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The situation of young people in the European Union

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Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions**

on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2021

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The situation of young people in the European Union

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Contents

Table of Figures	4
Abbreviations	7
Introduction	9
1. Youth population	14
1.1. Trends in the youth population	14
1.2. Youth migration among third and European countries	17
1.2.1. Patterns in youth migration	18
1.2.2. Impact of migration on demographic trends	21
Conclusions	23
2. Youth engagement in society	24
2.1. Voting in political elections	24
2.2. Other forms of participation	29
2.3. Volunteering	32
2.4. Digital participation	34
2.5. Support for and trust in national and EU institutions	36
Conclusions	38
3. Employment and entrepreneurship	40
3.1. Facing labour market challenges: youth unemployment	40
3.1.1. Youth unemployment trends to 2019	40
3.1.2. Who faces the biggest challenges? Youth unemployment by educational attainment and gender	44
3.1.3. Youth unemployment and the COVID-19 crisis	46
3.2. Patterns of youth employment	48
3.2.1. Temporary contracts	49
3.2.2. Part-time work	51
3.2.3. Self-employment and entrepreneurship	53
3.3. Labour market digitalisation	55
Conclusions	57
4. Youth on the move	59
4.1. Going on a learning experience abroad	60
4.2. Reasons for considering but not participating in a learning experience abroad	62
4.3. Reasons for not considering a learning experience abroad	64
4.4. Participation in Erasmus+ learning mobility actions	67
4.5. Participation in the European Solidarity Corps	71
Conclusions	72

5. Youth and the digital world	74
5.1. Media literacy and online safety	74
5.2. Use of the Internet	76
5.2.1. E-government: interacting with public authorities	77
5.2.2. E-commerce and collaborative economy	79
5.2.3. Digital divides	83
5.3. Online information and communication during the COVID-19 pandemic	85
Conclusions	88
6. Education and training	89
6.1. Non-formal learning	89
6.2. Digital skills	91
6.2.1. Level of digital skills	91
6.2.2. Digital skills and digital divide	93
6.3. E-learning	95
6.3.1. E-learning among young Europeans	95
6.3.2. Inequalities in the access to e-learning	97
Conclusions	99
7. Health and wellbeing	100
7.1. Psychological distress	101
7.2. Relational well-being	104
7.3. Impact of COVID-19 on the psychological wellbeing of youth and the total population	107
Conclusions	108
8. Social inclusion	109
8.1. Moving towards independence: young people leaving the parental home	109
8.2. Poverty, low work intensity and deprivation	111
8.2.1. The risk of poverty and social exclusion	111
8.2.2. The risk of poverty	113
8.2.3. Households with very low work intensity	115
8.2.4. Severe material deprivation	116
8.3. Young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs)	118
8.4. Social inclusion and the COVID-19 pandemic	120
Conclusions	123
9. Youth work	125
9.1. Quality assurance	126
9.1.1. Formal mechanisms: professional standards and public funding requirements	126
9.1.2. Informal modalities: evaluations and self-assessment	127
9.2. Digital youth work	128
9.2.1. Enhancing young people' inclusion in digital youth work	129
9.2.2. Strengthening the digital competences of youth workers	129
Conclusions	131
References	132
Annexes	143
Dashboard of EU youth indicators	143

Table of Figures

1. Youth population	14
Figure 1.1: Share of young people (15-19, 20-24 and 25-29) in the total population, by country, 2019	15
Figure 1.2: Trend in the share of young people in the total population (15-29), by country, 2010 and 2019	15
Figure 1.3: Projected trends in the number of young people (15-29) and total population, EU-27, 2021-2070	16
Figure 1.4: Projected trend in the share of young people (15-29), EU-27, 2021-2070	17
Figure 1.5: Share of young people (15-29) who immigrated (either from a third or a European country), and share of young people who emigrated from a European country, by country, 2019	18
Figure 1.6: Projected trend in the number of young people (15-29), with and without migration, EU-27, 2021-2070	19
Figure 1.7: Share of young people (15-29) in the total population of emigrants in the reference year by country, 2019	20
Figure 1.8: Projected trend in the number of young people (15-29), with and without migration, EU-27, 2021-2070	21
2. Youth engagement in society	24
Figure 2.1: Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) who had voted at least once (2019) and who had voted in the previous 3 years (December 2014) by country	25
Figure 2.2: Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) who had voted at least once in a local, national or European election by characteristic, 2019	26
Figure 2.3: Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) who declared having voted in the 2014 and 2019 elections to the European Parliament by country and age group	27
Figure 2.4: Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) with a (very or fairly) positive view of the EU by country, 2019	28
Figure 2.5: Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) who reported having participated in certain activities, EU-28, 2019	29
Figure 2.6: Most common forms of participation among young people (%) by country (excluding voting and volunteering), 2019	33
Figure 2.7: Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) involved in organised voluntary activities by country, 2019 and 2014	32
Figure 2.8: Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) involved in organised voluntary activities by characteristic, 2019	33
Figure 2.9: Geographical scope of the voluntary activities (%), EU-28, 2019 and 2014	33
Figure 2.10: Proportions of young people (aged 16-29) who participated in online consultations, voting and websites in relation to civic or political issues in the past year by country, 2019 and 2015	34
Figure 2.11: Proportions of young people (aged 16-29) who participated in online consultations, voting and websites in relation to civic or political issues in the past year by characteristic, 2019	35
Figure 2.12: Young people's trust in their country's government and in the EU, satisfaction with democracy and image of the EU (%), 2019, 2015 and 2020	37
Figure 2.13: Proportions of people (very or fairly) satisfied with measures to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020	38
3. Employment and entrepreneurship	40
Figure 3.1: Unemployment rates and ratios among young people (15-29) compared with the prime working-age group (25-54), EU-28, 2019	41
Figure 3.2: Unemployment rates and ratios for 15- to 29-year-olds by country, 2019	42
Figure 3.3: Youth unemployment rates (15- to 29-year-olds), compared with the prime working-age group (25-54), EU-28, 2013-2019	43
Figure 3.4: Changes in unemployment rates between 2015 and 2019 among young people aged 15-29, by country	43
Figure 3.5: Unemployment rates among young people (20-29), by educational attainment, EU-28, 2019	44
Figure 3.6: Comparison of youth unemployment rates among 20- to 29-year-olds with low and medium levels of education by country, 2019	45
Figure 3.7: Comparison of youth unemployment rates for men and women aged 15-29 by country, 2019	46
Figure 3.8: Unemployment rates among young people (15-29) compared with the prime working-age group (24-54), EU-27, 2019 and 2020	47
Figure 3.9: Change in unemployment rates (percentage points) among young people aged 15-29 between 2019 and 2020 by country	48
Figure 3.10: Youth unemployment and employment rates of 15- to 29-year-olds, by country, 2019	49

Figure 3.11:	Young temporary employees (15-29) as a percentage of the total number of employees in the same age group, by country, 2019	50
Figure 3.12:	Part-time employment among young people (15-29) as a percentage of total youth employment, compared with the prime working-age group (25-54), by gender, EU-28, 2019	52
Figure 3.13:	Part-time employment as a percentage of total employment among young people aged 15-29, including the percentage of involuntary part-time workers, by country, 2019	53
Figure 3.14:	Self-employment as a percentage of total employment among young people (20-29) compared with the prime working-age group (25-54), by gender, EU-28, 2019	54
Figure 3.15:	Self-employment as a percentage of total employment for young people (25-29), by country, 2015 and 2019	55
Figure 3.16:	Percentages of young people (16-29) and people in the prime working-age group (25-54) who used the internet to search for a job or send an application, by country, 2019	57

4. Youth on the move 59

Figure 4.1:	Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) having participated or not in a learning experience abroad by country, 2019	60
Figure 4.2:	Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) reporting having gone abroad for a learning experience of at least 2 weeks by characteristic, 2019	61
Figure 4.3:	Reasons given by young people (aged 15-30) for not taking part in a learning experience abroad despite having considered it (%), EU-28, 2019	62
Figure 4.4:	Reasons given by young people (aged 15-30) for not taking part in a learning experience abroad despite having considered it (%) by country, 2019	63
Figure 4.5:	Reasons given by young people (aged 15-30) for not considering a learning experience abroad (%), EU-28, 2019	65
Figure 4.6:	Reasons given by young people (aged 15-30) for not considering a learning experience abroad (%) by country, 2019	66
Figure 4.7:	Numbers of learners per 10 000 young people (aged 15-29) who participated in Erasmus+ mobility actions in HE and VET (for at least 1 month) starting in 2019	68
Figure 4.8:	Percentage differences between 2015 and 2019 in the numbers of learners starting an Erasmus+ mobility action of at least 1 month in HE and VET	69
Figure 4.9:	Numbers of learners starting an Erasmus+ mobility action in 2019 and 2020 by gender and duration	70
Figure 4.10:	Numbers of young people per 10 000 population (aged 15-29) who took part in a volunteering project or partnership (individually or in a team) funded by the ESC starting in 2019	71
Figure 4.11:	Percentage differences between the number of young volunteers starting an activity in the ESC in 2019 and the number of young volunteers starting an activity in the ESC in 2020	72

5. Youth and the digital world 74

Figure 5.1:	National strategies on media literacy and online safety, September 2020	75
Figure 5.2:	Shares of young people (16-29) and the total population who used the internet daily, by country, 2017 and 2019	77
Figure 5.3:	Shares of young people (16-29) and of the total population who used the internet to interact with public authorities during the previous year, by country, 2017 and 2019	78
Figure 5.4:	Shares of young people (16-29) and of the total population who made an online purchase during the previous 3 months, by country, 2017 and 2019	80
Figure 5.5:	Shares of young people (16-29) and of the total population who sold goods or services online, by country, 2017 and 2019	80
Figure 5.6:	Shares of young people (16-29) and of the total population who used any website or app to arrange an accommodation from another individual, by country, 2017 and 2019	82
Figure 5.7:	Shares of young people (16-29) and of the total population who used any website or app to arrange a transport service from another individual, by country, 2017 and 2019	82
Figure 5.8:	Share of young people (16-29) who used the internet daily, used it to interact with public authorities, to make an online purchase, to sell goods or services, to arrange accommodation and to arrange a transport service by level of education, EU-28, 2019	84
Figure 5.9:	Level of young people's trust in various sources of information about the COVID-19 pandemic, age group 16-24, by country, 2020	86
Figure 5.10:	Share of young people (16-24) who engage or not in online debates on the measures against COVID-19, by country, 2020	86
Figure 5.11:	Share of young people (16-24) in favour of public authorities using applications on their mobile phone to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, by country, 2020	87

6. Education and training	89
Figure 6.1: Share of young people (15-29) participating in non-formal learning and training by country, 2015 and 2019	90
Figure 6.2: Share of young people (16-29) with low, basic and above-basic levels of digital skills by country, 2019	92
Figure 6.3: Trend in the share of young people (16-29) with above-basic digital skills by country, 2015 and 2019	93
Figure 6.4: Share of young people (16-24) with above-basic digital skills by country and level of educational attainment, 2019	94
Figure 6.5: Share of young people (16-29) using the internet for learning activities by country, 2015, 2019 and first quarter of 2020	96
Figure 6.6: Share of young people (16-24) using the internet for learning activities by level of education and country, 2019	97
Figure 6.7: Country distribution based on the share of young people (16-29) using the internet for e-learning and the share of households without access to the internet because costs are too high, 2019	98
7. Health and wellbeing	100
Figure 7.1: Share of young people (15-24) who found confinement measures difficult to cope with by country, 2020	102
Figure 7.2: Share of young people (16-24) experiencing uncertainty as their most common feeling about the pandemic by country, 2020	103
Figure 7.3: Share of young people (16-24) concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on their health and that of their family and friends by country, 2020	104
Figure 7.4: Share of young people (16-24) talking more often to people than before the pandemic by country, 2020	105
Figure 7.5: Share of young people (16-24) who received help from people and provided help to persons in need by country, 2020	106
Figure 7.6: Psychological distress factors among young people (15-24) and the total population, EU-27, 2020	107
8. Social inclusion	109
Figure 8.1: Estimated average age of young people when leaving the parental household, by country, 2015 and 2019	110
Figure 8.2: Estimated average age of young people when leaving the parental household, by gender, EU-28, 2019	110
Figure 8.3: At-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate of young people (16-29) compared to children (younger than 16) and total population, by country, 2019	112
Figure 8.4: At-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate for young people (16-29), by gender, EU-28, 2015 and 2019	112
Figure 8.5: At-risk-of-poverty rate of young people (16-29) compared to children (younger than 16) and total population by country, 2019	113
Figure 8.6: At-risk-of-poverty rate for young people (16-29) by gender, EU-28, 2015 and 2019	114
Figure 8.7: Proportion of people living in households with very low work intensity by age groups and country, 2019	115
Figure 8.8: Proportions of young people (25-29) living in households with very low work intensity by gender, EU-28, 2015 and 2019	116
Figure 8.9: Severe material deprivation rate for young people (16-29) compared to children (younger than 16) and the total population, by country, 2019	117
Figure 8.10: Severe material deprivation rates for young people (16-29) by gender, EU-28, 2015 and 2019	118
Figure 8.11: Proportion of young people (15-29) not in employment, education or training (NEET rate), by country, 2015 and 2019	119
Figure 8.12: Proportion of young people (15-29) not in employment, education or training (NEET rate) by labour market status, attitudes towards work, and gender, EU-28, 2019	120
Figure 8.13: Proportion of young people (15-29) not in employment, education or training (NEET rate), total and by gender, EU-27, by quarter, 2020	121
Figure 8.14: Proportions of young people (15-29) not in employment, education or training (NEET rate) by labour status and attitude towards work, EU-27, by quarter, 2020	121
9. Youth work	125
Figure 9.1: Prevailing modalities of quality assurance, September 2020	126
Figure 9.2: Measures supporting the digitalisation of youth work, September 2020	128

Abbreviations

Statistical codes

: Data not available

🚫 Not participating

Country codes

EU	European Union Member States ⁽¹⁾	LV	Latvia
BE	Belgium	LT	Lithuania
BG	Bulgaria	LU	Luxembourg
CZ	Czechia	HU	Hungary
DK	Denmark	MT	Malta
DE	Germany	NL	Netherlands
EE	Estonia	AT	Austria
IE	Ireland	PL	Poland
EL	Greece	PT	Portugal
ES	Spain	RO	Romania
FR	France	SI	Slovenia
HR	Croatia	SK	Slovakia
IT	Italy	FI	Finland
CY	Cyprus	SE	Sweden

Non-EU Member States – Erasmus+ programme countries until December 2020 ⁽²⁾

IS	Iceland	RS	Serbia
LI	Liechtenstein	TR	Turkey
MK	North Macedonia	UK	United Kingdom
NO	Norway		

⁽¹⁾ Alphabetical order according to country's name in national language.

⁽²⁾ Alphabetical order according to codes.

Other abbreviations

COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
EACEA	European Education and Culture Executive Agency
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ESC	European Solidarity Corps
EU	European Union
EU-27	27 Member States of the EU from 1 February 2020
EU-28	28 Member States of the EU until 31 January 2020
HE	Higher Education
ICT	Information and communication technology
ILO	International Labour Organisation
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
LFS	Labour Force Survey
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
p.p.	percentage points
SILC	Statistics on Income and Living Conditions
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UOE	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation Institute for Statistics (UNESCO-UIS), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the Statistical Office of the European Union (Eurostat)
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WHO	World Health Organization

Introduction

Part two of the EU Youth Report presents data and information on the situation of young people in Europe.

This part of the report builds on the Dashboard of EU youth indicators, a selection of 77 indicators, which measure the most crucial aspects of young people's lives in Europe. The dashboard was first released by the European Commission in spring 2011 and updated in 2021. It is presented as an annex to this document.

Relying on Eurostat data, Eurobarometer surveys and the Youth Wiki ⁽³⁾, the report targets young people between 15 and 29 years of age. The analysis often distinguishes between subgroups aged 15 to 19, 20 to 24, and 25 to 29. In a few cases, data for different youth age cohorts are represented, either because of the specifications of survey data, or because the issue in question affects a particular age group. In addition, for some indicators, data for children (under 16 years of age), older age groups and the total population are also included.

The reference year of the report is 2019, for which all data were available at the time of drafting (spring 2021). As far as the availability of data allows, the report illustrates the main trends occurred since 2015 and – when addressing the impact of COVID-19 pandemic – in the course of 2020.

The analysis covers the EU Member States, the United Kingdom, and the other 2014–2020 Erasmus+ programme countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia and Turkey). As the data collection of Eurobarometer surveys does not include the latter, they are excluded from the relevant graphs. In consideration of the fact that the United Kingdom was an EU Member State until the end of 2019, the EU-28 average is used in the graphs and in the analytical text. Nonetheless, figures for EU-27 are added below each graph when available.

Following an introductory chapter on demography, which presents the main trends and projections for the youth and total populations, chapters are dedicated to the topics covered by the core areas identified by the EU Youth Strategy: Engage, Connect, Empower.

Chapter 2 discusses young people participation in political and voluntary activities. The first section analyses young voters' turnout in local, national and European elections. It then looks into young people's involvement in political parties, youth and student organisations, and other forms of activism. Digital participation represents the focus of the third section, while, in its final part, the chapter reports on young people's satisfaction with democracy and trust in national governments and the European Union – in particular during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter 3 illustrates the situation of young Europeans on the labour market, focusing, in its first section, on unemployment and on the most vulnerable groups in the youth population. It also relates the consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The second part of the chapter is dedicated to a discussion of the main patterns of youth employment and to the digitalisation of the labour market.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of young people's participation in learning experiences abroad, including volunteering. The first part of the chapter looks at youth mobility in a broad sense, also covering the reasons

⁽³⁾ The Youth Wiki is the platform reporting on national policies in the youth field. To access the most recent developments, see its website: <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki>. [Accessed on 28.05.2021]

why some people do not take advantage of such opportunity. The second part of the chapter focuses on youth participation in two specific European programmes, namely Erasmus+ learning mobility and the European Solidarity Corps.

The impact of digitalisation on several aspect of young people's lives is dealt with in Chapter 5. The chapter begins with an overview of the strategies established in European countries to reinforce youth media literacy and online safety. The second section explores several online activities conducted by young people and discusses some of the divides provoked and reinforced by digital technologies. The last section reports on young people' trust in digital information during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter 6 is dedicated to education and learning. The first section illustrates the level of participation of young people in non-formal learning and its trend over the last few years. The second section discusses young people's digital skills and the impact of different levels of formal education. The final section considers the increasing use of digital technologies in education and learning.

The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the psychological wellbeing of young people are the focus of chapter 7. The first section addresses the distress provoked by living for long periods in isolation and facing the health risks posed by the pandemic. The second section explores the changes that have occurred in interpersonal relations, and their impact on youth emotional wellbeing. The last section draws a comparison between the responses of young people and those of the general population to the pandemic.

Chapter 8 focuses on young people' social inclusion. It first sets the context by analysing the age at which young people leave the family home and become independent. This is a phase that may trigger economic insecurity and a deterioration of living standards. Then, the analysis addresses the fundamental factors of exclusion: being at risk of poverty, living in households with very low work intensity and experiencing severe material deprivation. The final section brings into focus one of the groups in the youth population that face a high risk of exclusion: those who are not in employment, education or training (NEET).

Quality in youth work is the topic of chapter 9, whose first section illustrates the modalities of quality assurance across European countries. Since quality in youth work goes hand in hand with innovation in its practices to respond to the evolving needs of young people, the second section of the chapter illustrates the measures taken by European countries to support the digitalisation of youth work practices.

EUROPEAN YOUTH: A SNAPSHOT

Crosscutting issues: digitalisation and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

The report investigates various aspects of the situation of young people, focusing on two crosscutting issues: the digitalisation of society and the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over the past decades, **digitalisation** has grown to cover all aspects of life, transforming the way people participate in education and training, experience employment, and participate in society. The benefits are many. Digitalisation makes possible to participate in education and training even in circumstances when face-to-face learning is difficult. Obstacles to accessing learning establishments can be overcome by e-learning.

The importance of this trend has become all the more evident during the lockdowns imposed to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Digitalisation has also changed the nature and modalities of employment. New jobs are created, such as platform work (i.e. work organised through online platforms) and coding (i.e. writing computer programmes). Working conditions change, often allowing for remote and flexible work. Online applications and platforms are used to find job openings, get in touch with prospective employers and participate in recruitment.

Spaces for participation also widen. Online consultations, exchanges with peers and public authorities, and access to information are examples of additional opportunities to take part in society.

At the same time, digital technologies may aggravate conditions of exclusion. Individuals with low levels of formal education and coming from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds risk staying at the margins of the digital society. The lack of adequate digital skills make them vulnerable to exclusion from the world of work, due to the disappearance of some non-automated jobs. Access to online education can also be restricted, as well as opportunities for online participation.

Such challenges become ever more serious as the **COVID-19 pandemic** has dramatically increased the use of digital applications. As the amount of time spent online has considerably increased during lockdowns, the risks of social isolation and exposure to online dangers have become all the more serious. Coupled with strong feelings of uncertainty and worry for health consequences, the pandemic has greatly affected the psychological wellbeing of many young Europeans.

This has also been impacted by the loss of employment that many young people have suffered in the course of the pandemic, caused by the economic crisis that has mostly hit the sectors where many of them work (for example, retail, food and hospitality).

COVID-19 has also curtailed youth mobility due to restrictions in travel and extended periods of confinement. Many Erasmus+ students had to suspend their learning experience abroad, and considerably fewer mobility activities started in the framework of this programme in 2020.

Nonetheless, in face of all these difficulties, young Europeans have demonstrated considerable resilience. They have swiftly adapted to the move from face-to-face to e-learning. They have cultivated relations with family members and friends through online means, as a coping practice against isolation. Moreover, they have shown awareness of the threats posed by news unreliability concerning the pandemic. Children and young people reported being able to detect fake news more promptly than before. This can partly be explained by the increased amount of time spent with family members during the lockdowns and their mediating effect in relation to news content. Indeed, scientific sources of information prove to be the most resorted to by young Europeans.

Main trends: a general improvement since 2015

While stressing the significant challenges caused by COVID-19, it is important to note the many respects in which the situation of young Europeans has improved since 2015.

As mentioned, the growing application of digital technologies in all spheres of society has greatly interested **education and training**. Accompanied by the expansion of online learning – particularly since the start of

2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic has forced learning institutions to close and teaching to move online – it has contributed to an increase in the shares of young Europeans reinforcing their digital skills.

Concomitantly, the report shows that young people have taken advantage of the opportunities offered by **digitalisation** to increasing degrees. The use of the internet has grown, and, in connection, the participation in several online activities such as interacting with public authorities and being active in the collaborative economy. In parallel, national governments in the vast majority of European countries have implemented measures to support digital literacy and ensure safe use of digital media.

Despite the downturn that took place during 2020, on average, youth unemployment has been steadily decreasing until the end of 2019. Linked to the amelioration of their situation in the **labour market**, between 2015 and 2019 the level of **social inclusion** of young Europeans has improved. All indicators analysed in this report – risk of poverty, very low work intensity and severe material deprivation – show positive trends. This also applies to the share of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEETs) – up until 2020, when the economic crisis due to the pandemic pushed many young people out of employment.

Over the years considered, the level of youth **political engagement** also shows several elements of progress. Youth participation in the 2019 European elections was higher than in 2014. The proportion of young people who are satisfied with how democracy works in their countries and in the EU also increased from 2015 to 2019. Participation in voluntary activities has grown considerably, especially in national and international projects.

Young Europeans participate more in volunteering activities and in programmes for learning **mobility**. Since 2015, and until 2019, the total number of learners from Erasmus+ countries augmented.

