and social issues among young people[126].

However important, these initiatives alone are not sufficient to motivate young people to engage in civic and political activities. Like any other group in society, they decide to become involved in political life when they think that their actions will have a real impact[127]. As illustrated in a forthcoming study on youth participation, young citizens must be given real stakes in political decision-making before they will want to take part in it. This is all the more crucial if the aim of increasing participation is to lessen the risk of social exclusion[128].

7.2. Young people's interest in politics

Interest in politics is considered a stepping stone to involvement in community affairs. When interested, people inform themselves about how decisions are taken in policy-making, as well as about the opinions of different stakeholders and available channels of participation. Ultimately, interest can engender willingness to address common problems jointly with other members of the community and take an active part in its affairs.

Political interest is 'the psychological feeling that political participation is worth the opportunity cost of trading off time and commitment from other occupations' (Weatherford 1992, p. 151, as in Kestilä-Kekkonen 2009, p. 153)

Conversely, interest will to some extent depend on real opportunities to participate in a social and political system. As in a virtuous circle, the existence of effective means of participation may motivate people to become interested in public life, which in turn will foster willingness to take advantage of those means.

According to the European Social Survey (ESS), one in four young people (aged 15 to 29) on average was at least 'quite interested' in politics in 2010 (Figure 7-A). However, there were wide differences in levels of interest across countries. In some countries (Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden), around half of the respondents reported to be very interested in politics, in others the corresponding proportion was some 20 % (Spain, Hungary, Portugal, Slovenia). The level of interest in politics was lowest in the Czech Republic (5 %).

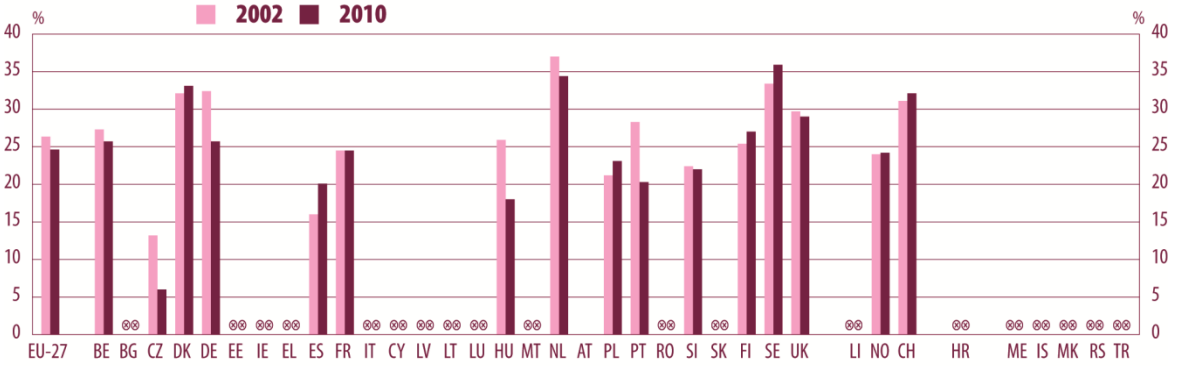
125 The study conducted by Eurydice on the topic offers EU-wide analysis of the variety of education-related policies and practice in 33 European countries (Eurydice/EACEA 2012a).

126 Youth Partnership 2011b.

127 SALTO-Youth 2009.

128 European Commission 2012d (forthcoming).

Figure 7-A: Share of young people (aged 15-29) claiming to be 'very' or 'quite' interested in politics, by country, 2002 and 2010

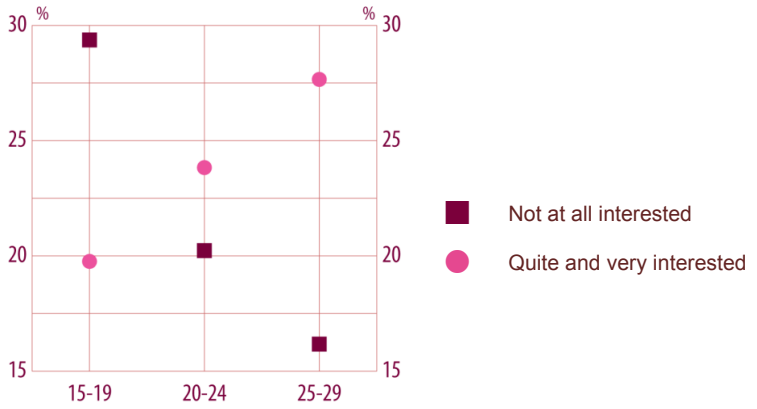


Source: European Social Survey (ESS) 2002 and 2010
Note: The chart covers the 16 countries for which data exist for 2002 and 2010.