Another noteworthy trend is the growing efforts by European countries to underpin quality and innovation in **youth work**, in order to support at best the inclusion, participation and wellbeing of young Europeans. The report illustrates how public authorities have established formal mechanisms of quality assurance in youth work projects in the vast majority of countries. Measures have also been established to reinforce the digitalisation of youth work (accelerated by the move to online activities during the COVID-19 pandemic), both by supporting youth workers in strengthening their digital skills and by encouraging youth participation through digital means.

Some challenges persist

Notwithstanding the general improvements, some challenges continue to affect young Europeans, particularly some specific groups.

Young age is frequently associated with worse working and social conditions compared with the total population and older age groups. Unemployment is higher among young people aged between 25 and 29 than among individuals in the prime working age (25–54). The same situation applies to the frequency of temporary contracts. In parallel, young people are at risk of poverty or social exclusion more than the total population.

Such risk tends to affect **young women** in particular. As the report illustrates, young women are more likely to be neither employed, nor in education or training (NEET) than men. A closer look at this gap reveals that women are more often inactive (i.e. not employed and not searching for a job). The fact that women tend to

bear more family responsibilities and hold more precarious positions in the labour market than men concurs to explain the higher rate of inactivity. This is also reflected in the fact that, comparatively, they tend to work part time more frequently and to create their own business to a lesser extent. In addition, the risk of being poor affects young women more than men and the divide is also visible across years. Indeed, the decrease in the proportion of youth at risk of poverty between 2015 and 2019 was bigger for men than for women.

Young people with a **low level of formal education** are often at a disadvantage too. Compared to individuals with higher qualifications, they have less chances of finding a job. This is also related to the lower level of digital skills they tend to have, a fact that, in addition, makes them at risk of exclusion from education and training. As mentioned above, learning has increasingly made use of digital technologies – especially when face-to-face interactions are limited – and this requires an adequate capacity to use digital means.

The level of formal education also influences the level of political and civic participation. Higher levels of formal education tend to be associated with higher rates of participation in elections and in other forms of activism. This is again linked to the lower levels of digital skills possessed by young people with lower attainment, as digital technologies are increasingly applied to participative activities (for example, online consultations, interaction with public authorities, discussion of social and political issues).

Beside age, gender and education, a third potential source of inequalities is represented by **where young Europeans live**. For example, some remote or rural areas do not dispose of a stable broadband internet coverage, thus reducing the possibility for young people to take full advantage of the learning, working and participative opportunities they provide.

The level of urbanisation is not the only factor behind geographical inequalities. In some parts of southern and eastern Europe, young people face comparatively more challenges in various respects. On average, the level of digital skills tend to be lower as well as the use of the internet. Participation in politics, society, volunteering and mobility is also more limited compared to the rest of Europe. In addition, larger shares of young people are faced by the risk of poverty and social exclusion, and unemployment. In this last respect, the gender divide described above is even more marked than elsewhere.

1. Youth population

Although there is no universal definition of the specific period in life when a person is considered to be young, the age range of 15–29 years (used in this chapter and in the rest of the report) is most commonly used across European countries ⁽⁴⁾. Indeed, this is the reference age group used in the European Union Youth Strategy for 2019–2027 and, in general, in EU cooperation in the youth field ⁽⁵⁾.

Clearly, transformations in how the youth age group is defined occur in parallel to developments in society. In some contexts, the youth age group is considered to include people up to their mid-30s, based on the length of time spent in education and when they become independent from the family of origin ⁽⁶⁾.

The transition from adolescence to adulthood represents an important stage in the life course. Over this period, young people complete their education, enter the workforce, become involved in political participation, and acquire new social and family responsibilities ⁽⁷⁾. Some of the implications of this transition are discussed in Chapter 8 on social inclusion.

The first section of this chapter discusses the size of the youth population in Europe, its trends and their impact on the total European population. The second section focuses on the dynamics of youth migration and their influence on the demography of European youth.

1.1. Trends in the youth population

Approximately 86 million young people live in the EU-28 ⁽⁸⁾. On average, one in every six people are aged between 15 and 29 years (Figure 1.1). Young people are equally distributed between the three age cohorts (15–19, 20–24 and 25–29 years), with a slight predominance of the oldest group.

While no variation exists in the share of young men and women, differences between countries in the proportion of young people in the total population are evident. The highest proportions of young people in the EU-28 are found in Cyprus (21.3 %), followed by Malta (19.8 %), and Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden and Ireland (all around 19 %). Conversely, the lowest proportions are found in several southern and eastern Member States (around 15 % in Bulgaria, Slovenia, Italy and Spain, and around 16 % in Czechia, Greece, Latvia, Portugal, Estonia and Romania).

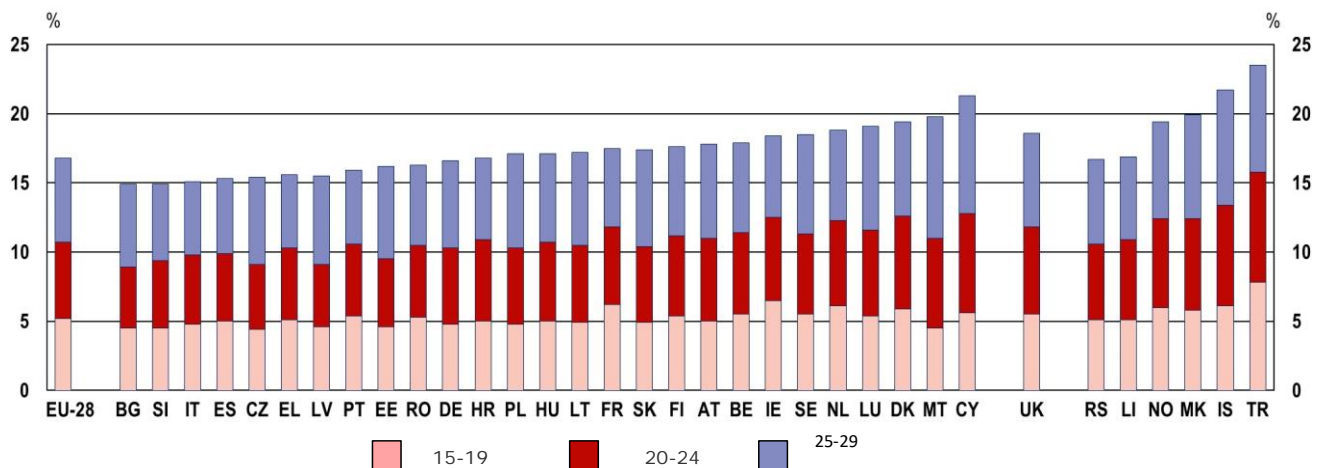
⁽⁴⁾ The national descriptions on the Youth Wiki platform provide further information on how European countries define the youth age group. Available at: <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki>. [Accessed on 09.04.2021]

⁽⁵⁾ The European Youth Strategy and information on EU cooperation in the youth field are available at: https://europa.eu/youth/strategy_en. [Accessed on 09.04.2021]

⁽⁶⁾ Billari, 2004; Belmonte et al., 2020.

⁽⁷⁾ OECD, 2020a.

⁽⁸⁾ Source: Eurostat [yth_demo_010]. Data extracted on 09.03.2021. Data refer to the EU-28. In 2020, 74 million young people lived in the EU-27. Approximately 22 million young people live in the non-EU Erasmus+ countries included in this report (Iceland, Liechtenstein, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia and Turkey).

Figure 1.1: Share of young people (15-19, 20-24 and 25-29) in the total population, by country, 2019

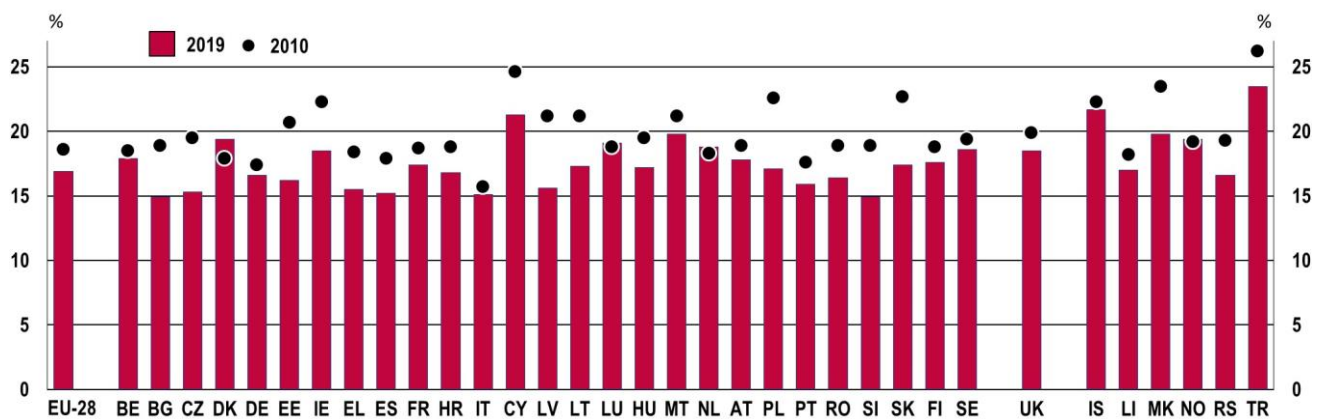
Source: Eurostat [yth_demo_020]. Data extracted on 09.03.2021.

Notes: Countries are ordered by ascending share of total youth population (15-29).

EU-27 averages: 15-29: 16.6 %; 15-19: 5.2 %; 20-24: 5.4 %; 25-29: 6 %.

In the non-EU countries analysed, the highest shares of young people are found in Turkey (23.5 %) and Iceland (21.7 %), while the lowest proportions in Serbia (16.6 %) and Liechtenstein (17 %).

Figure 1.2 illustrates the trends in the proportion of young people in the total population between 2010 and 2019. While, on average, the EU-28 saw a decline of 1.8 percentage points (p.p.), considerable differences exist between countries.

Figure 1.2: Trend in the share of young people in the total population (15-29), by country, 2010 and 2019

Source: Eurostat [yth_demo_020]. Data extracted on 09.03.2021.

Notes: EU-27 averages: 2019: 16.6 %; 2010: 18.4 %.

The Baltic and eastern European regions experienced the highest contractions. The share of young people fell by 5.6 p.p. in Latvia, 4.5 p.p. in Estonia and 3.9 p.p. in Lithuania. In the eastern region, Poland saw the proportion of young people decrease by 5.5 p.p., Slovakia by 5.3 p.p., Czechia by 4.2 p.p., and both Slovenia and Bulgaria by 4 p.p. On the other hand, the proportion of young people increased in Denmark (1.5 p.p.), the Netherlands (0.5 p.p.) and Luxembourg (0.3 p.p.).

Among the different factors that determine the proportion of young people in the total population, the trends over time and differences between countries are migratory dynamics and fertility rates ⁽⁹⁾. Fertility rates are discussed below, while migratory dynamics are discussed in Section 1.2.

Over the last few decades, the number of births has been declining – to different extents – in Europe, resulting in a progressive decrease in the total and youth population ⁽¹⁰⁾. Countries' fertility rates clearly have an impact on the national proportions of young people. Times series from 1991 to 2007 (the span of years when today's young people were born) show that countries currently reporting the lowest proportions of young people are among those that registered the lowest fertility rates over that period. Similarly, countries currently recording the highest proportions of young people had higher fertility rates during this period ⁽¹¹⁾.

There are many reasons behind the variation in fertility rate between countries. For example, staying in education for longer, choosing a 'child-free' lifestyle and taking longer to find a partner all contribute to the birth of fewer children and at a later stage in life ⁽¹²⁾.

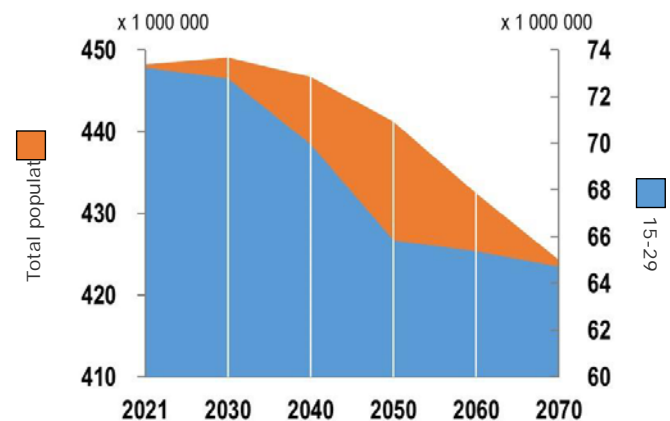
An additional noteworthy factor is a country's economic performance, which, combined with social benefits and family policies, influences the likelihood of young people becoming parents. For example, high levels of youth unemployment, precarious working conditions and downwards mobility result in many young people delaying having children and having fewer children ⁽¹³⁾.

The decline in the number of young people – and, in general, in the total population of Europe – is expected to continue in the future. As illustrated in Figure 1.3, it is predicted that, in the EU-27, the population of young people and the total population will progressively decrease over the next 50 years.

From a current figure of 73 million in 2021, it is estimated that the youth population will decrease to 64 million in 2070. Meanwhile, the total population is projected to decrease by 24 million by 2070. In proportional terms, whereas the size of the total population in the EU-27 will diminish by 5 %, the youth population is expected to shrink by 12 %, more than twice the rate for the total population.

Because of the more pronounced projected decline in the youth population than in the total population, the decrease in the proportion of young people in the total population is expected to continue until 2050. (Figure 1.4).

Figure 1.3: Projected trends in the number of young people (15-29) and total population, EU-27, 2021-2070



Source: Eurostat [proj_19np]. Data extracted on 23.03.2021.

⁽⁹⁾ IMF, 2016.

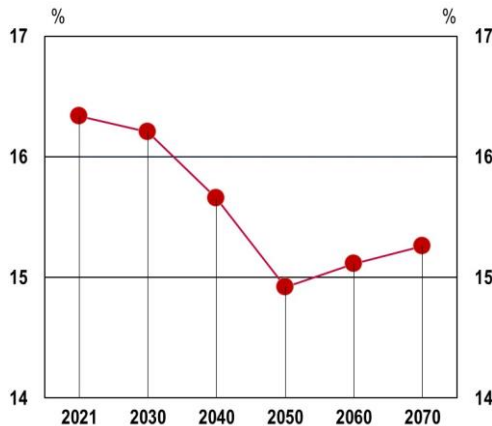
⁽¹⁰⁾ Source: Eurostat [demo_find]. Data extracted on 09.03.2021

⁽¹¹⁾ Ibid.

⁽¹²⁾ Sobotka, 2013.

⁽¹³⁾ Currie and Schwandt, 2014.

Figure 1.4: Projected trend in the share of young people (15-29), EU-27, 2021-2070



Source: Eurostat [proj_19np]. Data extracted on 9.03.2021.

The contraction in the size of the youth population is at the root of the progressive ageing of the European population ⁽¹⁴⁾. While longer life expectancy is a sign of improvements in people's health and well-being, this trend has challenging implications for the future of society ⁽¹⁵⁾. For example, the contraction in the proportion

of the working-age population is deemed to reduce public revenue from fiscal sources and challenge the sustainability of public services ⁽¹⁶⁾. Moreover, social and healthcare services may be put under increasing pressure to cater for an ever-ageing population ⁽¹⁷⁾. Finally, the diminution in the size of the youth population and the ageing of society will bring significant changes to the education system, resulting in an oversupply of teachers

and a lack of employment in the profession ⁽¹⁸⁾.

As mentioned above, besides fertility rates, migration dynamics are a powerful factor influencing trends in the youth – and therefore the general – population in Europe.

1.2. Youth migration

Youth migration within and towards Europe has accelerated since the 1990s ⁽¹⁹⁾. Increasingly higher numbers of young people from third countries ⁽²⁰⁾ have been moving to European countries, and, at the same time, more and more young Europeans have become mobile across the continent (Chapter 4 provides an overview of learning mobility across European countries). In the case of young migrants, migration is often not permanent as young people tend to move again later in their lives. In such case, migration can be 'temporary' (establishing one's residency in a foreign country for a definite length of time) or 'circular' (alternating periods in a foreign country with returns to the country or origin) ⁽²¹⁾.

These phenomena have resulted in important changes to Europe's youth population. On one hand, the diversity of the population has increased, as more and more young people with different geographical

⁽¹⁴⁾ OECD, 2020a; Aurambout et al., 2021.

⁽¹⁵⁾ UN, 2015.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Ibid.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Ibid.

⁽¹⁸⁾ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021b.

⁽¹⁹⁾ King, 2018.

⁽²⁰⁾ A third country is a country that is not a member of the European Union, as well as a country or territory whose citizens do not enjoy the European Union right to free movement. See European Commission, 'European Migration Network – EMN glossary'. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/glossary_search/third-country_en. [Accessed on 09.04.2021]

⁽²¹⁾ For a glossary of migration terms, see European Commission, 'European Migration Network – EMN glossary'. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/glossary_search/third-country_en. [Accessed on 09.04.2021]

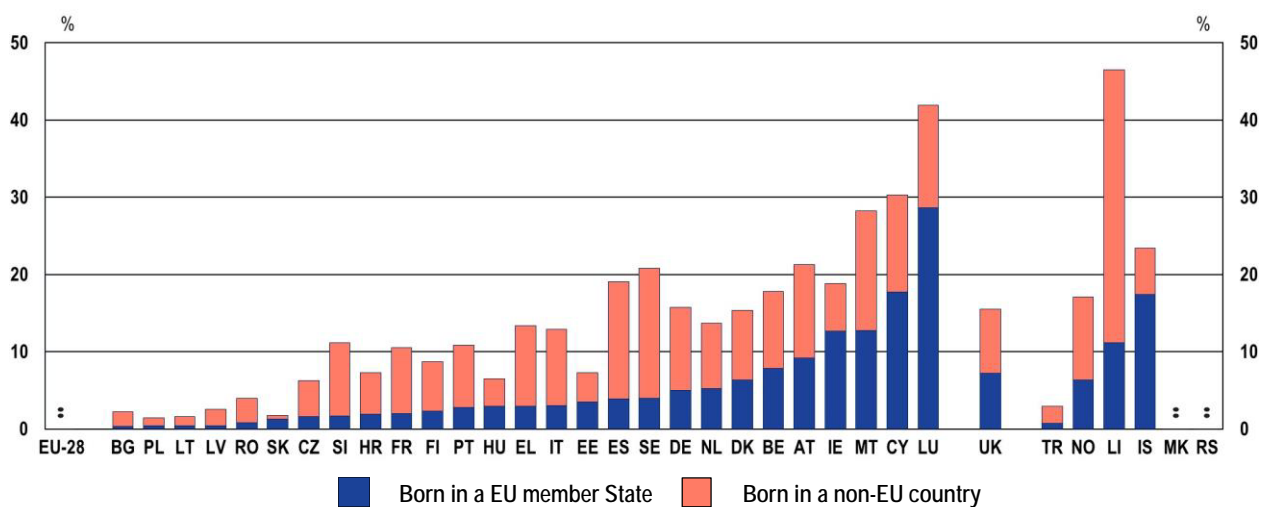
backgrounds have come to live in Europe. On the other, migratory flows have had a large impact on the size of the youth cohort, both across and within European countries ⁽²²⁾.

Section 1.2.1 provides an overview of migratory patterns among European countries, and Section 1.2.2 focuses on the impact of migration on the European youth population.

1.2.1. Patterns in youth migration

Figure 1.5 represents the share of young people (aged 15-29) born in a foreign country. The chart distinguishes between young people born in another EU-28 member State, and young people born in a country outside the EU.

Figure 1.5: Share of young people (15-29) born in a country different from the one where they reside by country, 2019



	EU-28	BG	PL	LT	LV	RO	SK	CZ	SI	HR	FR	FI	PT	HU	EL	IT	EE	ES
Born in a EU member State	:	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.8	1.3	1.6	1.7	1.9	2.0	2.3	2.8	2.9	3.0	3.0	3.5	3.9
Born in a non-EU country	:	1.8	1.0	1.2	2.1	3.2	0.5	4.6	9.4	5.4	8.5	6.4	8.1	3.6	10.4	9.9	3.8	15.2
	SE	DE	NL	DK	BE	AT	IE	MT	CY	LU		UK	TR	NO	LI	IS	MK	RS
Born in a EU member State	3.9	5.0	5.2	6.3	7.8	9.2	12.7	12.7	17.7	28.6		7.2	0.7	6.3	11.1	17.4	:	:
Born in a non-EU country	16.9	10.7	8.4	9.0	10.0	12.1	6.1	15.5	12.6	13.3		8.3	2.2	10.8	35.4	6.0	:	:

Source: Eurostat [yth_demo_060]. Data extracted on 08.06.2021.

Notes: countries are ordered according to the ascending share of young people born in a EU member State.

Ireland: estimated; France: forecast.

⁽²²⁾ For a glossary of migration terms, *ibid.*

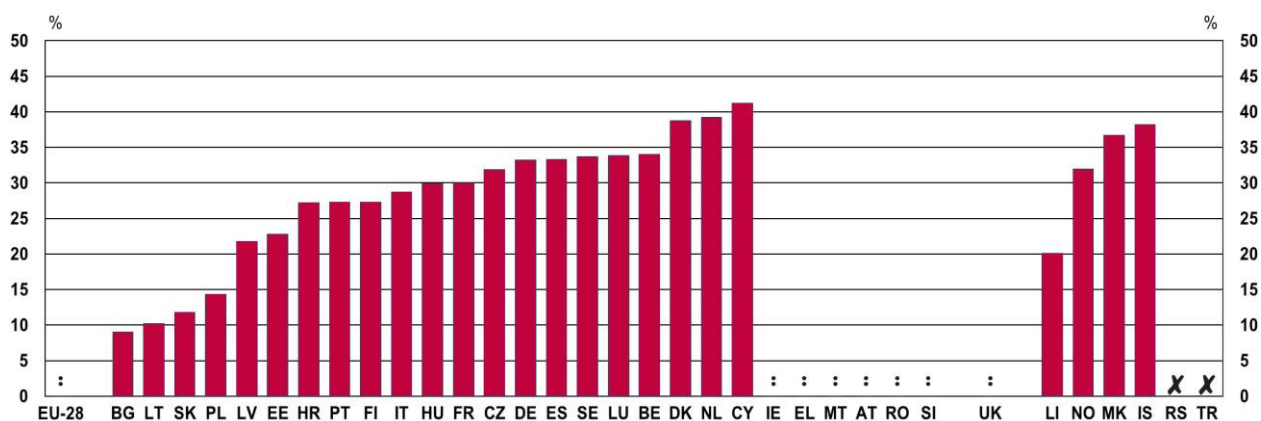
The highest shares are found in western and southern European countries. In the EU-28, Luxembourg presents the highest proportion, followed by Cyprus and Malta. On the contrary, the lowest figures are reported in several eastern and Baltic countries. Outside the EU-28, Liechtenstein reports the largest share of young people born in a foreign country.

In the majority of countries, the share of young people born in countries outside the EU-28 is higher than that of young people born in another EU member State. This is particularly the case in some south-European countries (Greece, Italy and Spain), eastern ones (Bulgaria and Romania), as well as in France, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia and Sweden. Conversely, the share of young people born in a EU member State is higher than that of those born outside of the EU-28 only in Slovakia, Ireland, Cyprus, Luxembourg, and, outside the EU-28, Iceland.

Overall, data indicate that western and southern regions of Europe tend to be destinations for comparatively largest scores of young people both coming from outside of the EU-28 and from other EU member states.

To complement the illustration of immigration dynamics among European countries, it is interesting to observe the proportion of young people in the total population of immigrants, defined as individuals establishing their usual residence in the territory of an EU member State for a period that is, or is expected to be, of at least 12 months, having previously been usually resident in another Member State or a third country⁽²³⁾.

Figure 1.6: Share of young people (15-29) in the total population of immigrants in the reference year by country, 2019



Source: Eurostat [yth_demo_070]. Data extracted on 16.06.2021.

Notes: countries are ordered according to the ascending share of young people in the total immigrant population.

Bulgaria: provisional; Poland and Slovakia: estimated and provisional

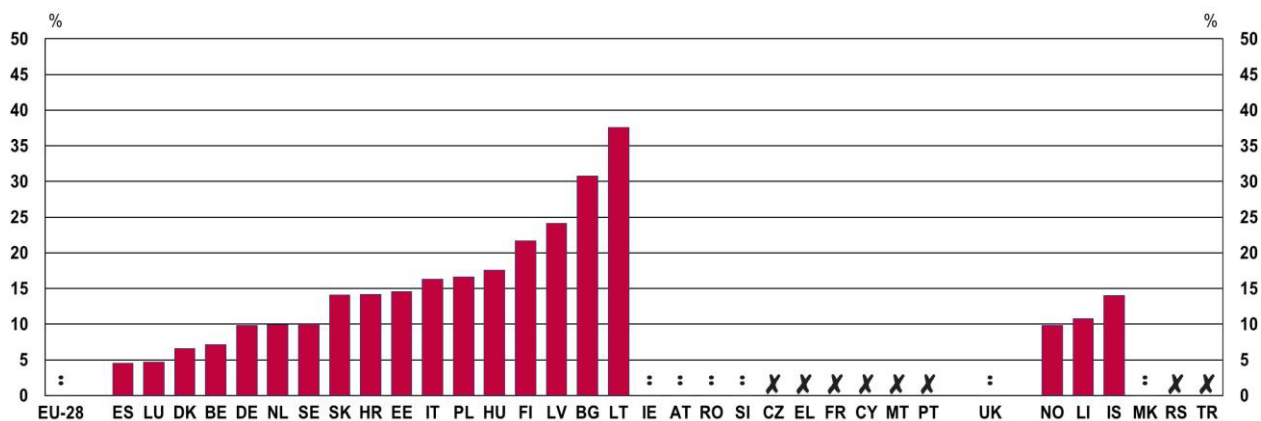
Figure 1.6 indicates that in western and southern European countries immigration tend to be “younger” than in eastern and Baltic ones. In particular, in 2019, the proportion of individuals aged 15-29 among immigrants was around 40 % in Denmark, the Netherlands and Cyprus. Outside of the EU-28, North Macedonia and Iceland reported figures above 30 %. Conversely, less than 25 % of immigrants were young in Bulgaria, Lithuania, Slovakia and Poland.

The tendency suggested by data on the share of young people born in a foreign country (Figure 1.5) is confirmed by the age composition of the immigrant population: larger shares of young people move to countries in the western and southern areas of Europe, compared with eastern and Baltic ones.

⁽²³⁾ Eurostat, 2021h

To fully understand the patterns of youth migration among European countries, it is essential to observe also the side of emigration. Figure 1.7 shows the proportions of young people among emigrants from the countries for which data are available. Emigrants are defined as people who, having previously been usually resident in the territory of an EU Member State, cease to have their usual residence in that Member State for a period that is, or is expected to be, of at least 12 months ⁽²⁴⁾.

Figure 1.7: Share of young people (15-29) in the total population of emigrants in the reference year by country, 2019



Source: Eurostat [yth_demo_080]. Data extracted on 09.06.2021.

Notes: countries are ordered according to the ascending share of young people in the total population of emigrants.

In 2019, a remarkable share of emigrants from Lithuania and Bulgaria were aged between 15-29 (37.6 % and 30.8 %, respectively). High shares of young emigrants were also reported by Latvia (24.1 %) and Finland (21.7 %). On the contrary, western European countries saw the lowest proportions of young people in the total population of emigrants – around 5 % from both Luxembourg and Spain, 7 % from both Belgium and Denmark, and 10 % from Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden.

The data illustrated in the section suggest the existence of two main dynamics in Europe. Western countries attract higher proportions of young people (from both the EU-28 and third countries) and see lower proportions of young people emigrating. With the limitations posed by the limited number of countries with available data, the opposite trend is observed in eastern and Baltic countries: higher rates of emigration are accompanied by lower rates of immigration (mostly from outside of the EU-28).

Various circumstances contribute to these differences between countries ⁽²⁵⁾. An important driver inducing many young people to move to western European countries is the opportunity to get a better education ⁽²⁶⁾. Besides the desire to experience living and studying in a different country, for many young people who cannot

⁽²⁴⁾ Eurostat, 2021h.

⁽²⁵⁾ Belmonte et al., 2020.

⁽²⁶⁾ European Commission, 2018b; International Monetary Fund (IMF), 2016.

access adequate education opportunities in their own countries, emigration is often a necessity ⁽²⁷⁾. Indeed, degree mobility ⁽²⁸⁾ (particularly in higher postgraduate education) sees educational institutions in western Europe attracting high numbers of young students. This phenomenon is at the root of imbalances in the level of mobility between countries, with some being ‘net exporters’ of students and others being ‘net importers’ ⁽²⁹⁾.

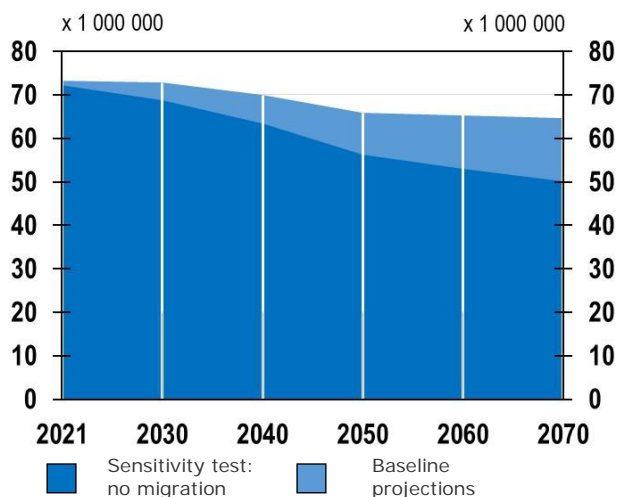
Economic conditions also play a considerable role in determining migratory flows. In countries where young people struggle to access the labour market and are compelled to work in the informal sector – suffering the ensuing precarious living conditions – emigration is an option chosen by many ⁽³⁰⁾. In Europe, northern and western countries tend to offer comparatively more opportunities for employment and are therefore the most sought-after destinations for many young job seekers ⁽³¹⁾.

These circumstances are expected to exert strong influences on the demographic situation of European countries for some time to come.

1.2.2. Impact of migration on demographic trends

Comparing data on the share of young people in the total population illustrated in Figures 1.1 and 1.2 with data discussed in the previous section provides evidence of the role played by migration in shaping the size of the youth population.

Figure 1.8: Projected trend in the number of young people (15-29), with and without migration, EU-27, 2021-2070



⁽²⁷⁾ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020b.

⁽²⁸⁾ Degree mobility is the physical crossing of a national border to enrol in a tertiary-level degree programme in the country of destination. European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020a.

⁽²⁹⁾ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020a.

⁽³⁰⁾ World Bank, 2016.

⁽³¹⁾ European Commission, 2018b.

Source: Eurostat [proj_19np]. Data extracted on 23.03.2021.

In countries where young people tend to immigrate (mainly in western and southern Europe), the general youth population has decreased comparatively less over the past decade. On the contrary, in countries where young people represent a comparatively bigger share of emigrants (as it is the case in eastern and Baltic regions), the contraction in the proportion of young people in the total population has been more pronounced.

Third-country immigration exerts a distinctive influence in terms of offsetting the demographic decline in the share of young people ⁽³²⁾. This is because the proportions of young people among extra-European immigrants are larger than the proportions of young people living in European countries ⁽³³⁾.

The balancing effect of third-countries' immigration is expected to continue in the future. Data illustrated in Figure 1.8 show that, when migration is excluded from the calculation of the projected number of young people in the EU-27 up to 2070, the population decrease is bigger.

Under this scenario, instead of a 12 % reduction (as depicted in Figure 1.3), the youth population would decrease by 30 % between 2021 and 2070, i.e. from 74 to 50 million. Countries are expected to be affected to different degrees. In line with data discussed in Section 1.2.1, projections for southern countries such as Malta, Italy and Cyprus indicate a considerable difference between the baseline and net migration trends (data not shown ⁽³⁴⁾). Conversely, the balancing effect of immigration is expected to be smaller in several countries in the Baltic and eastern European regions (e.g. Latvia, Estonia, Romania and Bulgaria) ⁽³⁵⁾.

⁽³²⁾ For a detailed overview of how demographic change shapes the future of Europe, see the European Commission Atlas of Demography, available at: <https://migration-demography-tools.jrc.ec.europa.eu/atlas-demography/>. [Accessed on 01.06.2021]

⁽³³⁾ Eurostat, 2021h. Migration flows: immigration to the EU from non-member countries was 2.7 million in 2019.

⁽³⁴⁾ Source: Eurostat [proj_19np]. Data extracted on 23.03.2021

⁽³⁵⁾ Ibid.; Belmonte et al., 2021

Conclusions

On average, in Europe, one in every six people are aged between 15 and 29 years. In line with the trend registered over the past decade, this proportion is expected to decline in the future. From a current figure of 73 million in 2021, it is estimated that the youth population will decrease to 64 million in 2070. Economic circumstances such as recurrent soars in unemployment, as well as changes in lifestyle (for example staying in education for longer) result in many young people delaying having children and having fewer children.

In some countries high rates of youth emigration have aggravated the demographic imbalance. Particularly in eastern and Baltic countries, the proportions of young people in the emigrant population are higher than in western ones, where, in turn, the shares of young people born in a foreign country are larger.

The contraction in the size of the youth population is at the root of the progressive ageing of the European population, which presents challenging social and economic implications for the future of society. This has been – and is expected to keep being – partially offset by immigration from third countries. The influx of immigrants compensates to a certain extent for the overall contraction in the population and counterbalances the demographic decline in the share of young people.

Brussels, 14.10.2021
SWD(2021) 287 final

PART 2/10

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

The situation of young people in the European Union

Accompanying the document

**Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European
Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions**

on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2021

{COM(2021) 636 final} - {SWD(2021) 286 final}

2. Youth engagement in society

A key objective of the new youth strategy is to encourage young people to become active citizens, agents of solidarity and positive change for communities across Europe, inspired by EU values and a European identity ⁽¹⁾. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to promote young people's participation in elections, to encourage their social and civic engagement, including their involvement in youth organisations and online activism, and to explore innovative and alternative forms of democratic participation.

Young people's lower turnout in elections and level of engagement with political parties does not necessarily mean that they lack interest in politics or are disconnected from the civic life of their communities. They usually perceive voting as a very important channel of democratic participation and are actively involved in many other forms of civic and political participation, especially through civil society organisations and social movements ⁽²⁾. Compared to older adults, young people may be less likely to participate in institutionalised politics but engage more often in non-institutionalised forms of participation like political consumerism, demonstrations and internet activism ⁽³⁾. As this chapter will show, the youngest generations are also particularly supportive of the democratic system and political institutions.

The first section of the chapter analyses young voter turnout in local, national and European elections according to Eurobarometer and European Parliament surveys. The second section looks at young people's involvement in political parties, youth and student organisations, and informal forms of participation, such as campaigns, strikes, street protests and social media activism. The third section examines young people's digital participation, in online consultations, votes and websites, over recent years. The final section examines young people's satisfaction with democracy and their degree of trust in the national government and in the European Union, in particular during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

2.1. Voting in political elections

Young people have traditionally been less likely to turn out at the polls than older adults ⁽⁴⁾. Between 2011 and 2017, young voter turnout declined in most European countries ⁽⁵⁾. Although the proportion of those with a strong or moderate interest in politics increased more during this time among young people than the other age groups – probably as the result of young people's use of social media – their interest in politics was still lower ⁽⁶⁾. In 2019, 52 % of people aged 15–24 years showed a strong or moderate interest in politics, compared with 63 % of people aged 25–39, 69 % of people aged 40–54, and 62 % of people aged 55 or older.

According to the Eurobarometer youth survey carried out in March 2019, an average of 72 % of young people aged 15–30 had voted at least once at local, national or European level (Figure 2.1). The voting age was generally 18, with the exception of Austria and Malta, where it was 16, and Greece, where it was 17. Voting is compulsory in Belgium and Luxembourg for registered citizens. In Greece, mandatory voting is not enforced.

⁽¹⁾ European Commission, 2018a.

⁽²⁾ Cammaerts et al., 2014.

⁽³⁾ Marien et al., 2010; Norris et al., 2005.

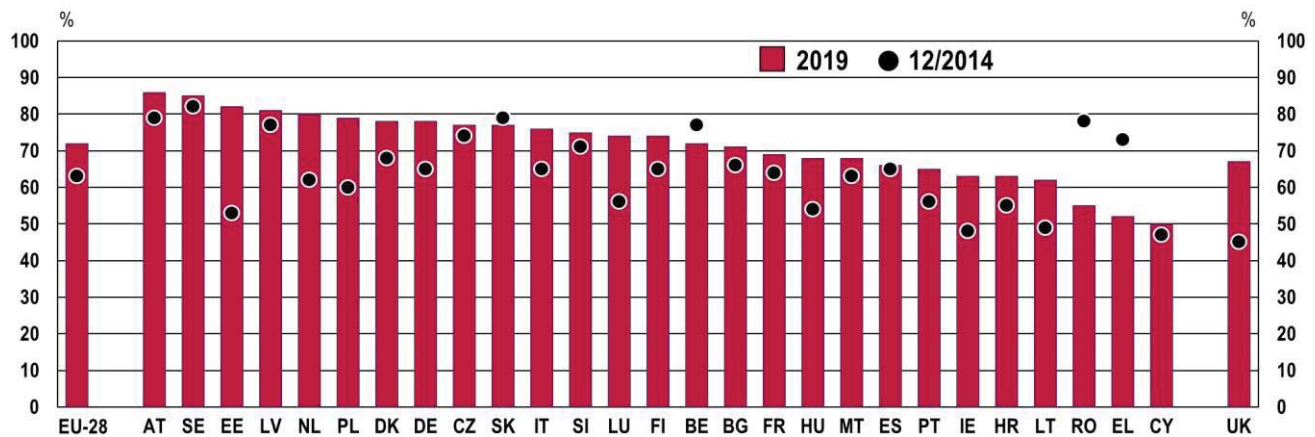
⁽⁴⁾ Wattenberg 2002; Fieldhouse et al., 2007; Gallego, 2009; Melo and Stockemer, 2014.

⁽⁵⁾ European Commission, 2018c, p. 86.

⁽⁶⁾ European Commission, 2018c, p. 83.

In Austria, Sweden, Estonia, Latvia and the Netherlands, at least 80 % of young people declared having voted. The proportion of young people who had ever voted was also over the EU-28 average (72 %) in Poland, Denmark, Germany, Czechia, Slovakia, Italy, Slovenia, Luxembourg and Finland. By contrast, in Cyprus, Greece and Romania almost one in two respondents had never gone to the polls.

Figure 2.1: Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) who had voted at least once (2019) and who had voted in the previous 3 years (December 2014) by country



Source: Flash Eurobarometer 478 (2019). Volume A. Question Q6: 'Have you ever participated in the following activities? Voting in local, national or European elections'. Flash Eurobarometer 408 (December 2014). Volume A. Question Q2: 'During the last 3 years, did you vote in any political election at the local, regional, national or EU level?'.

Notes: EU Member States are displayed in descending order of proportion of respondents who had voted in local, national or European elections in the 2019 survey.

In the Eurobarometer youth survey conducted in December 2014, around half of the young people in Cyprus declared that they had not voted in a local, regional, national or European election in the previous 3 years. Ireland, Lithuania and the United Kingdom also had a participation rate below 50 % at that time.

By contrast, in Greece and Romania, more than 70 % of young people reported having voted in the 3 years before the December 2014 survey. This was also the case in Belgium, Czechia, Latvia, Austria, Slovenia, Slovakia and Sweden.

Figure 2.2 provides a breakdown of the data on participation from the 2019 Eurobarometer youth survey by gender, age, age at end of education, degree of urbanisation, opinion on the EU, participation in a learning experience abroad and involvement in voluntary activities.

The average participation in elections of young women and men was very similar. Nor were there large differences by degree of urbanisation, although average participation was slightly higher among young people living in the city. The differences were more evident between age groups and education levels.

The relation between likelihood to vote, on the one hand, and age and education level, on the other, is well documented ⁽⁷⁾. Older people tend to be more likely to vote than the younger population because they usually are more mature, are more settled in life and have a stronger sense of civic duty ⁽⁸⁾. People with a higher level of education are more likely to vote than those with a lower level of education because they are usually more interested in following politics, and better equipped to do so, and have more resources that enable them to be politically engaged ⁽⁹⁾. However, the digital revolution could be attenuating the effect of age and education on

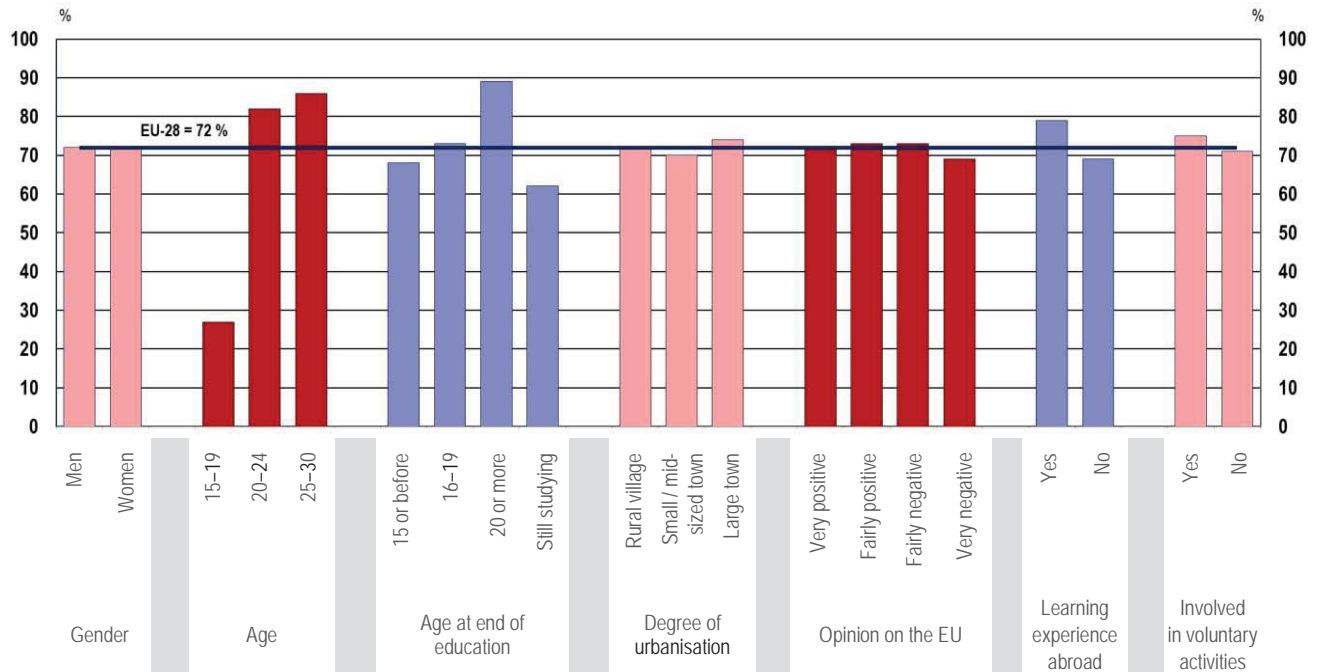
⁽⁷⁾ Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Blais, 2000.

⁽⁸⁾ Wattenberg, 2002; Melo and Stockemer, 2014.

⁽⁹⁾ Gallego, 2019; Stockemer, 2017.

voter turnout, as attested to by the growing interest of the youngest in politics and the increasing capacity of certain political parties to mobilise voters who have a low level of education.

Figure 2.2: Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) who had voted at least once in a local, national or European election by characteristic, 2019



Source: Flash Eurobarometer 478. Volume A. Question Q6: 'Have you ever participated in the following activities? Voting in local, national or European elections'.

According to the 2019 Eurobarometer youth survey, the proportion of young voters increased with age group (Figure 2.2). While only 27 % of young people aged under 20 years had ever voted, the percentage reached 82 % for those aged 20–24, and 86 % for those aged 25–30. Even if most of the respondents in the youngest age cohort had just not been eligible to vote, data on European Parliament elections suggest that they are less likely to vote even when they have reached voting age (see Figure 2.3).

The proportion of young voters also increased with the duration of their formal education. While 89 % of young people who had studied until (at least) the age of 20 reported having voted, the percentage decreased to 73 % for respondents with a shorter education and fell to 68 % for early leavers. Only 62 % of those still studying – which would include a large proportion of the youngest people – had ever voted.

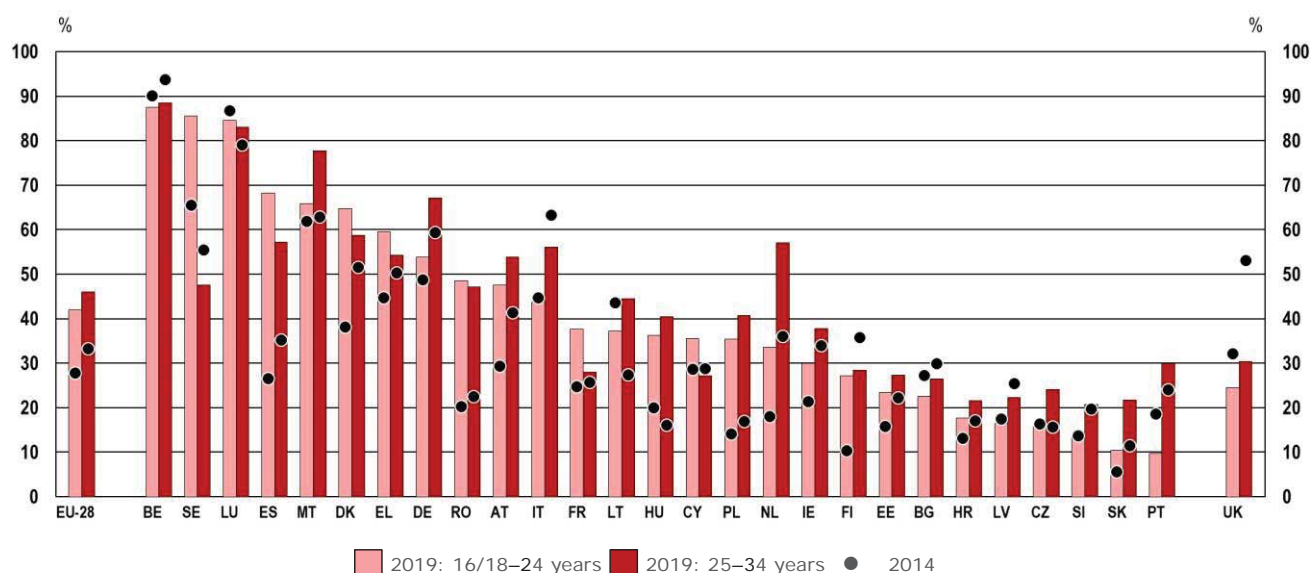
The tendency to vote was similar among young people having a positive and those having a negative view of the EU. However, a positive opinion on the EU may be more determinant in motivating young people to vote in the European elections, as data from the European Parliament post-election surveys show (see Figure 2.4).

Other factors, such as going abroad for learning and participation in volunteering, also appeared to be related to youth voter turnout. The proportion of young people who had ever voted in local, national or European elections was above average among those who had taken part in a learning experience abroad or had participated in voluntary activities. In fact, as illustrated in Chapter 4, youth mobility is particularly high in countries with a large proportion of young voters, such as Sweden, Estonia and Latvia. In other countries with a high youth turnout, such as Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany, young people are not only likely to go abroad for learning but particularly involved in voluntary activities (see Section 2.3).