The ESS data show trends in young people's level of interest in politics in recent years. From this survey, it appears that the proportion of those interested in politics was fairly similar in 2002 and 2010. It would also seem that, in the intervening period and in the countries considered at least, there is little evidence for the much publicised claim that young people have lost interest in politics. Yet, there were national variations: the proportions of young people in the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary and Portugal who were interested in political developments in their countries fell significantly by 8 percentage points on average. Spain and Sweden are the two countries in which the share of young people claiming to be 'very' and 'quite' interested increased significantly (by around 5 percentage points).

Clearly, the time span of the 15 to 29 age group is very long when considering the changes in life experience that impact on a person's social and political commitments. Trends in interest in politics among the 15 to 19, 20 to 24 and 25 to 29 age groups suggest that political awareness increases with age (Figure 7-B). It would appear that the low interest among the youngest cohort is partly due to them still getting acquainted with the basic 'rules of the game' (through interaction with family and friends, and targeted instruction in school) and are generally not being entitled to vote until the age of 18.

Figure 7-B: Share of young people claiming to be 'very', 'quite' and 'not at all interested' in politics, by age, 2010



Source: ESS 2010
Note: Countries covered by the survey: Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, France, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden, the United Kingdom.

In accordance with this age pattern, the overall level of interest amongst young people is not as high as that of older people. In 2010, 33 % of people aged over 30 were at least 'quite interested' in politics, compared to 25 % of those aged between 15 and 29[129].

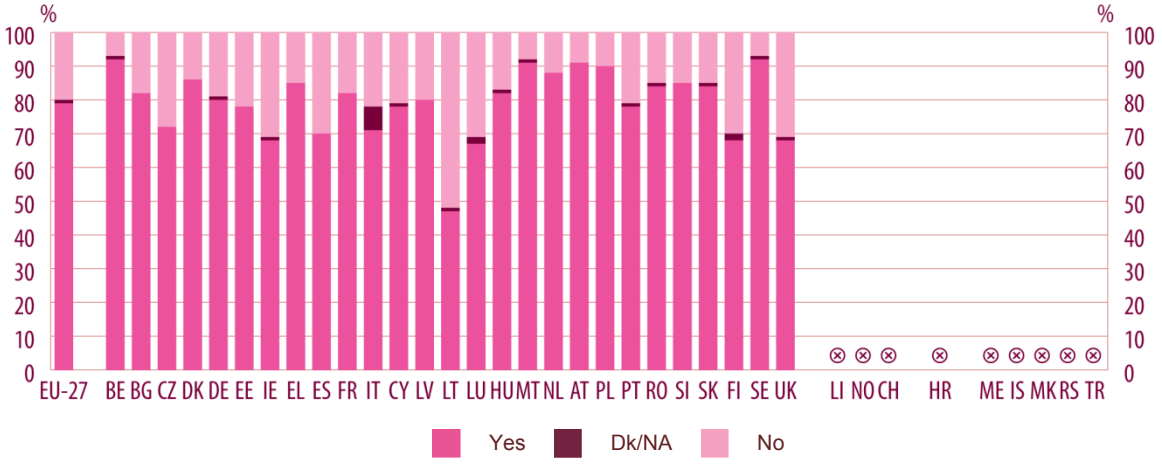
However, before concluding that young Europeans are disenchanted with politics and less keen to take a stand than older people, it should be borne in mind once more that interest in politics does not emerge in a vacuum. It partly depends on the opportunities for involvement, for which young people's preferences might differ from those of their elders. Indeed, some opportunities might be more likely to motivate certain stakeholders in society rather than others, and vice versa. It is therefore important to identify which forms of participation best meet the demands of young people, for a more reliable idea of how great and potentially effective their participation will be.

7.3. Young people's participation in representative democracy: voting, standing in elections and joining a political party

Competitive elections are fundamental mechanisms in the functioning of a democratic system. Choosing from amongst the programmes of various political parties and selecting representatives for public office are basic actions on the part of any fully engaged citizen. This is why election turnout is usually referred to as a measure of civic participation.

According to responses published in Eurobarometer 'Youth on the Move' (2011), some 80 % of eligible voters aged between 16 and 29 voted in local, regional, national or EU elections in the preceding three years (Figure 7-C). Lithuania was the only country in which less than half of young respondents said they voted. In other countries – the Czech Republic, Ireland, Spain, Italy, Luxembourg, Finland and the United Kingdom – the proportions of young people who took part in elections (67-72 %) were also lower than the EU-27 average.

Figure 7-C: EU youth indicator: Participation of young people (aged 15-30) in elections at the local, regional, national or EU level, by country



Source: 2011 Flash Eurobarometer 319a 'Youth on the Move'
Note: The question was 'During the last 3 years, did you vote in any political election at the local, regional, national or EU level? If you were, at that time, not eligible to vote, please say so.'
Base: Respondents who were old enough to vote, % by country.

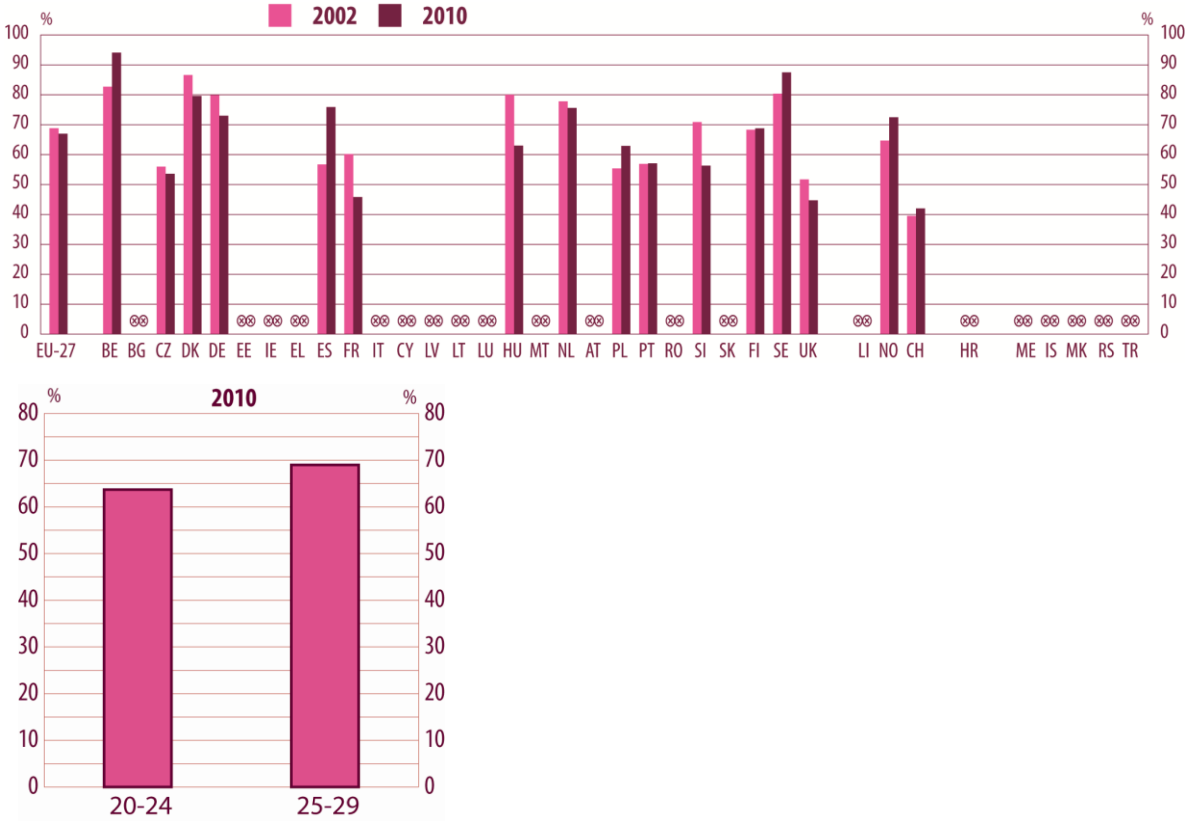
The Eurobarometer provides information on the sociological profile of young people who have voted in recent elections. Older respondents in the youth population said they had voted more often than younger ones. For example, while 78 % of 20 to 24 year olds had voted in

129 ESS5-2010, ed.1.0.

local, regional, national or EU elections in the preceding three years, 82 % of 25 to 29 year olds had done so. Educational attainment also seems to play a role in the turnout of young voters: 88 % of those who had completed higher education said they voted, compared to only half of those with lower secondary qualifications. Having a disability seems to discourage young people from voting: only 54 % of those with a disability said they voted, compared to the overall average of 79 %[130].