Data from the European Parliament post-election surveys point to a growing mobilisation of young voters and show that their participation tends to increase with age (Figure 2.3). Turnout among voters aged under 25 years increased from 28 % in 2014 to 42 % in 2019, and among voters aged 25–34 years from 33 % to 46 %. The higher young voter turnout had a positive effect on the overall turnout, which went from around 43 % in 2014 to almost 51 % in 2019.

The increase in young people's participation in the European elections was particularly evident in Denmark, Spain, Hungary, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland and Romania. In Finland and Sweden, participation increased significantly among the youngest voters, but it decreased among those aged 25–34. Youth turnout also decreased in Belgium, Bulgaria, Italy, Latvia and the United Kingdom, and in Lithuania and Portugal among those aged under 25 years.

Figure 2.3: Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) who declared having voted in the 2014 and 2019 elections to the European Parliament by country and age group



Source: European Parliament, 2019 and 2014 post-electoral surveys. Volume C. Questions QG1 and QP1: 'European Parliament elections were held on [date]. For one reason or another, some people in [country] did not vote in these elections. Did you yourself vote in the recent European Parliament elections?'

Notes: In Malta and Austria, the youngest voter age group was 16–24 years; in Greece, it was 17–24 years. EU Member States are displayed in descending order of proportion of respondents aged 16/18–24 who reported having voted in the 2019 European elections.

Despite the increase in youth participation, young voter turnout in the European 2019 elections was lower than the overall turnout in all countries except in Greece, Spain and Sweden⁽¹⁰⁾. Among young people, the oldest usually went to vote in larger proportions. Turnout among people aged 25–34 was on average 4 percentage points (p.p.) higher than that among those aged under 25. In Germany, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal and Slovakia, it was more than 10 p.p. higher. However, in a few countries, the youngest voters turned out at the polls in larger proportions. This was particularly evident in Sweden, where more than 80 % of young people aged under 25 years declared having voted – compared with less than half of those aged 25–34. To a lesser extent, the same pattern could be seen in other countries, such as Spain, Denmark, Greece, France and Cyprus.

As shown in Figure 2.3, in the 2019 elections to the European Parliament more than 80 % of young people voted in Belgium and Luxembourg, where voting is compulsory for registered citizens. The percentage was

⁽¹⁰⁾ European Parliament, 2019, p. 39.

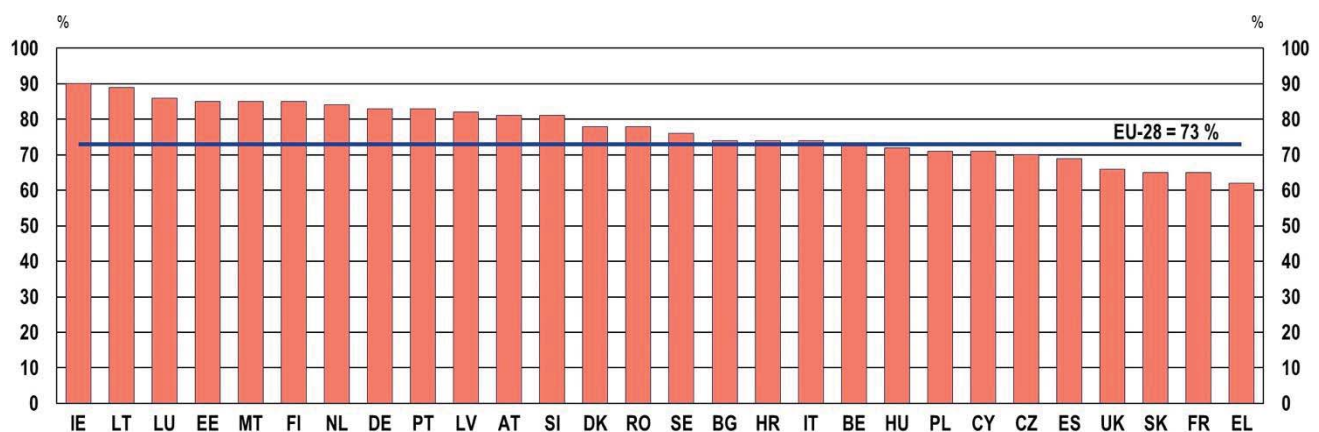
similarly high for the youngest cohort (aged under 25 years) in Sweden, and for young people aged 25–34 in Malta. In Spain, Denmark and Germany, the participation rate was in the region of 60 %. In Greece, where voting is also compulsory but no sanctions are in force, more than half of young people reported having voted. A similar proportion of young voters turned out at the polls in Romania, Austria and Italy, and in the Netherlands in the case of voters aged 25–34 years.

Recent research has studied the positive relation between the decision to participate in the European elections and one's engagement with European politics and opinion on the EU. Citizens who turn out at the polls for local or national elections out of a sense of duty will also participate in European elections when they feel that their vote can change things and when they know about and value positively the work of the EU ⁽¹¹⁾. Generally, turnout in European elections is lower than in national elections ⁽¹²⁾.

Figure 2.4 shows that, in most countries with a high young voter turnout in the 2019 European elections, young people tend to have a positive opinion on the EU. In Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Denmark, Romania, Sweden and Italy the proportion of young people with a positive view of the EU was above the average (73 %). In Belgium, the percentage was exactly 73 %.

Greece and Spain were the only exceptions. In these two countries, youth turnout in the 2019 European elections was particularly high – even higher than the overall turnout. However, Greece had the lowest percentage of young people with a positive opinion on the EU, and the second lowest percentage of young people having voted at least once in any election (see Figure 2.1). These two percentages were also below the EU-28 average in Spain, where young people's participation in the 2014 European Elections had been particularly low. This would speak for the success of political parties in connecting with the young electorate in the 2019 European elections, which would be worth further investigation.

Figure 2.4: Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) with a (very or fairly) positive view of the EU by country, 2019



Source: Flash Eurobarometer 478. Volume A. Question DX2: 'In general, please tell me if you have a very positive, fairly positive, fairly negative or very negative view of the European Union?'.
 Notes: Countries are displayed in descending order of proportion of respondents with a very or fairly positive view of the EU.

In the other countries where the proportion of young people with a positive view of the EU was below average (i.e. Hungary, Poland, Cyprus, Czechia, the United Kingdom, Slovakia and France), so was the youth voter turnout in the European elections.

⁽¹¹⁾ Clark, 2014; Stockemer and Blais, 2019.

⁽¹²⁾ European Parliament, 2019, p. 34.

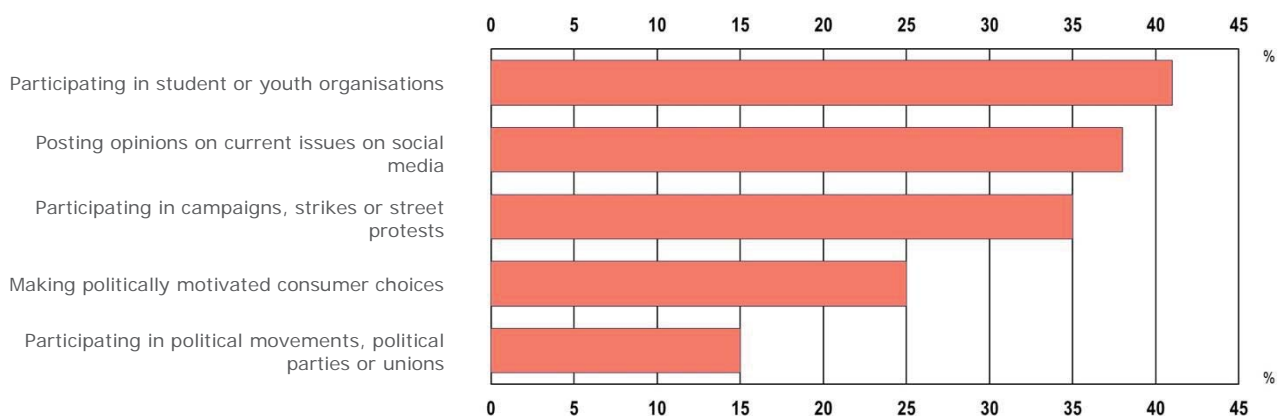
In Lithuania, Estonia, Finland, Portugal, Latvia, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Croatia, the percentage of young people with a positive view of the EU was above the EU-28 average but their participation in the 2019 European elections was particularly low (see Figure 2.3). In most of these countries, the overall turnout was also among the lowest in the EU ⁽¹³⁾. In Ireland, youth participation was lower than the EU-28 average, and much lower than the national average (50 %), despite having the largest proportion of young people with a positive view of the EU.

2.2. Other forms of participation

This section provides further insight in young people's participation in institutionalised politics by looking at their engagement in political parties and movements. It also examines their participation in youth and student organisations and other non-institutionalised forms of social and political activism.

According to the 2019 Eurobarometer youth survey, more than 40 % of young people had participated in student or youth organisations, 38 % had posted opinions on current issues on social media, and 35 % had taken part in campaigns, strikes or street protests (Figure 2.5). One quarter of respondents had made politically motivated consumer choices.

Figure 2.5: Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) who reported having participated in certain activities, EU-28, 2019



Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) who reported having participated in the following activities by age group, EU-28, 2019

Age group	Participating in student or youth organisations	Posting opinions on current issues on social media	Participating in campaigns, strikes or street protests	Making politically motivated consumer choices	Participating in political movements, political parties or unions
15–19	38 %	35 %	36 %	20 %	12 %
20–24	44 %	37 %	34 %	26 %	14 %
25–30	40 %	40 %	37 %	27 %	18 %

Source: Flash Eurobarometer 478. Volume A. Question Q6: 'Have you ever participated in the following activities?'.

By contrast, the participation of young people in political movements, political parties or unions was very modest (15 % on average). Research has shown that young people may not feel represented by the existing political parties, find it difficult to participate in such hierarchical and rigid structures, or prefer to be involved in promoting more specific objectives with shorter term results ⁽¹⁴⁾. Among other explanatory factors, political

⁽¹³⁾ European Parliament, 2019, p. 34.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Bouza, 2014; Cammaerts et al., 2014.

parties may have failed to engage with young people's preferred forms of participation (e.g. demonstrations, social media and civil society organisations), to address the issues important to young people in their political manifestos or to include young candidates in their lists ⁽¹⁵⁾.

Youth participation in political movements, political parties or unions is low but increases with age. While only 12 % of young people aged 15–19 years reported having been engaged in this way, the percentage increased to 14 % for those aged 20–24 and reached 18 % for those aged 25–30.

The proportion of young people posting opinions on current issues on social media and making politically motivated consumer choices also increased with age (from 35 % to 40 %, and from 20 % to 27 %, respectively). Young people aged 25–30 were also the most active in campaigns, strikes and street protests. By contrast, young people aged 20–25 were the most engaged in student and youth organisations.

Figure 2.6 shows the two most common forms of civic and political participation in each country, excluding voting in elections (see Section 2.1) and volunteering (see Section 2.3).

Taking part in a student or youth organisation was the most common form of participation in 18 countries and the second most common in another seven. More than 60 % of respondents declared having participated in a student or youth organisation in Ireland, 54 % in Sweden, and around half in Belgium, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Finland and the United Kingdom. The percentage was 40 % or more in Czechia, Germany, Estonia, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland and Portugal.

In Germany, Spain, France, Italy, Cyprus and Slovakia, the preferred form of participation was taking part in campaigns, strikes or street protests. This was also the second most common response in Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Greece, Luxembourg and Austria. More than half of respondents had taken part in such an activity in Spain and Italy, and almost that proportion had done so in Germany, Ireland and Luxembourg.

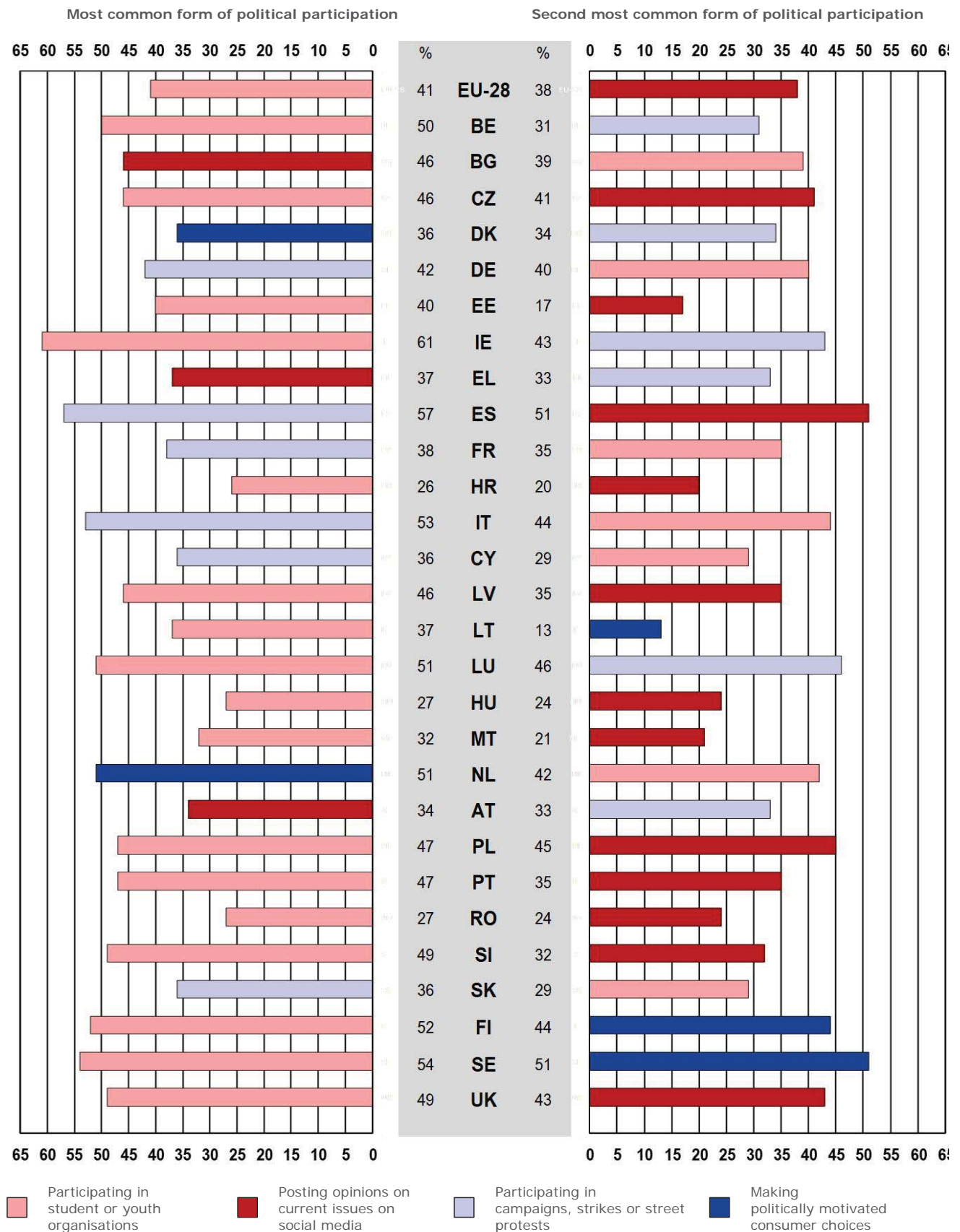
In Bulgaria, Greece and Austria, the most common form of participation was posting opinions on current issues on social media. This was the second preferred option in another 12 countries. In Czechia, Spain, Poland and the United Kingdom, more than 40 % of respondents declared having used social media to express their opinion. In Latvia and Portugal, the percentage was almost as high. Chapter 5 examines the role of social media during the COVID-19 pandemic, both as a source of information for young people and a means to make their voices heard.

Making politically motivated consumer choices was a form of participation particularly popular among young people in the Netherlands and the Scandinavian Member States (Denmark, Finland and Sweden).

Countries with a low young voter turnout, such as Croatia, Cyprus, Hungary, Malta and Romania (see Figure 2.1) also had some of the lowest proportions of engagement of young people in these other forms of participation. Conversely, in Ireland, Spain and Portugal, the high degree of involvement of young people in youth or student organisations, campaigns, strikes or protests, and social media contrasts with their low turnout at the polls.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Bouza, 2014.

Figure 2.6: Most common forms of participation among young people (%) by country (excluding voting and volunteering), 2019



Source: Flash Eurobarometer 478. Volume A. Question Q6: 'Have you ever participated in the following activities?'.

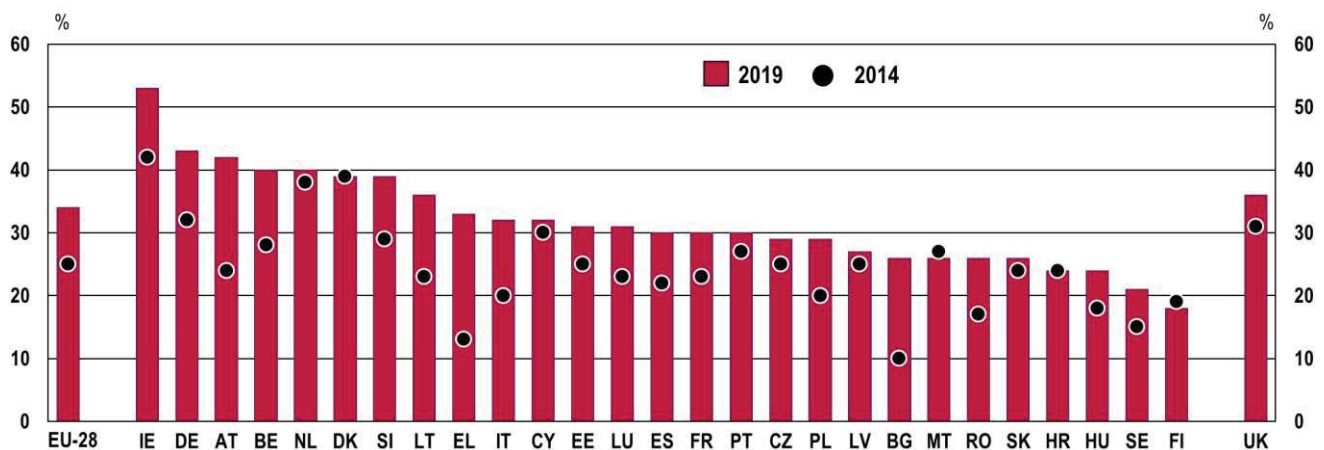
2.3. Volunteering

Not only do young people participate in youth organisations and informal forms of civic and political participation such as internet and street activism, they are also involved in voluntary activities in their local communities and beyond.

According to the Eurobarometer youth survey, around one in three young people were involved in organised voluntary activities in 2019 (Figure 2.7). In Ireland, this was the case for more than one in two of the respondents. In Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Slovenia, Lithuania and the United Kingdom, more than one in three had participated in organised voluntary activities. A similar or higher proportion of young people had participated in student or youth organisations in all these countries (see Figure 2.6).

By contrast, less than one in four of the respondents reported having participated in organised voluntary activities in Croatia, Hungary, Sweden and Finland. Participation in student or youth organisations was similarly low in Croatia and Hungary, but in Sweden and Finland it was higher.

Figure 2.7: Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) involved in organised voluntary activities by country, 2019 and 2014



Source: Flash Eurobarometer 478, Volume A, Q8, and Flash Eurobarometer 408, Volume A, Q3: 'In the last 12 months, have you been involved in any organised voluntary activities?'.

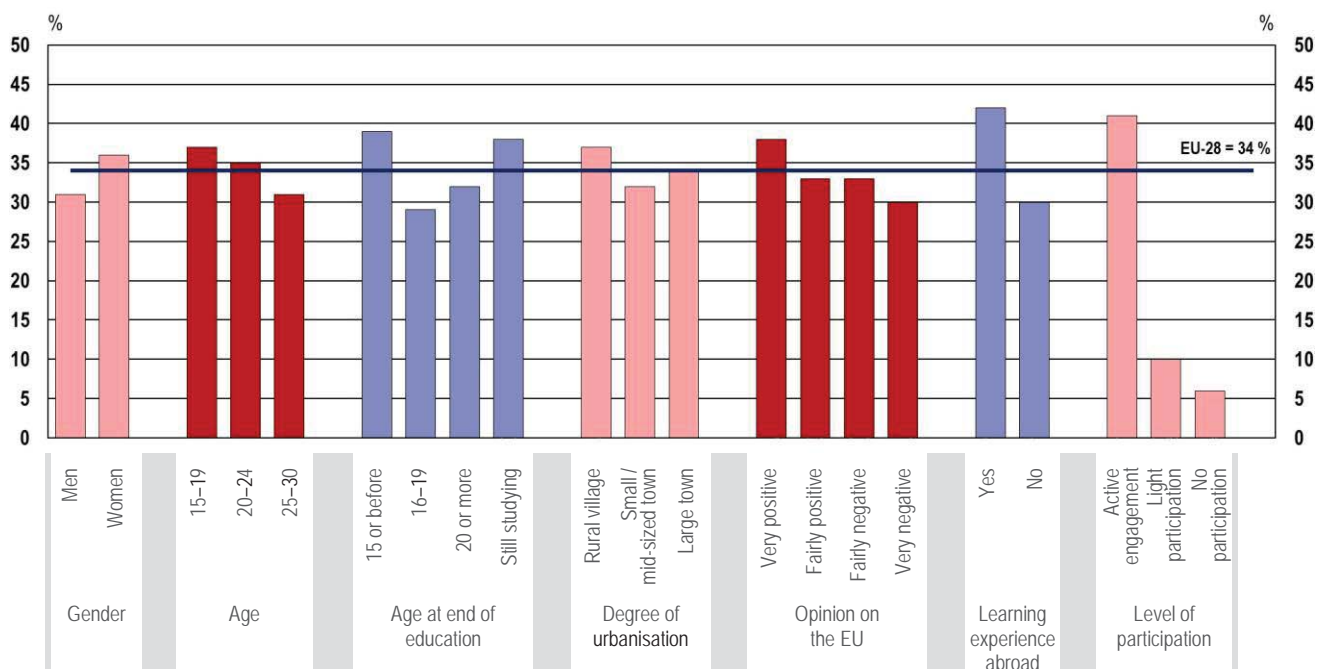
Notes: EU Member States are displayed in descending order of proportion of respondents involved in organised voluntary activities in 2019.

In 2014, 25 % of young people declared having been involved in organised voluntary activities in the previous 12 months, 9 p.p. fewer than in 2019. With the exceptions of Denmark, Malta, Croatia and Finland, the proportion of young volunteers increased in all the countries over these 5 years. The increase was 20 p.p. in Greece, 18 p.p. in Austria, 16 p.p. in Bulgaria, and at least 10 p.p. in Ireland, Germany, Belgium, Slovenia, Lithuania and Italy.

Figure 2.8 shows the positive relation between volunteering on the one hand, and civic and political participation and mobility on the other. Young people actively engaged in other forms of civic and political participation and those that had taken part in a learning experience abroad were involved in organised voluntary activities in larger proportions.

However, the profiles of the typical young volunteer and the typical young voter are slightly different. While the participation of young men and women at the polls is similar (see Figure 2.2), young women tend to be more active in volunteering than their male fellows. While the tendency to vote increases with age and education level, the propensity to participate in voluntary activities is higher the younger the age group. Young people with a post-secondary education are more engaged in voluntary activities than those with only a secondary education, but early school leavers and young students are the most engaged. Young people living in towns or suburbs are the least involved in voluntary activities, as they are in voting. However, those living in rural areas (not in cities) are the most active in volunteering. Finally, the typical young volunteer has a positive opinion on the EU, while this was not a distinctive characteristic of the typical young voter.