ESS data series show that, on average, voting turnout among young people in 16 European countries has changed little over the last decade, despite some national variations (Figure 7-D). In Belgium, Spain, Poland, and Sweden, they took part in elections more often in 2010 than in 2002, while in France, Hungary and Slovenia the percentages significantly declined.

Figure 7-D: Share of the youth population (aged 20-29) who voted in the most recent national elections, by country and by age, 2002-2010



Source: ESS 2002 and 2010
Note: The chart considers countries in which data exist for 2002 and 2010. The percentage of respondents who said they voted at the most recent national elections is calculated on the basis of the total number of respondents eligible to vote.

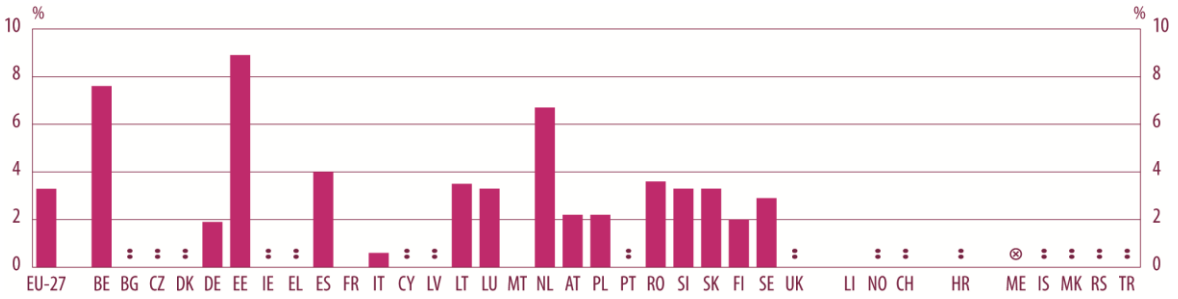
As with the level of interest in politics, the percentage of young people voting in elections is significantly lower than that of their elders (70 % in the EU-27)[131]. The longer transition from childhood to adulthood discussed in Chapter 3 may help to explain why: as many accomplishments of adulthood now occur later in life (completing education, securing employment, achieving economic independence and self-sufficiency), political awareness might also emerge later. However, it is debatable whether voting in elections really offers (or is perceived to offer) young people enough for them to stimulate their active participation. Here, data on young representatives elected to national parliaments can provide some insight

130 2011 Flash Eurobarometer 319a 'Youth on the Move'.

131 ESS5-2010, ed.1.0.

into how responsive institutions are to youth interests. Information collected by the European Knowledge Centre on Youth Policy (EKCYP) shows that the average proportion of members of parliament aged under 30 in Europe is low (3 %) (Figure 7-E).