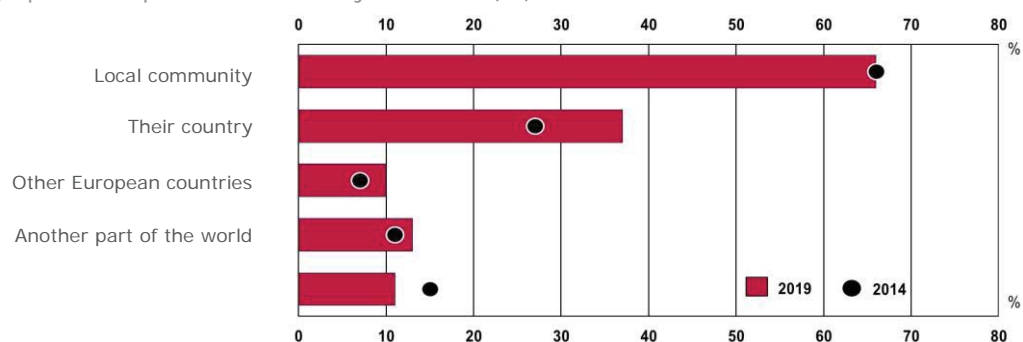
Figure 2.8: Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) involved in organised voluntary activities by characteristic, 2019



Source: Flash Eurobarometer 478. Volume B. Question Q8: 'In the last 12 months, have you been involved in any organised voluntary activities?'.

As shown in Figure 2.9, two out of three young volunteers were involved in activities aiming to change something in their local communities, while for more than one in three the aim was to change something in their country. Of young volunteers in Ireland, Croatia, Hungary, Austria, Slovenia and the United Kingdom, 70 % or more volunteered at local level. Participation in voluntary activities aiming to change something at national level was particularly high in Bulgaria, Czechia, Ireland, Cyprus and Portugal, where more than half of young volunteers were engaged in such an activity.

Figure 2.9: Geographical scope of the voluntary activities (%), EU-28, 2019 and 2014



Do not know / not applicable

Source: Flash Eurobarometer 408. Volume A. Question Q4: 'Were these voluntary activities aimed at changing something in ...?'

In contrast, their participation in voluntary activities with an international focus was more modest. Only 10 % of young volunteers had contributed to projects aiming to change something in other European countries, and 13 % in another part of the world. Young volunteers from Belgium, Denmark, Spain, France, Luxembourg and Sweden were the most active in volunteering abroad or in projects with an external dimension.

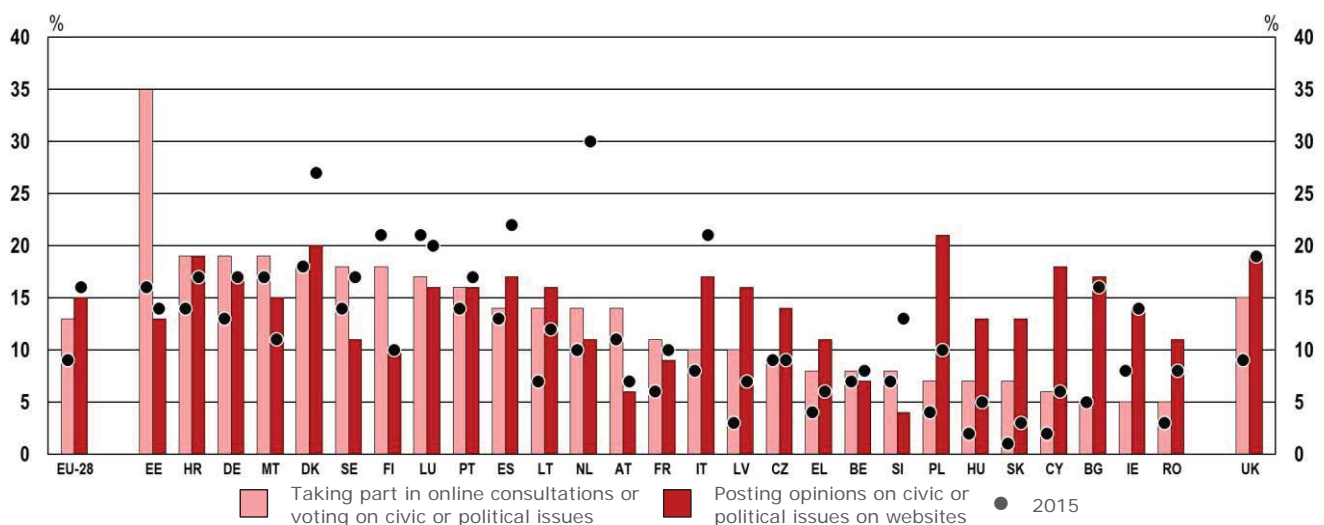
While youth volunteering in local communities remained stable between 2014 and 2019, the percentage of young volunteers involved in projects with a national or an international focus increased over these 5 years. In 2019, an increased number reported having been involved in activities aiming to change something in their country in Bulgaria, Czechia, France and Romania, and outside their country in Germany, Spain and Portugal. In Denmark, Ireland, Latvia and Slovakia, an increased number of young volunteers were involved in projects with a national or an international impact.

2.4. Digital participation

Section 2.2 showed young people's activism on social media to discuss current affairs – as reported in the Eurobarometer Youth survey. This section will examine Eurostat data on youth participation in online consultations, voting and websites in relation to civic and political issues, and its evolution over recent years.

According to 2019 Eurostat data (Figure 2.10), an average of 13 % of young people in the EU-28 had taken part (in the previous year) in online consultations or voting on civic or political issues (e.g. commenting on urban planning consultations, signing a petition), and 15 % had posted their opinions on civic or political issues on websites (e.g. blogs, social networks, etc.). The average for the total population was 3 p.p. lower in both cases (see Figure 2.11).

Figure 2.10: Proportions of young people (aged 16-29) who participated in online consultations, voting and websites in relation to civic or political issues in the past year by country, 2019 and 2015



Source: Eurostat, Internet use and activities [ISOC_BDE15CUA]. Data extracted on 02/02/2021.

Notes: EU Member States are displayed in descending order of proportion of respondents who had taken part in online consultations or voting on civic or political issues in 2019.

The country with the largest proportion of young people voting or participating in consultations online was Estonia (35 %). This was also the country with the largest increase between 2015 and 2019 (19 p.p.). It is worth noting that, in Estonia, where it is possible to vote using the internet, there were parliamentary elections in 2019. By contrast, the percentage of young people who had posted opinions on civic or political issues online in this country was below the EU-28 average. This was also a common feature in Finland and Sweden, where the relatively high participation of young people in online consultations or voting on civic or political issues (18 %) contrasted with their modest contribution to social or political discussions on websites (around 10 %).

In other countries, such as Croatia, Germany, Malta, Denmark, Luxembourg, Portugal and the United Kingdom, young people were quite active in both regards. At least 15 % of respondents had posted opinions on civic or political issues on blogs, social networks or other websites in these countries. The percentage reached 20 % in Denmark. Between 15 % and 19 %, depending on the country, had voted or participated in online consultations.

In Spain and Lithuania, young people participated in online consultations or votes on civic or political issues and expressed their opinion on websites more than average. In the Netherlands and Austria, they were particularly active in online consultations and votes, while in Italy, Latvia, Poland, Cyprus and Bulgaria they were more active in posting their opinion on blogs, social networks and other websites.

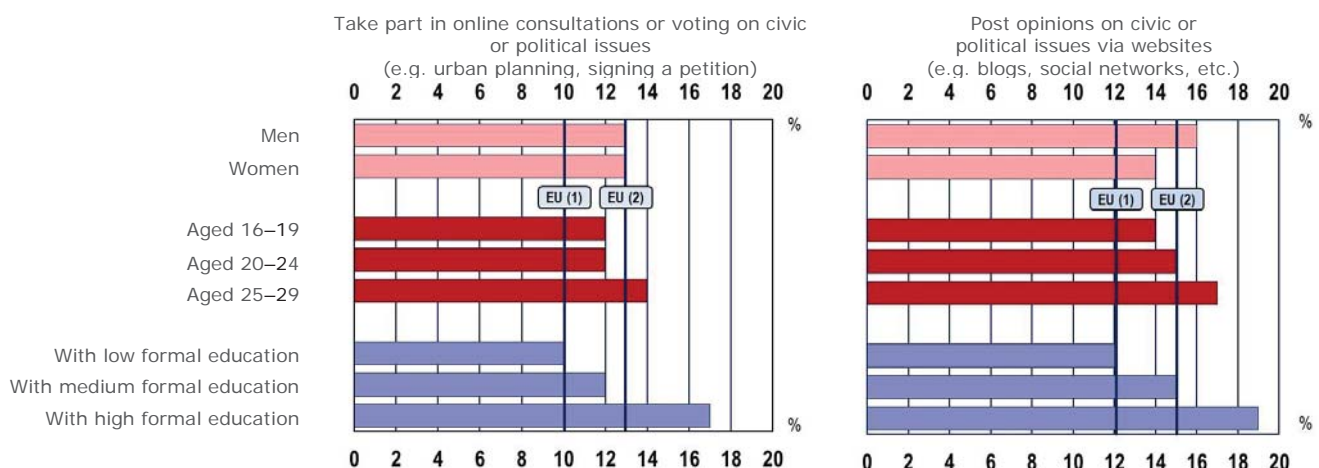
Romania, Ireland, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland had the lowest rates of youth participation in online consultations and votes, while Slovenia, Austria, Belgium and France had the lowest rates in posting opinions on websites. In all these countries, the average participation of the total population was similarly low.

Compared with 2015, the largest increase in youth digital participation in online consultations and voting took place in the Baltic states. Regarding young people's contribution to blogs, social networks or other websites on civic or political issues, Cyprus, Poland, Slovakia, Latvia and Hungary registered the largest increases over these 5 years.

Figure 2.11 provides a breakdown of youth digital participation by gender, age group and level of education, comparing the averages for the general population (EU-1) and for young people (EU-2).

Young men posted opinions on civic or political issues on websites more than their female fellows, but there was no difference between them regarding their participation in online voting or consultations.

Figure 2.11: Proportions of young people (aged 16-29) who participated in online consultations, voting and websites in relation to civic or political issues in the past year by characteristic, 2019



EU (1) = EU-28, all respondents EU (2) = EU-28, young people (aged 16–29)

Source: Eurostat, Internet use and activities [ISOC_BDE15CUA]. Data extracted on 02/02/2021.

Young people aged 25–29 years old took part in online consultations or voting on civic or political issues and posted their opinions on blogs, social networks or other websites in larger proportions than their younger fellows (aged under 25 years). Nevertheless, all of them were more engaged in these activities than the average citizen.

It is worth noting that the level of formal education completed by the youngest age group is generally lower, and education also appears to have a role in digital participation, as was the case for voting. While only 10 % of young people with a low level of formal education reported having participated in online consultations or voting on political or civic issues in the previous year, the percentage was 12 % for those with a medium level of formal education, and reached 17 % for those with a high level of formal education. Similarly, only 12 % of young people with a low level of formal education reported having contributed to discussions on political or civic issues on websites, compared with 15 % of those with a medium level of formal education and 19 % of young people with a high level of formal education. Chapter 5 examines in detail the relation between education and use of the internet, and Chapter 6 analyses the digital divide in education.

2.5. Support for and trust in national and EU institutions

Previous sections have shown that the participation of young people in elections, political parties and digital platforms (i.e. posting their opinions on social media, blogs or other websites, or taking part in online consultations or votes on civic and political issues) increases with age. However, as this section will show, this does not indicate a lack of support among the youngest people for political institutions and the democratic system.

Figure 2.12 shows the average citizen's and young people's trust in their country's government and in the EU, their satisfaction with how democracy works at national and EU levels, and their views on the EU.

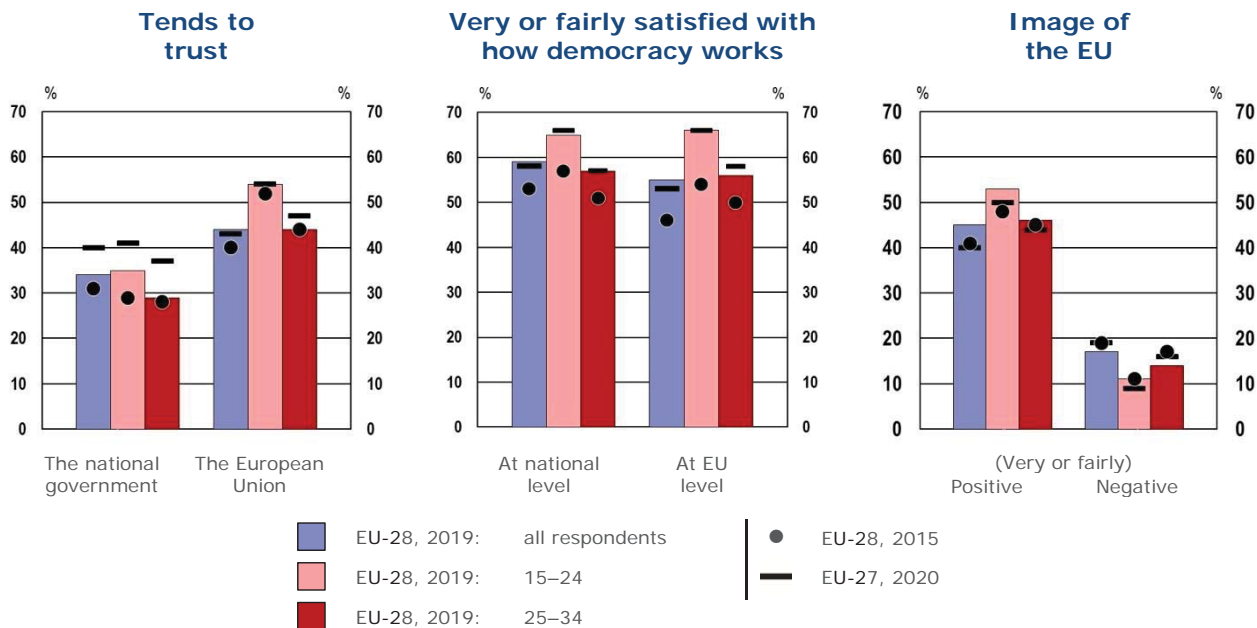
Regarding trust in political institutions, citizens tend to trust the European Union more than the government of their country. This is also the case for young people.

They might be less fond of polling stations, but young people aged under 25 years tend to trust the national government more than adults, and, particularly, more than their older young fellows. According to the standard Eurobarometer survey, in the EU-28 in 2019, an average of 35 % of young people aged 15–24 trusted the national government, compared with 29 % of those aged 25–34.

Trust in the national government among the youngest people (15–24 years old) increased by 6 p.p. between 2015 and 2019. In the EU-27 in 2020, it increased by another 6 p.p. Among older groups of young people, trust in their country's government did not vary between 2015 and 2019, but it also increased in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. As shown in Chapter 5, national governments were among the most trusted sources of information on COVID-19.

The level of trust in the European Union is also higher among the youngest age group. In the EU-28 in 2019, an average of 54 % of young people aged 15–24 trusted the European Union, compared with 44 % of those aged 25–34. However, trust in the European Union increased among the latter group in the EU-27 in 2020.

Figure 2.12: Young people's trust in their country's government and in the EU, satisfaction with democracy and image of the EU (%), 2019, 2015 and 2020



Source: Standard Eurobarometers 83.3, 91.5 and 93.3. Questions:

'I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain (media and) institutions. For each of the following (media and) institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it'.

'On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in (your country, the EU)?'.

'In general, does the EU conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image?'.

Even though most citizens do not trust their government, they are generally satisfied with how democracy works. This also applies to young people, in particular to the youngest.

In 2019, around 55 % of young people aged 25–34 declared being (very or fairly) satisfied with democracy in their country and in the European Union. The percentage was even higher among their younger fellows: around 65 % of young people aged under 25 years said that they were satisfied.

Satisfaction with democracy increased between 2015 and 2019 for both age groups. In 2020, the proportion of young people aged under 25 years who said they were satisfied with how democracy worked in their country was slightly larger than the year before. The proportion of young people aged over 25 who declared that they were satisfied with how democracy worked in the European Union was also slightly higher.

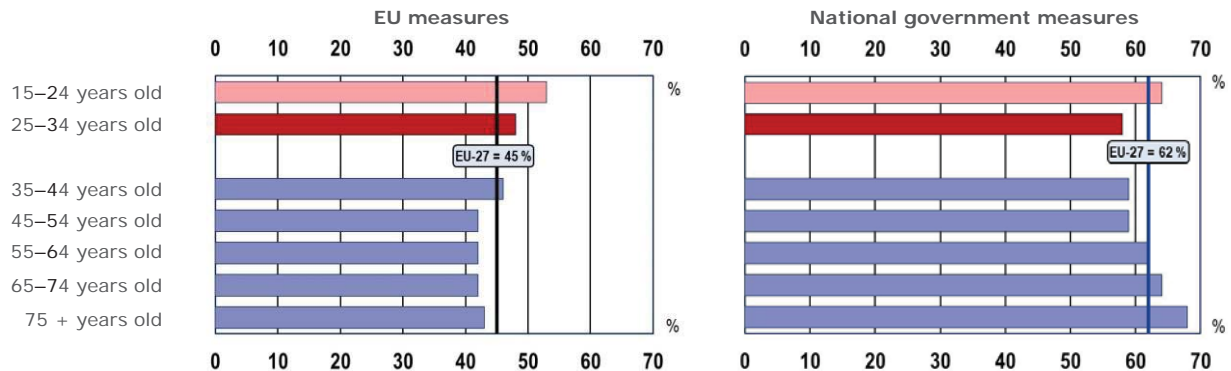
Finally, the European Union generally conjures up a more positive image for young people than for the older population.

In 2019, the difference between the proportion of citizens having a positive and a negative opinion on the European Union was 28 p.p., compared with 32 p.p. for those aged 25–34 and 42 p.p. for those aged under 25. The European Union conjured up a positive image for 53 % of young people aged under 25 and a negative image for only 11 % of them.

The percentage of young people in the EU-28 for whom the European Union conjured up a positive image increased between 2015 and 2019, but declined slightly in the EU-27 in 2020.

Satisfaction with measures to fight the COVID-19 pandemic was also higher among young people aged under 25 years than older adults (Figure 2.13).

Figure 2.13: Proportions of people (very or fairly) satisfied with measures to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020



Source: Standard Eurobarometer 93.1. Volume B weighted. Question QA21a.2: 'In general, how satisfied are you with the measures taken to fight the coronavirus outbreak by the national government and the EU?'

Satisfaction with the measures taken by the EU decreased with age, with the lowest levels of satisfaction found among adults aged 45 years or older. On average, 45 % of citizens declared that they were satisfied with the measures taken by the EU to tackle the pandemic, compared with 48 % of those aged 25–34 and 53 % of young people aged under 25 years.

Citizens were generally more satisfied with the measures taken by their governments. On average, 62 % of all respondents declared that they were satisfied with the measures taken by their government to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Support was higher among the youngest and the oldest generations: 68 % of those older than 75 and 64 % of those younger than 25 reported being very or fairly satisfied. By contrast, young people between 25 and 34 years old showed the lowest level of satisfaction with the measures taken by their governments.

Chapter 5 examines in further detail young people's views on the information received about the pandemic and the use of apps on mobile phones to implement certain measures.

Conclusions

Despite being less eager to vote than older adults, European young people appear to take part in elections in a larger proportion than in other forms of civic and political participation, according to Eurobarometer youth surveys. On average, more than two thirds of young people in the EU have voted at least once in local, national or European elections. Their growing interest in voting was particularly evident in the 2019 elections to the European Parliament. Public opinion surveys show that age and education continue to play a role in youth voter turnout.

According to the Eurobarometer youth survey, more than one third of young people have participated in student or youth organisations, have taken part in campaigns, strikes or street protests, and have posted opinions on current issues on social media at least once in their lives.

In addition, one third of young people were involved in organised voluntary activities in 2019, compared with only one quarter in 2014. Most of these activities were aimed at making a change at local level, but the

number of young volunteers contributing to projects with a national or an international focus increased over these 5 years. Young people who left education at the age of 15 or before and those still studying are the most likely to volunteer.

On average, almost three quarters of young people have a very or fairly positive view of the European Union. The EU conjures up a positive image for the youngest people in particular. Young people aged under 25 years also tend to trust the EU more and are more satisfied with how democracy works (at national and European levels) than older adults.

Although young people tend to trust the EU more than the government of their country, they were more supportive of the measures taken to fight the COVID-19 pandemic at national level than at EU level, and trust in national governments increased among young people during this time.

Brussels, 14.10.2021
SWD(2021) 287 final

PART 3/10

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

The situation of young people in the European Union

Accompanying the document

**Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European
Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions**

on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2021

{COM(2021) 636 final} - {SWD(2021) 286 final}

3. Employment and entrepreneurship

One of the major challenges for young people in establishing their independence is finding a stable job. The transition from education to employment is rarely a smooth and clear-cut path; it is often a rather complex and protracted process, with steps forwards and back, interruptions and periods of overlap between different types of activity. The traditional model of transition, whereby a young person finds his or her first job directly after graduation and embarks on a stable career path, is becoming far less common in our rapidly changing and globalised world. Many young people start working part-time or have summer jobs while still studying; many young people start on temporary or fixed-term contracts with spells of job-hunting in between. Some young people return to their studies after a period of employment in order to upgrade their skills or qualifications. When searching for the right job, some young people discover that they want a complete change from their original field of study or career and return to education in a different area ⁽¹⁾.

In recent years, European economies were on a path towards recovery from the economic crisis, which has improved the situation of young people and eased their transition from education to employment. However, as this chapter will illustrate, in 2020 the COVID-19 crisis hit young people exceptionally hard. The chapter presents the employment situation of young people under these changing conditions and recent trends in youth employment and unemployment. The analysis is based on Eurostat data from the European Union (EU) Labour Force Survey on unemployment, temporary and part-time work, and self-employment. In addition, indicators on the digitalisation of labour markets are from the Eurostat survey on ICT usage.

3.1. Facing labour market challenges: youth unemployment

Entering the world of work after graduation poses significant challenges. Many young people encounter a gap between education and ‘real life’ and get caught in a vicious cycle of being unable to obtain a job owing to lack of experience and being unable to gain experience without a job ⁽²⁾. Those who leave education without formal qualifications and with a low level of skills have even less chance of gaining employment (see Section 3.1.2).

3.1.1. Youth unemployment trends to 2019

In the EU-28 in 2019, over 5 million people between the ages of 15 and 29 were unemployed (Figure 3.1). This number includes all people who were available for work and actively seeking a job, irrespective of their educational status. However, the numbers of those in education become very important when considering the youth unemployment rate – the most common measure of labour market conditions for young people.

The unemployment rate is the number of people unemployed as a percentage of the labour force (employed and unemployed persons) ⁽³⁾. The unemployment rate does not consider the economically inactive, who are not actively looking for a job, for example because they are fully concentrating on their education. When considering the prime working-age group (people aged 25–54), the labour force is closer to the total population, and therefore the unemployment rate does not differ much from the unemployed to population

⁽¹⁾ For more details, see Kahn et al., 2011; Eurofound, 2014; Mourshed, Patel and Suder, 2014; O'Reilly 2015; STYLE, 2017.

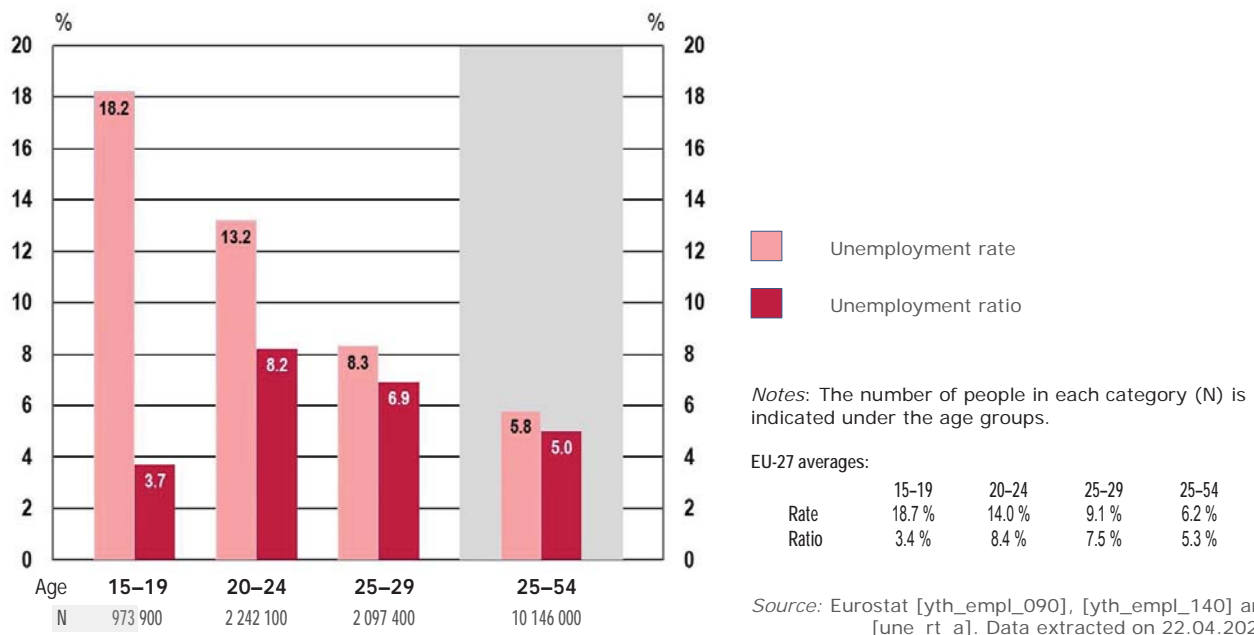
⁽²⁾ Kahn et al., 2011.

⁽³⁾ Eurostat, 2021a.

ratio (Figure 3.1). However, as many young people are still studying in their early 20s and therefore are not yet in the labour force, the unemployment rate and ratio differ greatly.

Relatively small numbers of unemployed people can generate high unemployment rates when divided by a small labour force. Therefore, it is also important to consider the youth unemployment ratio: the percentage of unemployed young people compared with the total population of that age group (not only the economically active but also the inactive, such as students) ⁽⁴⁾.

Figure 3.1: Unemployment rates and ratios among young people (15-29) compared with the prime working-age group (25-54), EU-28, 2019



Unemployment rates and ratios are depicted side by side in Figure 3.1. Both statistics reflect the same numbers of unemployed people (indicated under the figure below the age groups), but they display considerably different distributions. When considering the unemployed to labour force indicator (the unemployment rate), the younger age groups seem to be the most affected. In contrast, the unemployed to population indicator (the unemployment ratio) shows that the problem is worst for the 20–24 age group and, to a lesser extent, for the 25–29 age group.

Figure 3.2 shows youth unemployment rates and ratios in European countries. The number of unemployed people, in thousands, is indicated in the grey band in the centre of the figure. This figure largely depends on the country's youth population and varies from more than 2 million unemployed 15- to 29-year-olds in Turkey and 800 000–900 000 in Spain, France and Italy, to 4 000–5 000 in Malta and Iceland.

⁽⁴⁾ Eurostat, 2021b.

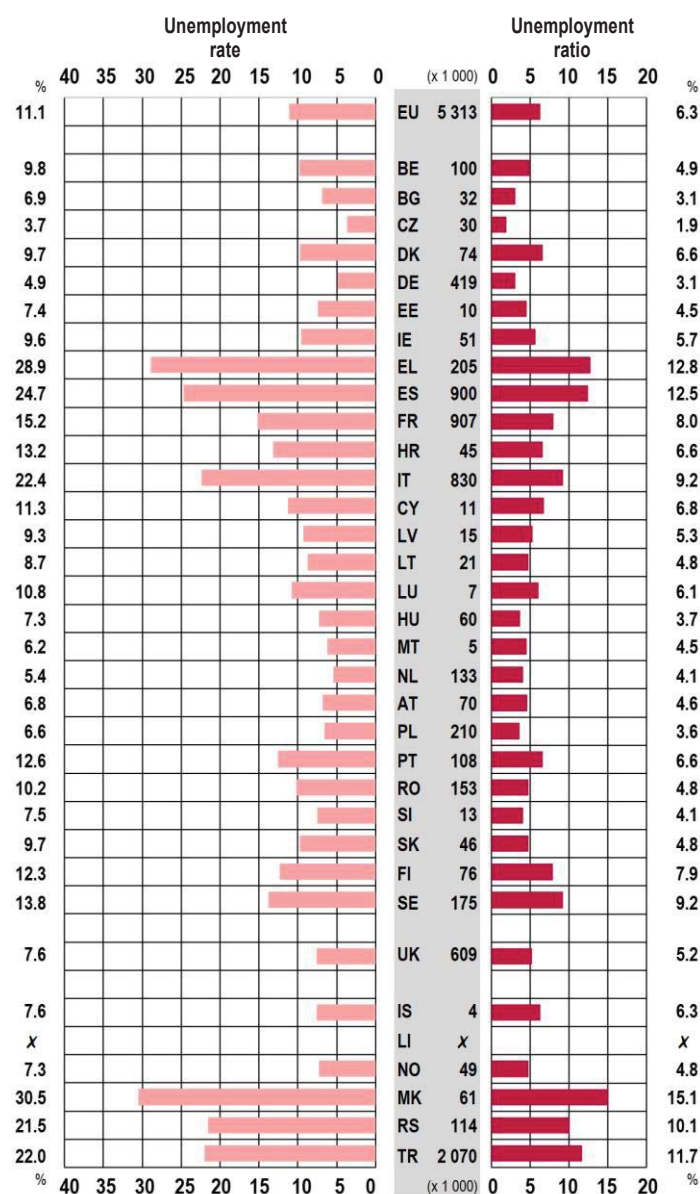
In 2019, in the EU-28, 6.3 % of young people aged 15–29 were unemployed. The highest unemployment ratios were registered in Greece and Spain (around 13 %), and outside the EU-28, in North Macedonia (around 15 %). In contrast, only around 2–3 % of young people were looking for a job in Bulgaria, Czechia and Germany.

Youth unemployment rates vary between European countries to a greater degree than unemployment ratios, as they are calculated taking into account unemployed 15- to 29-year-olds in the labour force. As discussed earlier, the size of the labour force depends on the proportion of young people who are inactive, namely those in education, those engaged in unpaid caring activities, the disabled, or discouraged workers ⁽⁵⁾.

In the EU-28, the average proportion of young people aged 15–29 who were unemployed as a percentage of the youth labour force (i.e. the unemployment rate) was 11.1 % in 2019.

Unemployment rates among young people were the highest, above 20 %, in Greece, Spain and Italy within the EU-28, and in North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey outside the EU. The lowest youth unemployment rates were registered in Czechia, Germany and the Netherlands. Certainly, youth unemployment rates depend not only on the activity and inactivity rates of young people but also on the general economic situation. The countries registering high youth unemployment rates are also those with relatively high unemployment rates among the prime working-age group ⁽⁶⁾.

Figure 3.2: Unemployment rates and ratios for 15- to 29-year-olds by country, 2019



Source: Eurostat [yth_empl_090] and [yth_empl_140]. Data extracted on 22.04.2021.

Notes: the numbers of unemployed people in thousands are indicated in the grey band in the centre. EU refers to EU-28.

EU-27 averages:

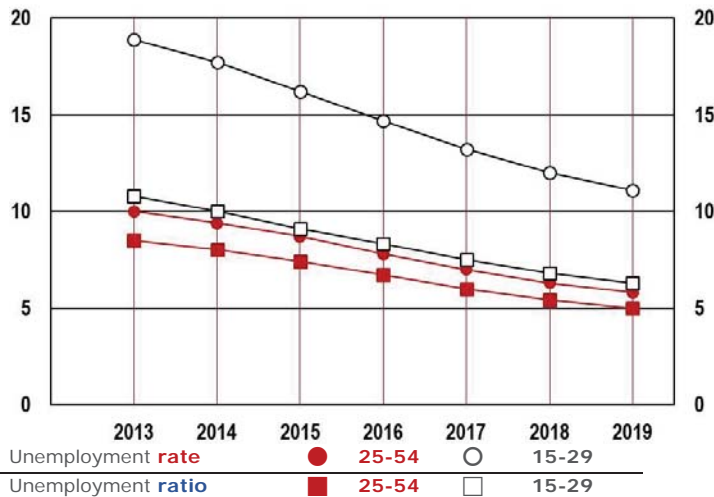
Unemployment rate: 11.9 %

Unemployment ratio: 6.5 %.

⁽⁵⁾ These conditions are at the root of differences between groups in the NEET population, as discussed in Chapter 8.

⁽⁶⁾ Source: Eurostat [une_rt_a]. Data extracted on 22.04.2021.

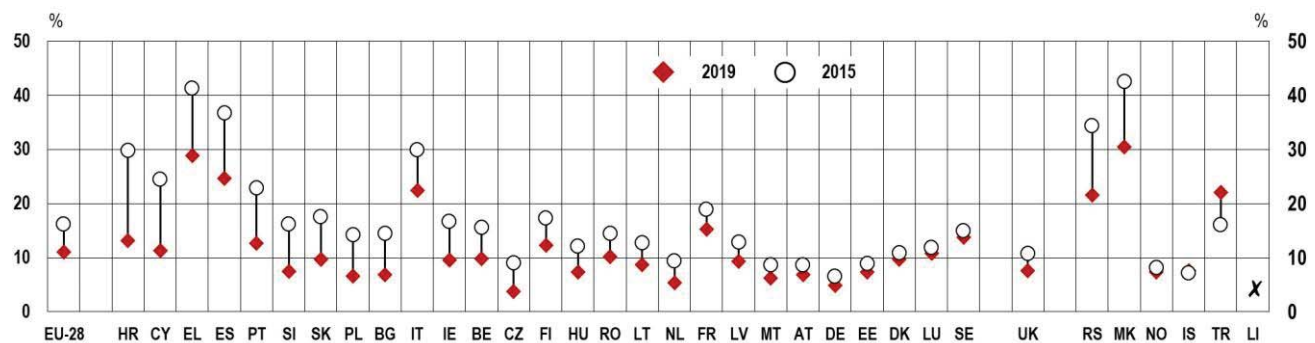
Figure 3.3: Youth unemployment rates (15- to 29-year-olds), compared with the prime working-age group (25-54), EU-28, 2013-2019



Source: Eurostat [yth_empl_090], [yth_empl_140] and [une_rt_a]. Data extracted on 22.04.2021.

Over this period, youth unemployment rates decreased in all European countries except Iceland and Turkey. The biggest decrease, of over 16 percentage points (p.p.), was registered in Croatia, but youth unemployment rates also fell by more than 10 p.p. in southern European countries such as Greece, Spain, Cyprus and Portugal, as well as in North Macedonia and Serbia. In contrast, the situation of young people on the labour market did not change much between 2015 and 2019 in northern Europe (Denmark, Sweden, Iceland and Norway) and Luxembourg.

Figure 3.4: Changes in unemployment rates between 2015 and 2019 among young people aged 15-29, by country



Source: Eurostat [yth_empl_090]. Data extracted on 22.04.2021.

Notes: Countries are grouped based on EU membership and in descending order by change between 2015 and 2019.

EU-27 averages: 2015: 17.3 %; 2019: 11.9 %.

As Figure 3.3 shows, both general and youth unemployment rates went down between 2013 and 2019 as economic growth resumed in Europe after the 2008 economic crisis. As the figure reveals, trends were very similar in the youth population (aged 15–29) and the prime working-age population (aged 25–54), with all unemployment rates and ratios in 2019 being around half of the 2013 level.

This strong improvement is also visible when looking at changes at country level. Given the parallel changes in youth unemployment rates and ratios, the following figures will concentrate on one unemployment indicator only: the youth unemployment rate.

Figure 3.4 shows the unemployment rates of young people aged 15–29 in 2015 and 2019.

3.1.2. Who faces the biggest challenges? Youth unemployment by educational attainment and gender

Not all young people have access to the same resources when looking for employment. Young people differ in the time they have spent in education and their qualifications, their access to financial and material resources, their family background and networks, and their gender, ethnicity, migration status and disability. This section looks behind the term ‘youth unemployment’ and examines differences in the employment situation of young people based on their educational attainment and gender.

Educational attainment

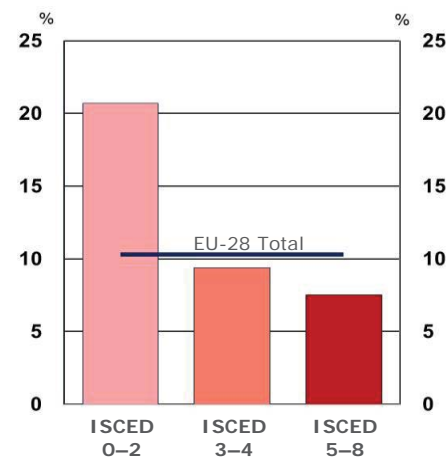
A good level of education and relevant qualifications are critical in finding employment as they provide young people with the skills needed in rapidly changing modern economies.

As Figure 3.5 shows, the higher the educational level, the lower the unemployment rate. In 2019, in the EU-28, while the average unemployment rate for 20- to 29-year-olds with low educational attainment was 20.7 %, this rate was less than half that for those with a medium level of qualifications (9.4 %), and even lower, at 7.5 %, for highly qualified young people. Not surprisingly, young people without upper secondary qualifications therefore have the greatest difficulty in finding a job among all young people. Even having an upper secondary qualification significantly raises a young person’s chances of finding employment.

Figure 3.6 therefore compares the unemployment rates of young people with a low level and a medium level of qualifications in European countries.

As the figure shows, the largest differences between the unemployment rates of young people with a low and a medium level of qualifications can be found predominantly in central European countries, and also in Bulgaria and Sweden (in purple colour). The three countries with the largest differences in the employment prospects of young people are Czechia, Hungary and Slovakia. In Czechia and Slovakia, in 2019, the unemployment rate of young people without upper secondary qualifications was more than five times higher (in Slovakia, even more than six times higher) than the unemployment rate of their peers who possessed upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary degrees. On the one hand, this is due to relatively low unemployment rates of young people with upper secondary qualifications, which was the lowest in Czechia at 2.6 %, and also lower than the EU-28 average in all countries in this colour category. On the other hand, some of these countries, particularly Slovakia (42.6 %) and Sweden (29.3 %), have relatively high unemployment rates among low-skilled young people.

Figure 3.5: Unemployment rates among young people (20–29), by educational attainment, EU-28, 2019

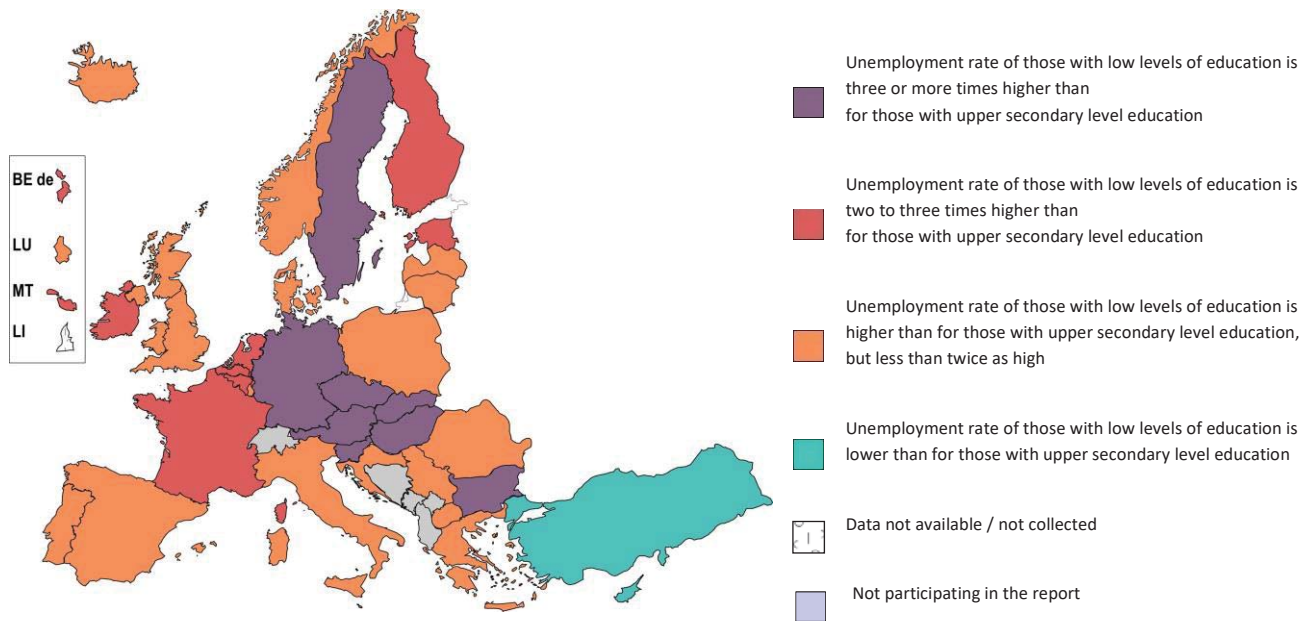


Source: Eurostat [yth_empl_090]. Data extracted on 11.11.2020.

Notes:

EU-27 averages:		
ISCED 0–2	ISCED 3–4	ISCED 5–8
22.2 %	9.9 %	8.2 %

Figure 3.6: Comparison of youth unemployment rates among 20- to 29-year-olds with low and medium levels of education by country, 2019



Source: Eurostat [yth_empl_090]. Data extracted on 22.04.2021.

Notes: Data have low reliability for the low skilled in Estonia, Ireland, Croatia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia and Iceland.

There are only two countries where not having upper secondary qualifications does not mean being at a disadvantage when looking for a job: Cyprus and Turkey. In Cyprus, where only 8 % of young people aged 20–29 do not have an upper secondary level education ⁽⁷⁾, this may be an effect of over-education – that is, a discrepancy between the supply of education and the needs of the economy ⁽⁸⁾. In Turkey, a higher incidence of unemployment among more educated young people may be related to the fact that they are those who can afford to search for a job in the formal economy, while many unskilled young people are employed in the informal sector in low-paid, irregular and insecure jobs ⁽⁹⁾.

Gender

Gender patterns of unemployment are less straightforward than those relating to educational attainment. In the EU-28, average unemployment rates do not differ considerably between young men and young women, no matter which age group one looks at. In 2019, female unemployment rates were around 1 p.p. lower than male unemployment rates in the 15–19 and 20–24 age groups but identical in the 25–29 age group ⁽¹⁰⁾. Gender differences in unemployment ratios also show a mild female advantage, with slightly smaller proportions of women looking for a job in all age groups ⁽¹¹⁾. This at least partly reflects the higher proportion of women enrolled in higher levels of education, as well as the higher proportion of women engaged in caring responsibilities.

⁽⁷⁾ Source: Eurostat [yth_demo_040], data extracted on 22.04.2021.

⁽⁸⁾ Ioannou and Sonan, 2016.

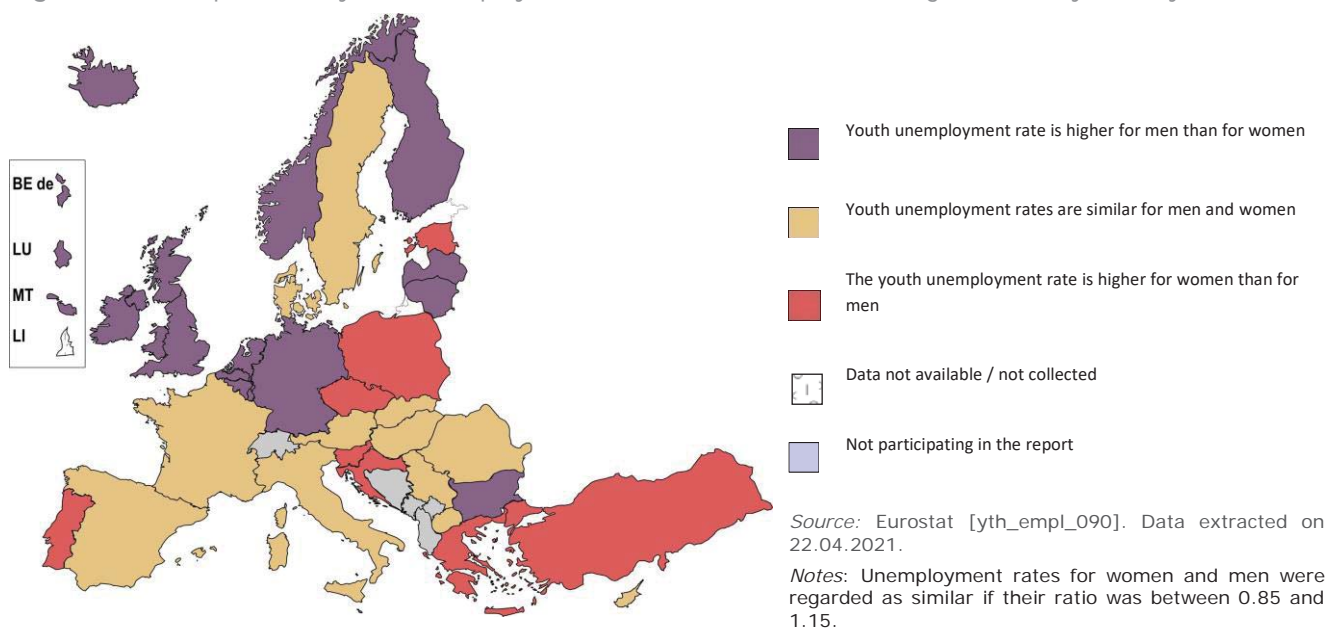
⁽⁹⁾ Scarpetta and Sonnet, 2012.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Source: Eurostat [yth_empl_090], data extracted on 22.04.2021.

⁽¹¹⁾ Source: Eurostat [yth_empl_140], data extracted on 22.04.2021.

The picture becomes more nuanced when examining gender differences in unemployment rates by country. Figure 3.7 depicts European countries coloured differently depending on the relationship between the unemployment rates for women and men aged 15–29. In around one third of the European countries shown in the figure, the unemployment rates of women and men do not differ considerably. Unemployment rates for men were higher than those for women in 13 countries in 2019, mostly in northern Europe, but also in Bulgaria and Malta. Gender differences were the most pronounced in Lithuania and Iceland, where the unemployment rates of young men were 10.3 % and 9.2 %, respectively, compared with the respective unemployment rates of 6.8 % and 5.9 % of young women.

Figure 3.7: Comparison of youth unemployment rates for men and women aged 15-29 by country, 2019



A higher proportion of young women than young men (among those who were economically active) were unemployed in 2019 in only eight countries, predominantly in southern and eastern Europe, with the largest gender differences in Estonia and Croatia. In Estonia, the unemployment rate among women aged 15–29 was 9 %, as opposed to 6.2 % among men; in Croatia, the respective rates were 16.7 % and 10.4 %.

3.1.3. Youth unemployment and the COVID-19 crisis

The year 2020 was marked by the COVID-19 crisis, with young people in both education and employment being strongly affected. The economic crisis triggered by the restrictions established to contain the pandemic has deeply affected young people's likelihood of both finding and retaining employment⁽¹²⁾. The halt in economic sectors such as the hospitality and retail, where young people often find employment, has reduced labour demand⁽¹³⁾. In parallel, many young people who are transitioning from education to work have found it difficult to seek jobs owing to the limitations on mobility and lower levels of economic activity imposed during the pandemic⁽¹⁴⁾.