Figure 7-E: Share of young members of national parliaments (aged under 30), 2011

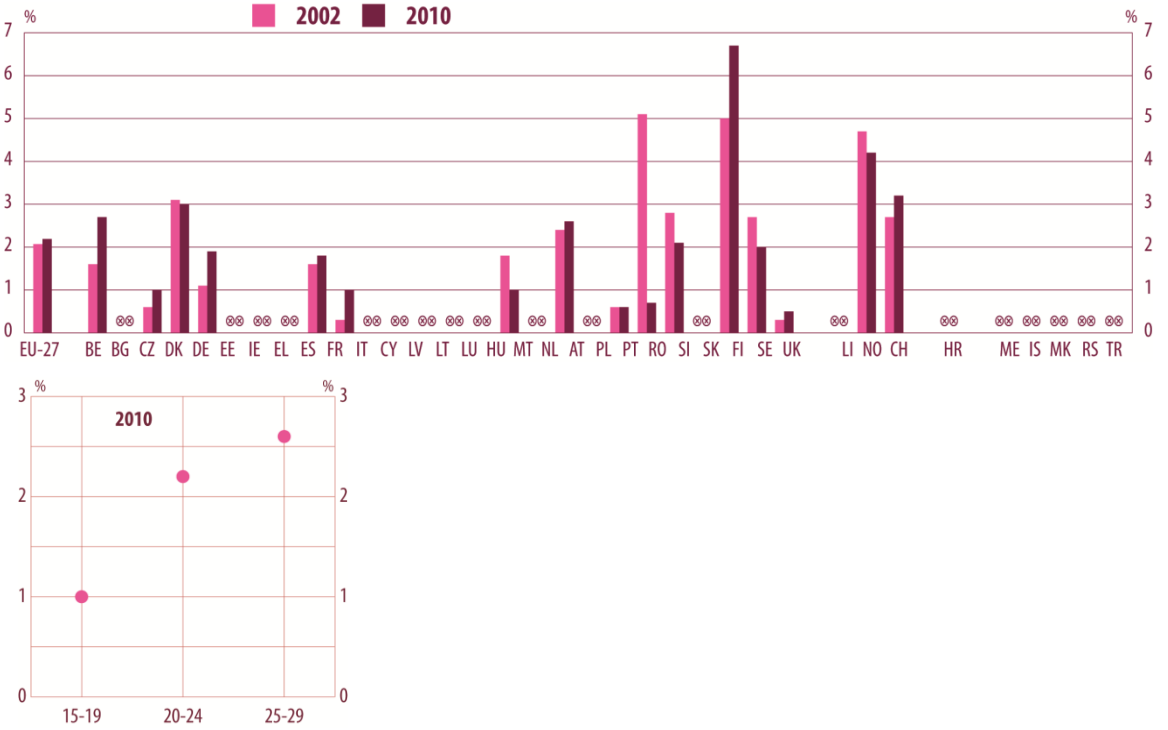


Source: European Knowledge Centre on Youth Policy (EKCYP) 2011

Of the countries for which data is available, only in three (Belgium, Estonia and the Netherlands) do young Members of Parliament constitute a significant share (around 7 %) of the total membership of the parliament. The situation in the European Parliament is similar. Those aged under 30 constitute 3.4 % of the members elected in 2009. Hence, information from national and European parliaments suggests that opportunities for young people to be represented by their peers are limited, and so they are not strongly motivated to take part in elections.

The weak presence of young people in representative institutions is partly attributable to the fact that relatively few of them join political parties – an average European level proportion of 2 % (Figure 7-F).

Figure 7-F: Membership of political parties amongst young people (aged 15-29), by countries and by age, 2002 and 2010



Source: ESS 2002 and 2010
Note: The chart considers countries for which data exist for 2002 and 2010.

The average percentage share of young people in Europe who are members of a political party is less than half that of their elders (4.5 %)[132]. This is in line with data showing that people within the consecutive age groups of the youth population (aged 15 to 29 as a whole) are more willing to join parties as they get older. As with electoral participation, an age divide seems to affect the level of party membership.

If political parties and elections were the only means of being politically active, one might conclude that young people are far more dissatisfied with and uninterested in politics than their elders. Yet other means of taking an active part in society exist and arguably provide for more spontaneous and informal participation. Indeed, some research concludes that personal commitment and faith in political involvement are stronger amongst young people than in other age groups[133]. The fact that their turnout at elections and membership of political parties are relatively weak might not be a symptom of disinterest but of their preference for other forms of participation.

7.4. Other forms of participation by young people, ranging from engagement in civil society to public demonstrations

The previous section suggests that traditional channels of representative democracy only partially stimulate young people's interest in active participation. Voting at elections and joining political parties seem to have a limited appeal, particularly amongst the youngest members of the 15 to 29 age group. However, interest and involvement in political and social activities are not confined to the sphere of elections and political parties. Less institutionalised and structured forms of participation, such as contributing to the work of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or community-driven initiatives and joining social movements, are also worthwhile forms of social engagement which – according to some research – are increasingly appealing to young people[134].

The Flash Eurobarometer 'Youth on the Move' confirms the preference of young people for being active in non-governmental and local associations rather than in political parties. Twice as many respondents as those who were active in a political party said they were involved in the work of an NGO, or a local organisation aimed at improving the local community or environment (Figure 7-G).

132 ESS5-2010, ed.1.0.

133 Këstila-Kekkonen 2009, pp. 145-165; Vinken 2005, pp. 147-157.

134 For example Hoikkala 2009, Barber 2010, Gaiser et al. 2010, Santo et al. 2010.

Figure 7-G: EU youth indicator: Share of young people (aged 15-30) who have participated in the activities of various organisations, by country, 2011

Source: 2011 Flash Eurobarometer 319b 'Youth on the Move'
Note: The question was 'Have you in the past year participated in any activities of the following organisations?'
Base: % 'yes' answers by country.

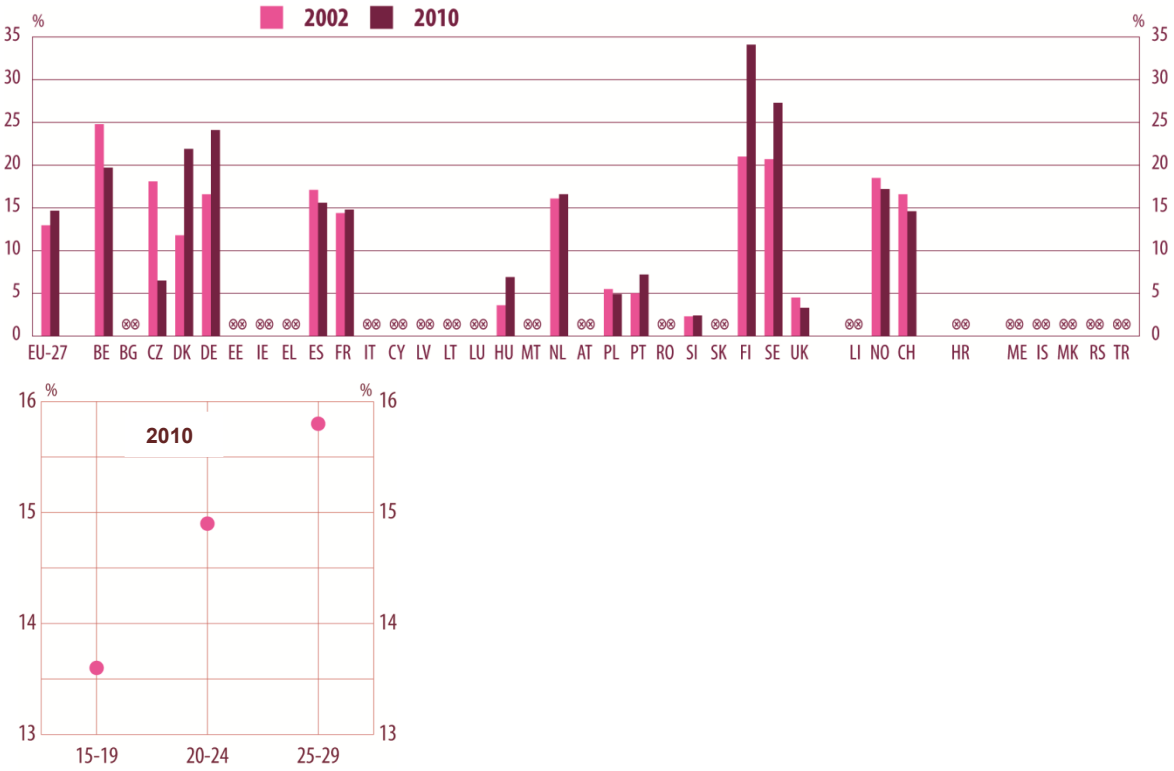
The share of young people participating in a local organisation is particularly high in Ireland (almost 25 %). Italy, Malta, Sweden and the United Kingdom are the countries with the highest level of participation in NGOs (over 10 %). Bulgaria Spain and Slovakia score lowest for the three categories of organisation identified in Figure 7-G. Furthermore, in contrast to the over-representation of older people in the membership of political parties, participation levels of young people in other forms of social engagement are similar to the corresponding proportions among other age groups: at European level, about the same percentages of young people and of people above the age of 30 (15 % and 15.5 % respectively) said they were involved in the activities of civil society organisations[135]. These results match recent studies arguing that youth is increasingly disillusioned with traditional political structures because the latter are perceived as unresponsive to young people's interests. They therefore often consider that involvement in community activities and small-scale organisations is far easier and more effective[136].

In line with these findings, the proportion of young people working for civil society organisations and associations has slightly increased over the last decade (Figure 7-H). This trend is mainly due to the big increases in Denmark, Germany, Finland and Sweden, while the situation in the majority of other countries has changed little. Yet a few others (in particular the Czech Republic) witnessed a significant decrease. As in the case of party membership, there are significant differences between the propensities of different age groups within the youth population to be active members of organisations (Figure 7-H). Older individuals tend to participate to a larger extent.