⁽¹²⁾ Eurofound, 2020.

⁽¹³⁾ Ibid.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Gómez, A. and Montero, J., 2020.

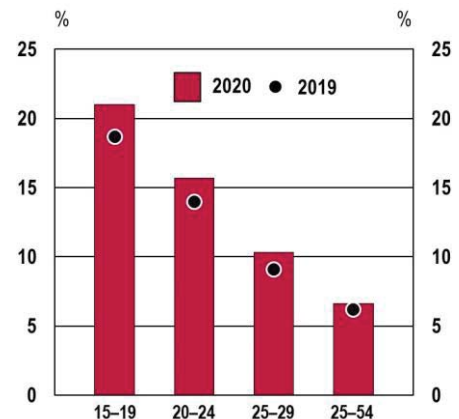
As illustrated in the following sections, young people are more likely to have a temporary or part-time contract than people in the prime working-age group. These precarious conditions become even more challenging in times of economic crisis, when young people are more likely than older age groups to have their working time reduced ⁽¹⁵⁾. Thus, the COVID-19 crisis aggravated pre-existing inequalities in the position of young Europeans in the labour market compared with the rest of the working population.

In addition to hitting young people the hardest, the economic slump caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has created a cleavage within the youth population. Those in stable jobs where telework is possible suffer less from unemployment than those with precarious employment contracts, especially in sectors where telework is not possible (e.g. retail, hospitality, food services) ⁽¹⁶⁾. In this context, young women in particular are likely to be affected because they are employed in these sectors at higher levels than young men ⁽¹⁷⁾. This situation has serious consequences for the health and well-being of young people, and for their social inclusion, as discussed in Chapters 7 and 8, respectively.

Comparing youth unemployment rates in 2019 and 2020 shows that the declining trend of 2013–2019 was reversed in 2020 in all youth age groups, as well as in the prime working-age group, in the EU-27 (Figure 3.8). However, as the figure also shows, changes were proportionally more considerable for young people than for the prime working-age population.

This direction of change can be observed in the large majority of European countries (Figure 3.9). In the EU-27, unemployment rates of young people aged 15–29 increased from 11.9 % in 2019 to 13.3 % in 2020 (1.4 p.p.) ⁽¹⁸⁾. This corresponded to increased unemployment rates in all EU Member States, except Italy (although in the latter, the decrease was less than 1 p.p., so not significant).

Figure 3.8: Unemployment rates among young people (15-29) compared with the prime working-age group (24-54), EU-27, 2019 and 2020



Source: Eurostat [yth_empl_090] and [une_rt_a]. Data extracted on 22.04.2021.

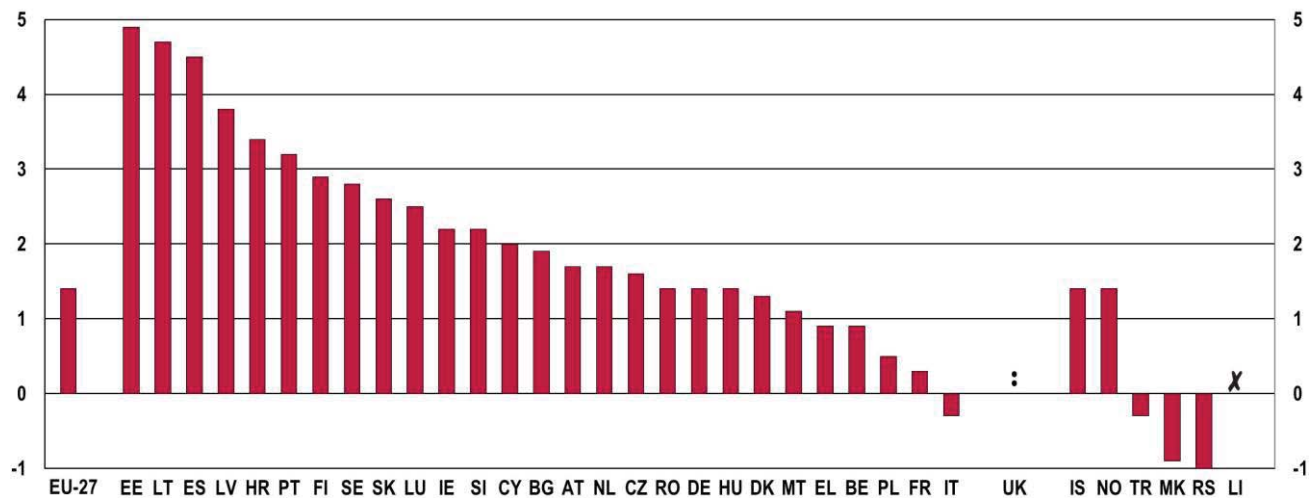
⁽¹⁵⁾ Eurofound, 2020.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Blustein et al., 2020.

⁽¹⁷⁾ ILO, 2020.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Quarterly figures show an increase in unemployment rates for young people aged 15–24 until Q3, followed by a decrease in Q4. This may be owing to the different support measures countries put in place by this time. Source: Eurostat [une_rt_q], data extracted on 02.06.2021.

Figure 3.9: Change in unemployment rates (percentage points) among young people aged 15-29 between 2019 and 2020 by country



Source: Eurostat [yth_empl_090] and [une_rt_a]. Data extracted on 22.04.2021.

Notes: Germany: 2020 data: provisional, break in series. Iceland: 2020 data: break in series.

Countries are grouped based on EU membership and in descending order by change between 2019 and 2020.

The increases in youth unemployment rates between 2019 and 2020 were most substantial in Estonia, Lithuania and Spain, amounting to more than 4 p.p.

3.2. Patterns of youth employment

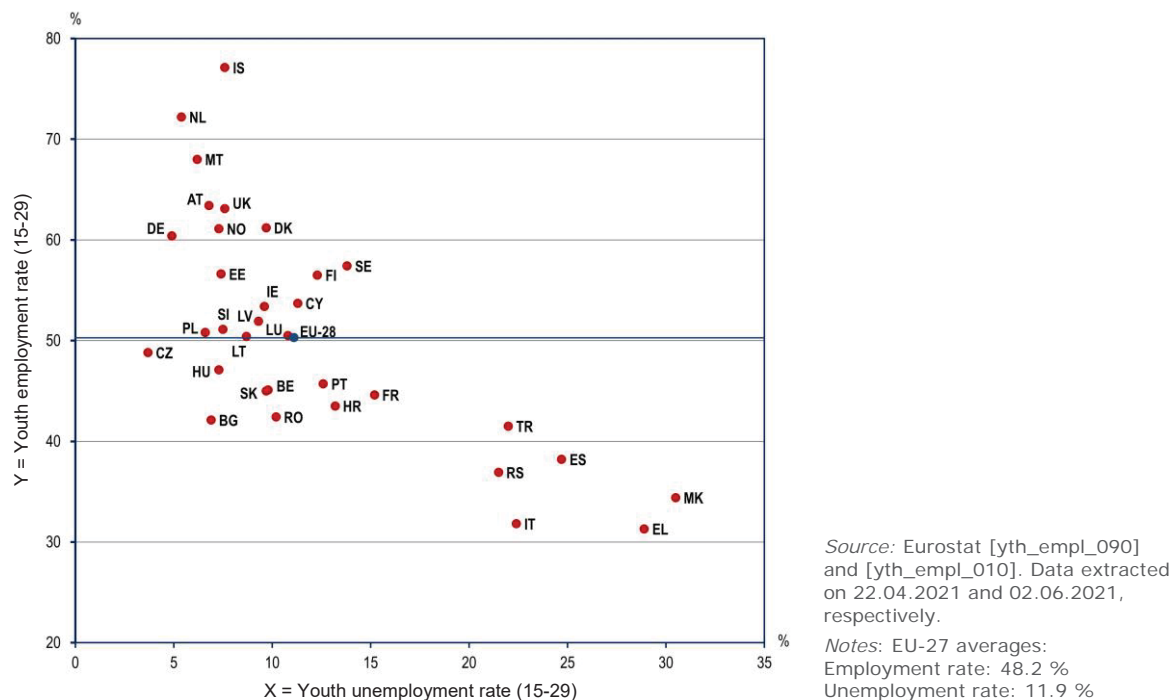
The most important characteristic of labour markets is the proportion of people in employment. Employment rates show the percentage of employed persons in relation to the total population of the same age ⁽¹⁹⁾. As it can be expected, the employment rates of young people increase with age: in 2019 in the EU-28, while only 16.7 % of 15- to 19-year-olds were employed, this rate was 54 % for the 20- to 24-year-olds and 75.9 % for young people aged 25–29 ⁽²⁰⁾. In comparison, the employment rate in the prime working-age population was 81.2 % ⁽²¹⁾.

Comparing youth employment and youth unemployment rates provides an interesting insight into the state of the youth labour market and the economy in general in the different European countries. Figure 3.10 shows the unemployment and employment rates of young people aged 15–29. As the figure illustrates, countries characterised by relatively high unemployment rates (above 20 %) and relatively low employment rates (around 40 % or below) form a clear cluster.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Eurostat, 2021c.

⁽²⁰⁾ Source: Eurostat [yth_empl_010]. Data extracted on 02.06.2021.

⁽²¹⁾ Source: Eurostat [lfsi_emp_a]. Data extracted on 02.06.2021.

Figure 3.10: Youth unemployment and employment rates of 15- to 29-year-olds, by country, 2019

At the same time, countries with youth unemployment rates at or below 15 % can have very different youth employment rates. In 2019, 50.3 % of young Europeans aged 15–29 were employed in the EU-28. Countries below the blue line on Figure 3.10 had lower employment rates than the EU-28 average; in Bulgaria and Romania, employment rates were just above 40 %. In contrast, in the Netherlands and Iceland, with comparable proportions of unemployed young people, youth employment rates were above 70 %. The reasons behind such differences are manifold, and depend on factors such as the average length of higher education studies, the proportion of young people who are both in employment and education, the share of part-time work (see also Section 3.2.2), or the proportion of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET rate, see Chapter 8). The following sections will illustrate some of the specificities of youth labour markets and employment patterns.

3.2.1. Temporary contracts

An important characteristic of the youth labour market is the prevalence of temporary contracts in comparison with the labour market for other age categories. A temporary contract is a fixed-term contract that will terminate either after a period agreed in advance or when certain objective criteria are met, such as the completion of an assignment or the return of the employee who has been temporarily replaced ⁽²²⁾.

Temporary employment can be an important step in the transition from education to the labour market. It gives young people work experience and makes it easier for them to find a stable job. Temporary employment also gives employers an opportunity to assess young people's suitability and capacity to perform the tasks required. Often, temporary jobs serve as stepping stones to permanent jobs ⁽²³⁾.

However, temporary employment entails higher levels of insecurity, both in terms of employment and financially, as well as fewer opportunities for developing skills and a longer term career. Young people can be trapped in a cycle of alternating periods of temporary employment and unemployment, which may adversely

⁽²²⁾ Eurostat, 2021d.

⁽²³⁾ Eurofound, 2013.

affect their status and their level of social protection into their 30s and beyond. Where this is the case, young people may lack the stability needed to allow them to live independently ⁽²⁴⁾.

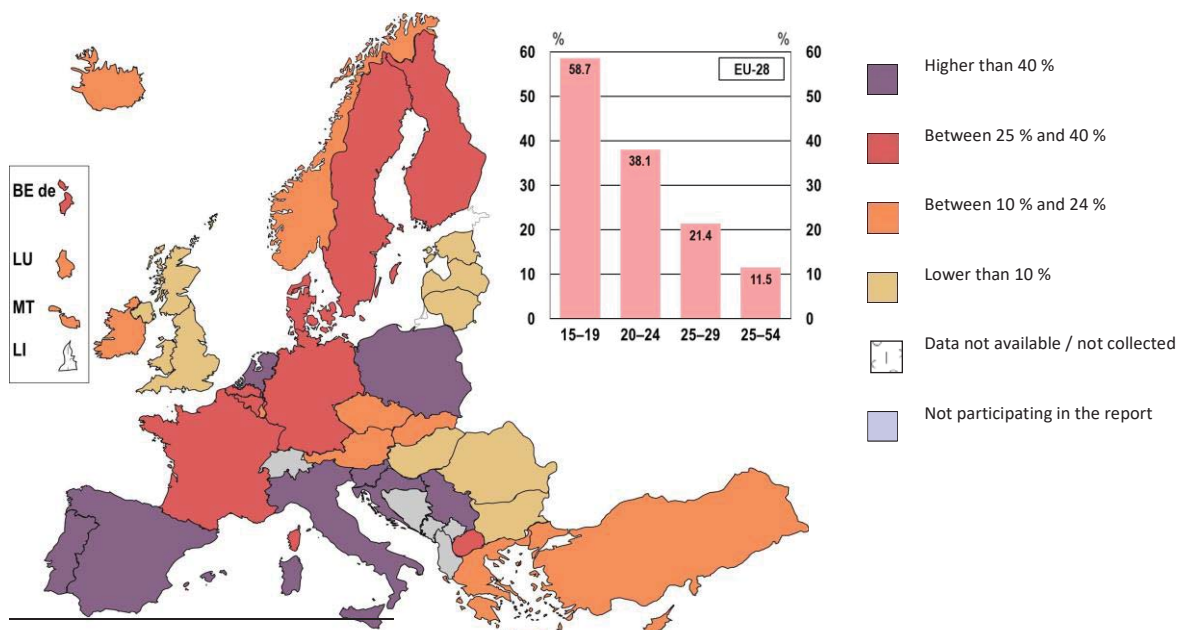
These higher levels of insecurity have also been highlighted by the COVID-19 crisis. The high proportion of young people who were working with temporary – and thus more easily terminable – contracts may have been one reason behind the fast rise in youth unemployment rates presented in the previous section.

Figure 3.11 shows that the proportion of temporary employees is very high among the youngest age group (15- to 19-year-olds) but it reduces rapidly with age. In the EU-28 in 2019, 58.7 % of all 15- to 19-year-olds in employment had temporary work contracts. This includes temporary ‘student’ or seasonal/summer jobs. The proportion drops to 38.1 % for 20- to 24-year-olds and even further, to 21.4 %, for 25- to 29-year olds. In contrast, only about 1 in 10 adult employees in the prime working-age group has a fixed-term contract. These proportions have been quite stable since 2015 in the EU-28 in all age groups ⁽²⁵⁾.

As Figure 3.11 also shows, the types of contracts that young people have vary considerably across European countries. In several central and eastern European countries and the United Kingdom, very few young people (less than 10 % of all employees) have fixed-term contracts. This does not necessarily mean that young people have a more secure position in the labour market: the low proportion of temporary contracts could also reflect a high level of labour market flexibility in these countries. In flexible labour markets, it is easier for employers to hire and fire employees, even if they have permanent contracts ⁽²⁶⁾. The countries with the lowest proportion of temporary contracts are Latvia, Lithuania and Romania, where only slightly more than 3 % of young people aged 15–29 have a temporary contract among all employees in this age group.

In contrast, in eight countries, mostly southern European countries, as well as in the Netherlands and Poland, the proportion of young employees with a temporary contract is higher than 40 %. In Spain, the percentage of temporary employees is as high as 55.4 %.

Figure 3.11: Young temporary employees (15-29) as a percentage of the total number of employees in the same age group, by country, 2019



⁽²⁴⁾ Eurofound, 2010.

⁽²⁵⁾ Source: Eurostat [youth_empl_050] and [lfsi_pt_a]. Data extracted on 28.04.2021.

⁽²⁶⁾ See for example the OECD indicators of employment protection, such as the ‘Strictness of employment protection – individual dismissals (regular contracts)’ on OECD.Stat (<https://stats.oecd.org/>).

Source: Eurostat [yth_empl_050] and [lfsi_pt_a]. Data extracted on 28.04.2021.

Notes: the EU-28 averages compare youth age groups with the prime working-age group.

EU-27 averages:			
15-19	20-24	25-29	25-54
70.0 %	44.1 %	24.6 %	12.7 %

3.2.2. Part-time work

The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines ‘part-time worker’ as an employed person whose normal hours of work are fewer than those of comparable full-time workers ⁽²⁷⁾. This definition encompasses all forms of part-time work (half-day work, work for one, two or three days a week, etc.). For comparative statistical purposes, however, part-time work is usually considered as working for fewer than 35 hours, or 30 hours, per week ⁽²⁸⁾.

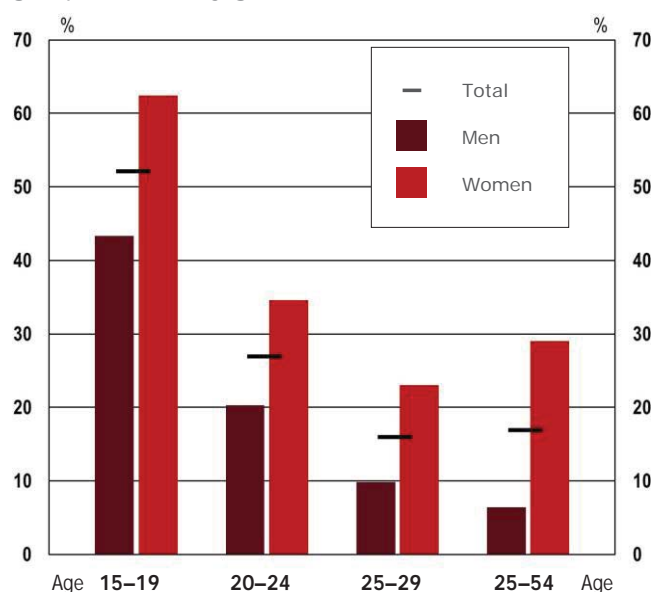
Part-time employment can be beneficial to young people depending on the quality of the part-time job and whether working part-time is a choice. On the one hand, part-time jobs are the only way some groups of people can join or remain in the labour market. Many young people who are in education and training are able to work only some hours per week in term time. Often those with children or other care responsibilities work part-time, although this may be more relevant for the older age groups. On the other hand, part-time jobs are often characterised by less job security, lower average hourly earnings and fewer opportunities for training and promotion ⁽²⁹⁾.

⁽²⁷⁾ ILO, 1994.

⁽²⁸⁾ ILO, 2017. In the Eurostat Labour Force Survey, the distinction between full-time and part-time work is generally based on a spontaneous response by the respondent (Eurostat, 2021e).

⁽²⁹⁾ Fagan et al., 2015.

Figure 3.12: Part-time employment among young people (15-29) as a percentage of total youth employment, compared with the prime working-age group (25-54), by gender, EU-28, 2019



Source: Eurostat [yth_empl_060] and [lfsi_pt_a]. Data extracted on 30.04.2021.

Notes:

	EU-27 averages:			
	15-19	20-24	25-29	25-54
Total	48.1 %	26.9 %	16.1 %	16.3 %
Men	39.9 %	20.2 %	10.3 %	6.4 %
Women	58.2 %	35.0 %	22.9 %	27.9 %

Part-time work is very common among the youngest employed people. Figure 3.12 shows that about every second 15- to 19-year-old who has a job works less than full-time. This may be because the majority of those who work in this age group combine work and study. Many 20- to 24-year-olds also work part-time, 26.9 % of all those employed in this age group. In contrast, only 16.9 % of employees in the prime working-age group (25-54) are not employed full-time. The proportion is even lower among 25- to 29-year-olds, at 15.9 %.

Women tend to work part-time much more than men in all age groups. As Figure 3.12 also shows, the differences are largest in the prime working-age group, where women tend to take on more caring or family responsibilities than men. Nevertheless, the gender gap in part-time employment is also there for younger age groups. Among 25- to 29-year-olds, the proportion of women having part-time jobs is still more than twice as high as that of men (23 % vs 9.8 %). The gaps are somewhat narrower in the youngest age groups but still significant.

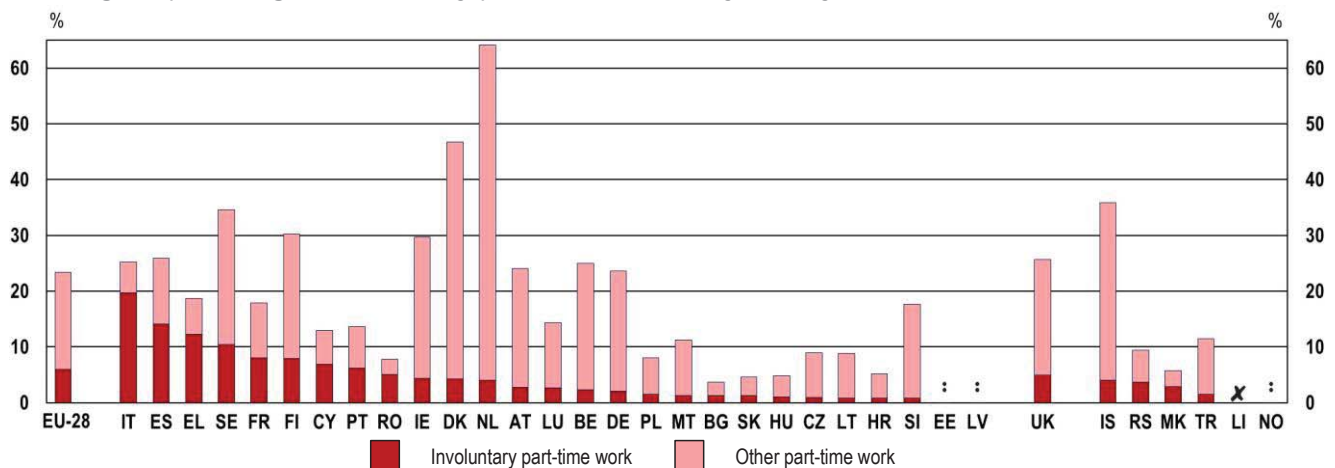
As discussed earlier, there are various reasons for working less than full-time. When a person works

part-time only because he or she is unable to find full-time employment, we talk about ‘involuntary’ part-time employment. In the EU-28 in the period between 2015 and 2019, the development was positive in this regard: while the proportion of young people in part-time employment stayed stable, the proportion of involuntary part-time workers among all young people working part-time decreased from around one third to one fourth⁽³⁰⁾. This shows that during the economic crisis, more young people were pushed into involuntary part-time work; but as conditions changed during the economic recovery, the proportion of involuntary part-time work decreased.

Figure 3.13 depicts part-time employment, including the proportion of involuntary part-time workers in 2019 by country. In the EU-28, around one in four young part-time workers aged 15–29 worked part-time involuntarily in 2019, which corresponds to around 6 % of total youth employment. In most countries with a high prevalence of part-time youth employment, the percentage of those working part-time involuntarily is rather low. This is the case in the Netherlands, Denmark and Iceland, where the proportions of part-time workers are among the highest in Europe but involuntary part-time employment represents only around 10 % or less of all part-time employment (and less than 5 % of total employment).

⁽³⁰⁾ Source: Eurostat [yth_empl_060] and [yth_empl_080], data extracted on 30.04.2021.

Figure 3.13: Part-time employment as a percentage of total employment among young people aged 15-29, including the percentage of involuntary part-time workers, by country, 2019



Source: Calculations based on Eurostat [yth_empl_060] and [yth_empl_080]. Data extracted on 30.04.2021.

Notes: 'Involuntary part-time work' means that respondents report that they work part-time because they are unable to find full-time work (Eurostat, 2021e).

Bulgaria, Croatia, Lithuania, Malta, Slovenia, Sweden: Low reliability of involuntary part-time work estimates.

Estonia, Latvia, Norway: Data not reliable.

Countries are grouped based on EU membership and in descending order by proportion of involuntary part-time work in total employment.

EU-27 averages: involuntary part-time work as a percentage of total employment: 6.2 %; part-time work as a percentage of total employment: 23.0 %.