135 ESS5-2010, ed.1.0.

136 Harris et al. 2010, pp. 9-32.

Figure 7-H: Share of young people (aged 15-29) working in civil society organisations and associations, by country and by age, 2002 and 2010

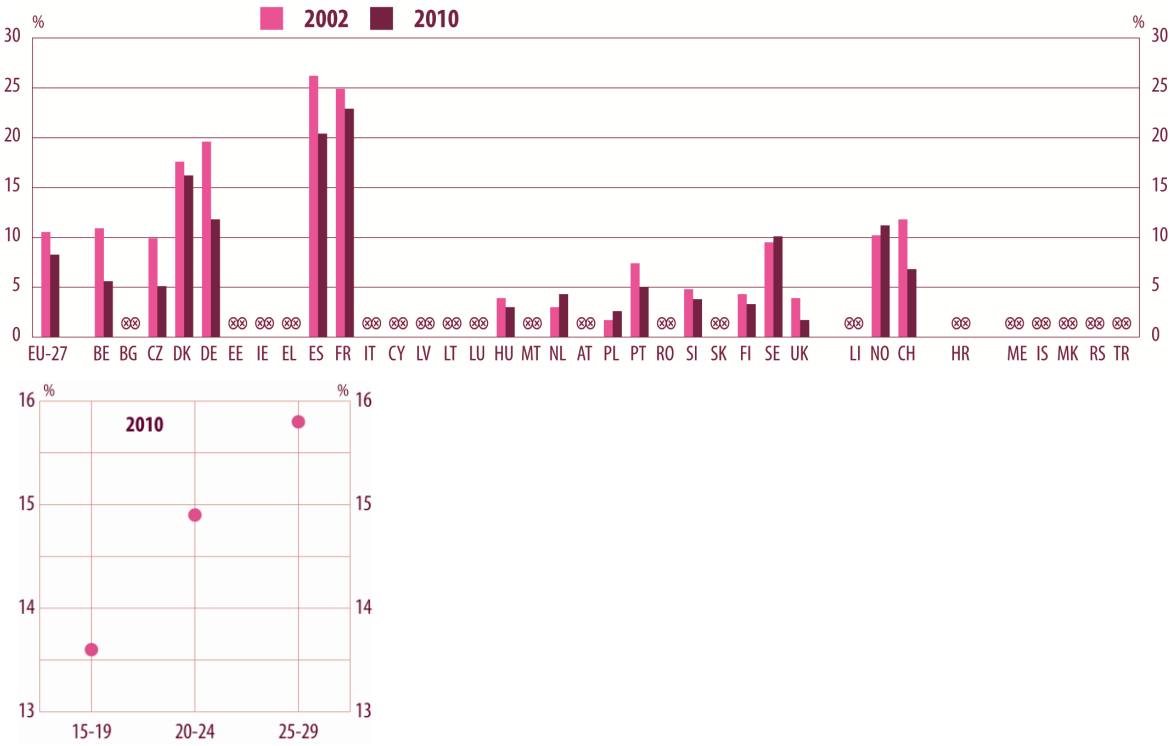


Source: ESS 2002 and 2010
Notes: The chart considers countries for which data exist for 2002 and 2010.
The question was 'There are different ways of trying to improve things in [country] or help prevent things from going wrong. During the last 12 months, have you worked in another organisation or association?'

Frustration with institutional forms of political participation can also result in people expressing their concerns and interests more or less independently of organised structures like political parties or NGOs. In this context, street demonstrations, protests, or the occupation of public spaces become means of looser and more informal involvement in society and in politics, which many young people find worth experiencing[137]. Indeed, they appear to resort to such activities much more often than their elders. For example, according to ESS data, 8 % of youth respondents in 14 EU Member States – as opposed to 5 % of respondents aged 30 and over – joined lawful public demonstrations in the 12 months prior to the survey[138]. Notable differences also exist between the constituent age groups of the total youth population. The youngest group, which joins political parties the least, appears to take part most frequently in public demonstrations. In comparison, participation amongst respondents aged between 25 and 29 is two percentage points lower (Figure 7-I).

137 Feixa et al. 2009, pp. 421-442.
138 ESS5-2010, ed.1.0.

Figure 7-I: Participation of young people (aged 15-29) in lawful public demonstrations, by country and by age, 2002 and 2010



Source: ESS 2002 and 2010
Note: The chart considers countries for which data exist for 2002 and 2010.

7.5. Fresh opportunities for participation offered by the new media

Young people have been at the forefront in using the Internet and its applications (for example Facebook and Twitter) as means of interpersonal communication. The virtual spaces frequented by young people such as online forums, chats, social networks and blogs, serve the same basic function as the physical ones they replace, by establishing collective interaction around common interests. They thus constitute a great resource for political and social engagement, which the young have been fastest to acknowledge and exploit.

In this context, new media can be used in a variety of ways: to become familiar with and exchange ideas on social and political topics; to expose violations of political and social rights that would otherwise go unreported; to initiate and organise protests and demonstrations around shared objectives; and to establish contacts and exchanges with public authorities. It is also important to note that online and offline modes of participation are usually convergent, with one reinforcing the other[139]. In other words, young people who are already active offline can take advantage of the new media to expand their participation (for example, by joining transnational networks). At the same time, young people who start to participate online are more likely to respond to offline modes of participation (for example, by learning about the existence of a local association and joining it).

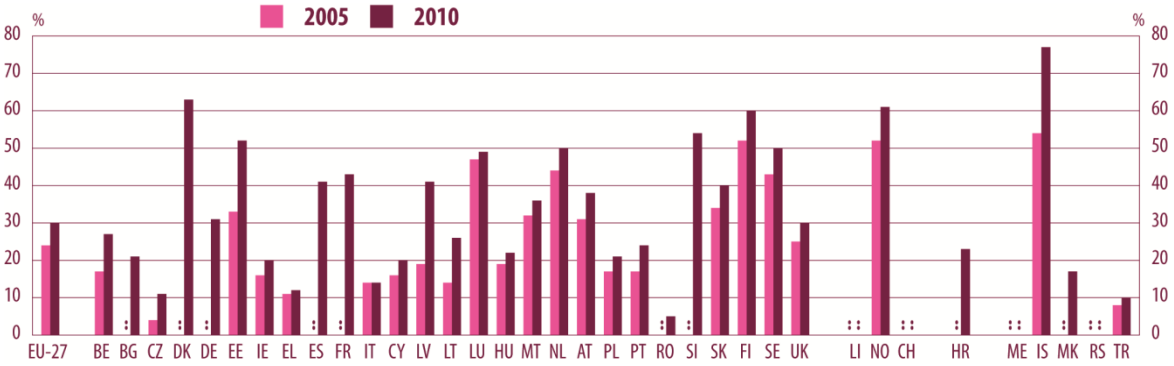
However, the challenges posed by a potential digital divide should be acknowledged. The new media can restrict access to certain networks and areas of knowledge solely to those able to

139 Hirzalla et al. 2010.

use a computer and surf the Internet, thereby replicating the social inequalities of the 'non-virtual' environment.

Several studies indicate the importance of the Internet in fostering social contact and facilitating interaction between citizens and their political representatives through what are usually called 'e-democracy' projects, often targeting young Internet users[140]. Indeed, the percentage of young people contacting public authorities via the Internet has increased in recent years (Figure 7-J). This is clearly due to the increase in Internet use in general, but is also an indication that new forms of political participation can be especially appealing to the young, in comparison to more traditional ones. The Eurostat data point to a geographical divide separating countries in northern Europe, in which young people seem to interact more readily with public authorities via the Internet, from those in southern and eastern Europe, in which they do so much less.

Figure 7-J: EU youth indicator: Share of the population aged 16-24 who have used the Internet (in the last three months) for interaction with public authorities, 2005 and 2010



Source: Eurostat 2010 – Survey on ICT usage in households and by individuals (ISS-HH). Online data code: isoc_pibi_igov

Similarly, young people are active in accessing information, forming opinions and exchanging views on political and social issues within Internet communities (Figure 7-K). Unfortunately, comparison over time is not possible because data is not available for earlier years. However it can be assumed that the percentage followed a trend similar to that of Internet contacts with public authorities.

Figure 7-K: EU youth indicator: Share of the population aged 16-24 who have used the Internet (in the last three months) to access or post opinions on civic and political issues via websites, 2011

Source: Eurostat 2011 – ISS-HH. Online data code: isoc_ci_ac_i

National trends vary substantially. While some Member States report proportions of some 40 % or over (Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, and Finland), others register very low levels of Internet use for exchanging political views (Belgium, Cyprus, Poland, Slovakia and Sweden). The percentages of young people active via these 'new' forms of participation are

140 Hirzalla et al. 2010.

generally significant and bear comparison with or surpass those reported for their elders. Among respondents to the Eurostat survey who were young (aged 16 to 24) and older (25 to 64), about one third in each case said they used the Internet to contact public authorities, while 24 % and 14 % respectively said they used it to join blogs and forums to discuss political topics[141].

As in the case of non-institutional forms of participation, young people seem to prefer interaction via the Internet and its services to traditional kinds of political participation. The potential offered by this form of civic involvement for mobilising the interest and commitment of young people should be fully acknowledged and supported.

[141] Eurostat – online data code: isoc_ci_ac_i.