The proportion of involuntary part-time employment is very high in Italy, where 19.7 % of young people in employment are working part-time because they cannot find a full-time position. In other words, in Italy, involuntary part-time work constitutes 78.1 % of all part-time positions filled by young people. The proportions are also high in Spain and Greece: involuntary part-time work account for 14.1 % and 12.2 %, respectively, of all jobs held by young people, and 54.6 % and 65.4 % of part-time jobs. These three countries also have the highest youth unemployment rates in the EU (see Figure 3.2).

3.2.3. Self-employment and entrepreneurship

A self-employed person is the sole or joint owner of the unincorporated enterprise (one that has not been incorporated, i.e. formed into a legal corporation) in which they work, unless they are also in paid employment that is their main activity⁽³¹⁾. There are two main drivers for becoming self-employed: 'opportunity entrepreneurs' use self-employment in order to realise a business idea, become their own boss or achieve a better work-life balance; 'necessity entrepreneurs', on the other hand, start their own business because they cannot find employment elsewhere and have no other means of making a living. While also providing new opportunities, the 'Uberisation' of service sectors and the emerging 'collaborative economy' might, for example, push young people into self-employment⁽³²⁾.

The first group, opportunity entrepreneurs, often report higher levels of happiness and job satisfaction, associated with creativity, autonomy and flexibility, while the second group tends to have levels of job satisfaction similar to or lower than regular employees⁽³³⁾. A Eurofound study shows that only one in four

⁽³¹⁾ Eurostat, 2021f.

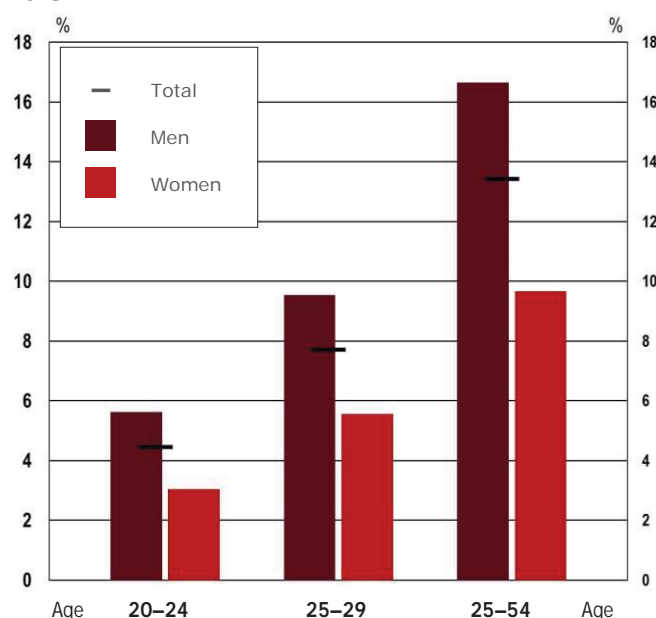
⁽³²⁾ Nurvala, 2015. See also Section 3.3 on labour market digitalisation.

⁽³³⁾ Baumol, 1990; Blanchflower, 2000; Reynold et al., 2005; Binder and Coad, 2013; Fairlie and Fossen, 2017.

young self-employed people start their own business because they have no other alternative; however, they still turn to self-employment out of necessity more often than older age groups ⁽³⁴⁾.

Although the self-employed population is a highly heterogeneous group, it is important to highlight that all these people have some issues in common with respect to job quality ⁽³⁵⁾. On average, the self-employed generally have lower income than the employed, especially those without employees. Furthermore, self-employment appears to provide lower levels of social security than many other forms of employment ⁽³⁶⁾. Working conditions vary greatly, but most entrepreneurs tend to work longer and more atypical hours. Moreover, the potential for stress and health-related issues is often greater for the self-employed than for employees ⁽³⁷⁾.

Figure 3.14: Self-employment as a percentage of total employment among young people (20-29) compared with the prime working-age group (25-54), by gender, EU-28, 2019



Source: Calculations based on Eurostat [lfsa_esgan] and [lfsa_egan], data extracted on 03.05.2021.

Notes:

	EU-27 averages:		
	20-24	25-29	25-54
Total	4.1 %	7.5 %	13.3 %
Men	5.1 %	9.2 %	16.5 %
Women	2.9 %	5.6 %	9.6 %

youngest age group, 20- to 24-year-olds. There are numerous explanations for this gender gap, including differences in attitudes to risk-taking; difficulties in combining self-employment with family responsibilities;

Thus, self-employment may not be wholly beneficial for all young people ⁽³⁸⁾, but unlocking the potential of youth entrepreneurship is still important to ensure that those who have good business ideas and the right skills can set up and run successful enterprises ⁽³⁹⁾.

As self-employment among 15- to 19-year-olds is very rare (less than 2 % of 15- to 19-year-olds are self-employed in the EU-28), Figure 3.14 depicts the self-employment rate of young people aged 20–24 and 25–29 compared with the prime working-age group (25- to 54-year-olds).

Younger people are far less likely than older people to be self-employed. In the EU-28, only 4.4 % of employed young people in the 20–24 age group worked in their own business in 2019. The proportion was higher among 25- to 29-year-olds (7.7 %), but it still remained considerably lower than the proportion of self-employed people in the prime working-age group (13.4 %).

There is a strong gender divide in the self-employment figures. The rate for men is almost twice that for women in all age groups, with proportionally the biggest differences in the

⁽³⁴⁾ One quarter of the self-employed people aged under 35 (24 %) say they have no other alternatives for work, compared with 18–19 % of the self-employed in older age groups (Eurofound, 2017).

⁽³⁵⁾ Van Praag and Versloot, 2007; Binder and Coad, 2013; OECD, 2019.

⁽³⁶⁾ OECD, 2019.

⁽³⁷⁾ Gevaert, J., Van Aerden, K., De Moortel, D., and Vanroelen, C., 2021.

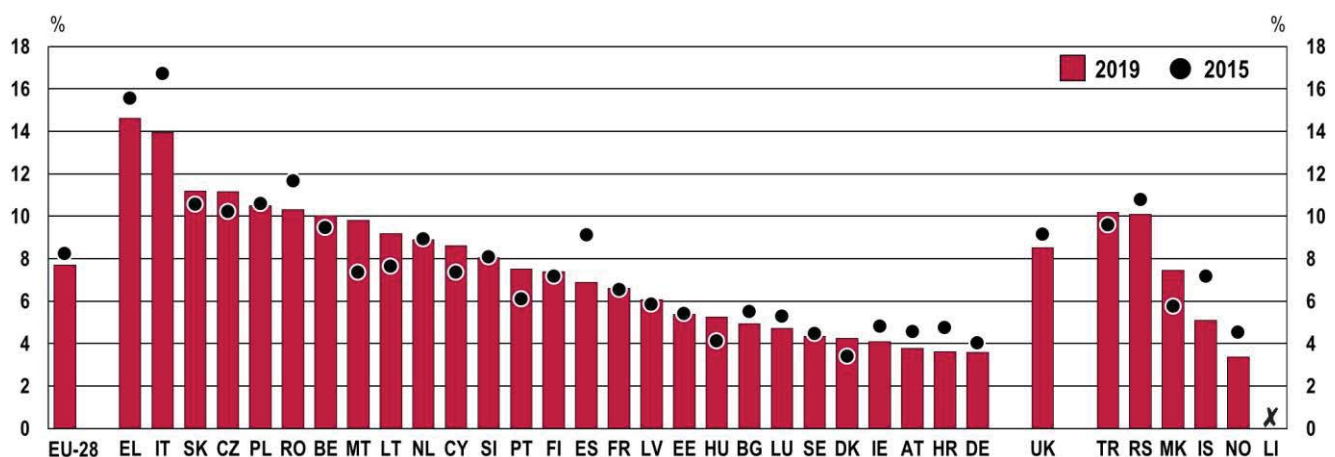
⁽³⁸⁾ Burchell et al., 2015; Hatfield, 2015.

⁽³⁹⁾ Eurofound, 2015.

family and tax policies that discourage labour market participation and entrepreneurship; and negative attitudes towards female entrepreneurs ⁽⁴⁰⁾.

Figure 3.15 depicts the proportion of self-employed young people aged 25–29 by country. The proportion of self-employed young people was the highest in Greece (14.6 %) in 2019, followed by Italy (13.9 %), Czechia and Slovakia (11.2 % in both). It should be recalled that levels of youth unemployment are among the highest in Greece and Italy (see Figure 3.2), and in these two countries, self-employment rates most likely reflect a relatively high degree of necessity entrepreneurship. This is confirmed by the parallel decreases in youth unemployment and self-employment rates between 2015 and 2019. In contrast, in Czechia and Slovakia (and similarly, in Poland), youth unemployment rates have been relatively low, and self-employment remained relatively stable in this period. This suggests that there are other factors behind the relatively high self-employment rates in these countries, for example supportive policy environments ⁽⁴¹⁾.

Figure 3.15: Self-employment as a percentage of total employment for young people (25-29), by country, 2015 and 2019



Source: Calculations based on Eurostat [lfsa_esgan] and [lfsa_egan]. Data extracted on 03.05.2021.

Notes: Croatia: low data reliability.

EU-27 averages: 2015: 8.1 %; 2019: 7.5 %.

Countries are grouped based on EU membership and in descending order by self-employment as a percentage of total employment in 2019.

In 2019, the percentage of self-employed young people in the 25–29 age group was the lowest, below 4 %, in Austria, Germany and Croatia ⁽⁴²⁾ within the EU-28, and in Norway outside the EU, with small decreases in all four countries between 2015 and 2019. At the EU-28 level, self-employment rates remained rather stable in this period.

3.3. Labour market digitalisation

Digitalisation has a fundamental impact on labour markets. It changes job dynamics, leading to the creation of new jobs while making other jobs redundant. It also transforms working conditions and work organisation by

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Wagner, 2007; Andersson Joona and Wadensjö, 2008; OECD, 2019.

⁽⁴¹⁾ Dvouletý and Orel, 2020.

⁽⁴²⁾ Data reliability is low in Croatia.

making flexible work possible and allowing the creation of new types of employment relationships ⁽⁴³⁾. Digitalisation drives the economy towards a more flexible, online, on-demand economy ⁽⁴⁴⁾. One example, as was mentioned above, is the Uberisation of service sectors and the emergence of a collaborative economy – as discussed in Chapter 5 – which has been made possible by new and more developed internet-based matching platforms and a resulting decrease in transaction costs ⁽⁴⁵⁾. Finally, digitalisation creates a shift in skill needs and results in a new ‘digital divide’ ⁽⁴⁶⁾. As Chapter 6 shows, this digital divide between young people with lower and higher levels of education is still strong in Europe. In addition to having diverging abilities to fulfil the new tasks required by a digital economy (see Chapter 5), inequalities in digital skills also mean differences in access to (digital) information, including information on jobs.

European countries are at different stages in their transitions to a digital economy. The European Commission’s Digital Economy and Society Index provides a tool to measure the extent of digitalisation and tracks the digital development of EU Member States ⁽⁴⁷⁾. This index looks at the following five aspects of digitalisation: connectivity (availability of broadband infrastructure), human capital (skills), use of internet services (online activities of individuals), integration of digital technology (digitalisation of businesses), and digital public services (such as e-government) ⁽⁴⁸⁾. While Chapter 6 focuses on the digital skills of young people, several other chapters in this report address different aspects of how and for what kind of activities young people use the internet in different European countries.

Figure 3.16 depicts the percentage of young people aged 16–29 who have used the internet to search for a job or send an application. These percentages depend on many different aspects of the labour market: on the extent of digitalisation in terms of broadband access, especially in remote/rural areas (see also Chapter 5), the percentage of jobs advertised online and the extent to which public employment services offer their services online; on the divide in digital skills among young people (see also Chapter 6); and also on the activity rate of the youth population. As discussed above, many young people – especially in younger age groups – are still in education and may not be looking for a job at all, either online or offline (for a comparison of employment rates, see Figure 3.10).

In the EU-28, around one third of young people aged 16–29 used the internet when searching for a job or sending an application in 2019. In contrast, only one in five people did the same in the prime working-age population. However, these averages hide huge disparities among EU Member States. While around half or even more young people used the internet when looking and applying for jobs in some Nordic countries (Finland, Denmark and Sweden), this percentage was below 20 % in some central and eastern European countries (Poland, Bulgaria and Czechia) and reached only 10 % in Romania.

The same tendencies can be observed in the prime working-age population, but at a lower level. A higher percentage of young people search and apply for jobs online than do so in older age groups in almost every country ⁽⁴⁹⁾, despite the lower level of young people’s labour market activity. The differences between younger and older age groups are largest in Malta, Austria and Czechia in the EU-28, and in Iceland and

⁽⁴³⁾ European Parliament, 2015; EESC, 2017.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ EESC, 2017.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ Nurvala, 2015.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ European Parliament, 2015.

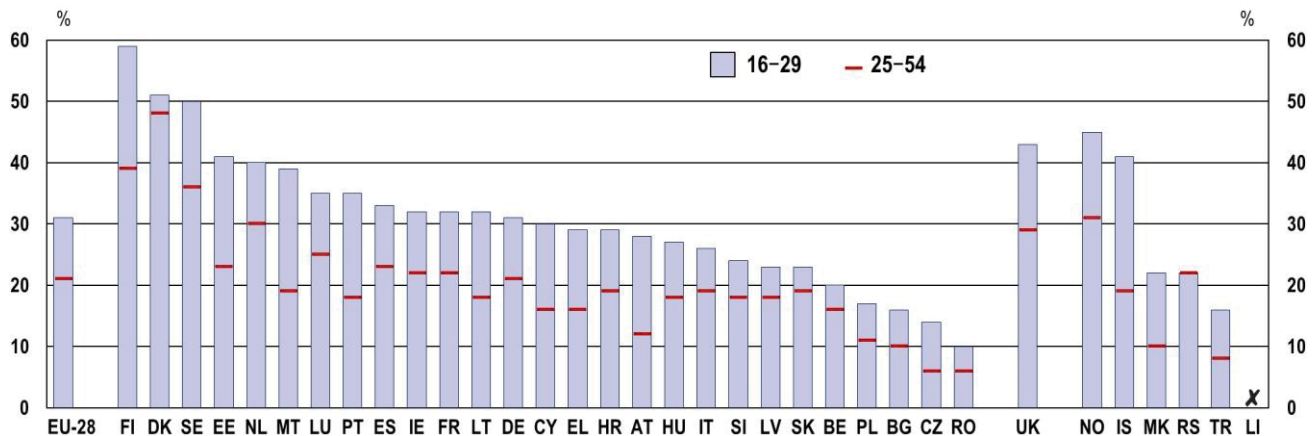
⁽⁴⁷⁾ European Commission, 2021a.

⁽⁴⁸⁾ Ibid.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ The only exception is Serbia, where the two proportions are identical.

North Macedonia outside the EU. In these countries the proportion of people looking for or applying for a job online in the prime working-age group is less than half of the same percentage in the youth population. In contrast, there are no differences between younger and older age groups in the extent of using the internet for such purposes in Serbia, and the differences are also relatively small in Denmark, Slovakia and Belgium.

Figure 3.16: Percentages of young people (16-29) and people in the prime working-age group (25-54) who used the internet to search for a job or send an application, by country, 2019



Source: Eurostat [isoc_ci_ac_i]. Data extracted on 07.05.2021.

Notes: EU-27 averages: internet use: 29 % (16-29) and 20 % (25-54); activity rate (15-29): 54.7 %.

Countries are grouped based on EU membership and in descending order by proportion of young people using the internet to search for a job or send an application.

Conclusions

Young people entering the world of work usually experience multiple and often protracted transitions between education, the labour market and inactivity. The youngest age groups are rarely employed and, when they are, it is usually in part-time 'student' or seasonal jobs, combining employment and education. However, the chances of finding employment for young people who do seek it are lower than those of the prime working-age group.

In the majority of European countries, youth employment rates mirror those of the adult population at a higher level. Higher proportions of young people are in unemployment in those countries where adult unemployment rates are higher.

It is not only the unemployment rate that is higher among young people than in the prime working-age population. A much higher proportion of young employees than of those in the prime working-age population have temporary or fixed-term contracts. In contrast, few young people have set up their own business. The digitalisation of labour markets also changes working conditions, and young people may be more likely to embrace the changes.

On average, in Europe, unemployment in both the youth population and the prime working-age population was steadily decreasing between 2013 and 2019. Nevertheless, employment prospects are not the same for all young people. Young people with lower levels of education have higher unemployment rates. While gender differences in unemployment do not follow the same pattern in all European countries, gender gaps in employment patterns are persistent: women tend to work part-time much more and create their own businesses to a much lesser extent.

The COVID-19 crisis has had a large impact on the lives of young people, both those in education and those in employment. While unemployment rates increased for all age groups in 2020 after the steady decrease of the economic recovery period, the increase was more substantial for young people. The future will tell whether such changes are temporary or if they will have a lasting impact.

Brussels, 14.10.2021
SWD(2021) 287 final

PART 4/10

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

The situation of young people in the European Union

Accompanying the document

**Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European
Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions**

on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2021

{COM(2021) 636 final} - {SWD(2021) 286 final}

4. Youth on the move

Taking part in a learning experience abroad gives young people the opportunity to develop a wide range of skills and competences, strengthening both subject-specific knowledge and transversal skills such as critical thinking, communication and problem-solving. They may also learn a foreign language or improve their language skills. Moreover, youth mobility promotes intercultural understanding and contributes to broadening young people's perspectives of Europe and the world, so that they are better equipped to face the challenges of an increasingly diverse society ⁽¹⁾.

Erasmus+ is the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe. It aims to support participating countries to use the potential talent and social assets in a lifelong learning perspective and promote opportunities for cooperation and mobility between them. Participants in the Erasmus+ programme usually report feeling more ready to take on new challenges, having better career prospects and being more aware of the benefits that the EU brings to their daily lives ⁽²⁾.

The European Solidarity Corps (ESC) is the EU's new programme providing opportunities for young people (aged 18–30 years) to carry out volunteering activities, gain experience in traineeships and jobs, and run their own solidarity projects. Young volunteers who have taken part in ESC activities report developing additional skills and knowledge that will be useful in their future careers ⁽³⁾.

However, not all young people have equal access to these opportunities. According to Eurostudent data, students with lower socio-economic status – measured by the education level or profession of their parents – are less likely to participate in student mobility schemes ⁽⁴⁾. Further studies have confirmed this trend based on extensive graduate data from specific countries ⁽⁵⁾. Moreover, the mobility uptake varies significantly across universities and fields of study, and preliminary research shows that those with a low mobility uptake have larger proportions of disadvantaged students, which could further limit their access to mobility schemes ⁽⁶⁾. They would have fewer chances to be in contact with other young people having enjoyed such an experience and to receive information about existing opportunities. They could also face more difficulties to go through the procedures and to get the necessary financial means.

This chapter provides an overview of young people's participation in learning experiences abroad, including volunteering. The first part of the chapter looks at youth mobility in a broad sense. Section 4.1 shows the proportions of young people who have considered going abroad or who have been abroad for study, training, work, exchanges or volunteering, according to the Eurobarometer youth surveys. Section 4.2 examines why some of them considered it but did not go, while Section 4.3 analyses why some people have never considered such an opportunity. The second part of the chapter focuses on youth participation in two specific activities, namely the Erasmus+ learning mobility activities (Section 4.4) and the ESC (Section 4.5).

⁽¹⁾ European Commission, 2018c.

⁽²⁾ European Commission, 2020c.

⁽³⁾ European Commission, 2020d.

⁽⁴⁾ Hauschildt et al., 2015.

⁽⁵⁾ Schnepf et al., 2020; Wiers-Jenssen, 2011; Munk, 2009.

⁽⁶⁾ Schnepf and Colagrossi, 2020.

4.1. Going on a learning experience abroad

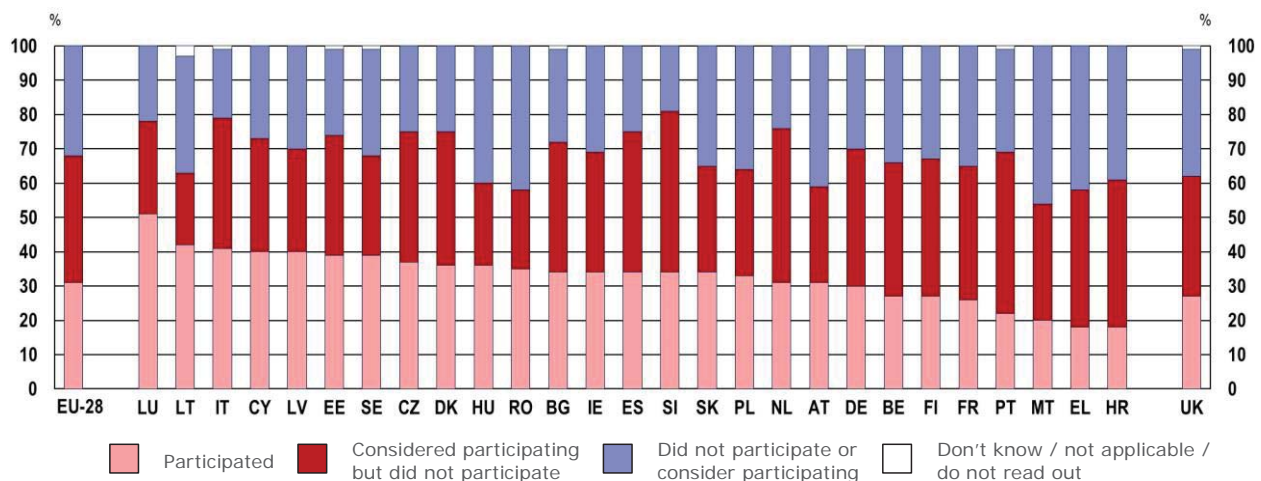
In the 2019 Eurobarometer youth survey *How do we build a stronger, more united Europe? The views of young people*, young people in EU Member States were asked whether they had gone abroad for at least 2 weeks for study, training, work, exchanges or volunteering (i.e. excluding travel for tourism or living with one's family abroad). On average, one in three had taken part in such experiences.

As illustrated in Figure 4.1, more than half of the respondents in Luxembourg reported having gone abroad for such a purpose. Youth mobility was also high in the three Baltic states, Italy, Cyprus and Sweden, where around 40 % of the interviewees reported having participated in a learning experience abroad for at least 2 weeks.

This mobility includes, among other things, the completion of part or all of a university degree in a foreign country. According to the Bologna process implementation report, Cyprus and Luxembourg have the largest proportions of graduates earning a university degree abroad ⁽⁷⁾. In Luxembourg, it is a requirement for all university students to complete part of their degree programme in another country. The proportion of students getting their degree or taking a number of credits of their study programme abroad is relatively high in Italy, Latvia, Lithuania and Sweden.

In the Eurobarometer youth survey, the proportion of young people who had gone abroad for study, training, work, exchanges or volunteering was also above the EU-28 average (of 31 %) in Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Ireland, Spain, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia.

Figure 4.1: Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) having participated or not in a learning experience abroad by country, 2019



Source: Flash Eurobarometer 478. Volume A. Question D7Q (1 and 2): 'Excluding travel for tourism or living with one's family abroad, have you ever stayed abroad for at least two weeks? For example, for studies, training, work, exchanges or volunteering'.

Notes: EU Member States are displayed in descending order of proportion of respondents having participated in a learning experience abroad.

By contrast, only around 20 % of the respondents in Greece, Croatia and Malta reported having taken part in a learning experience abroad. In these countries, around 40 % reported that they had not even considered such a possibility. Although youth mobility was higher in Hungary, Austria and Romania, 40 % of the respondents in these three countries also had not considered going abroad for study or volunteering. Many of these young people were just not interested in such an experience, whereas others felt that it would not be possible because

(7) European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020a, p. 136.

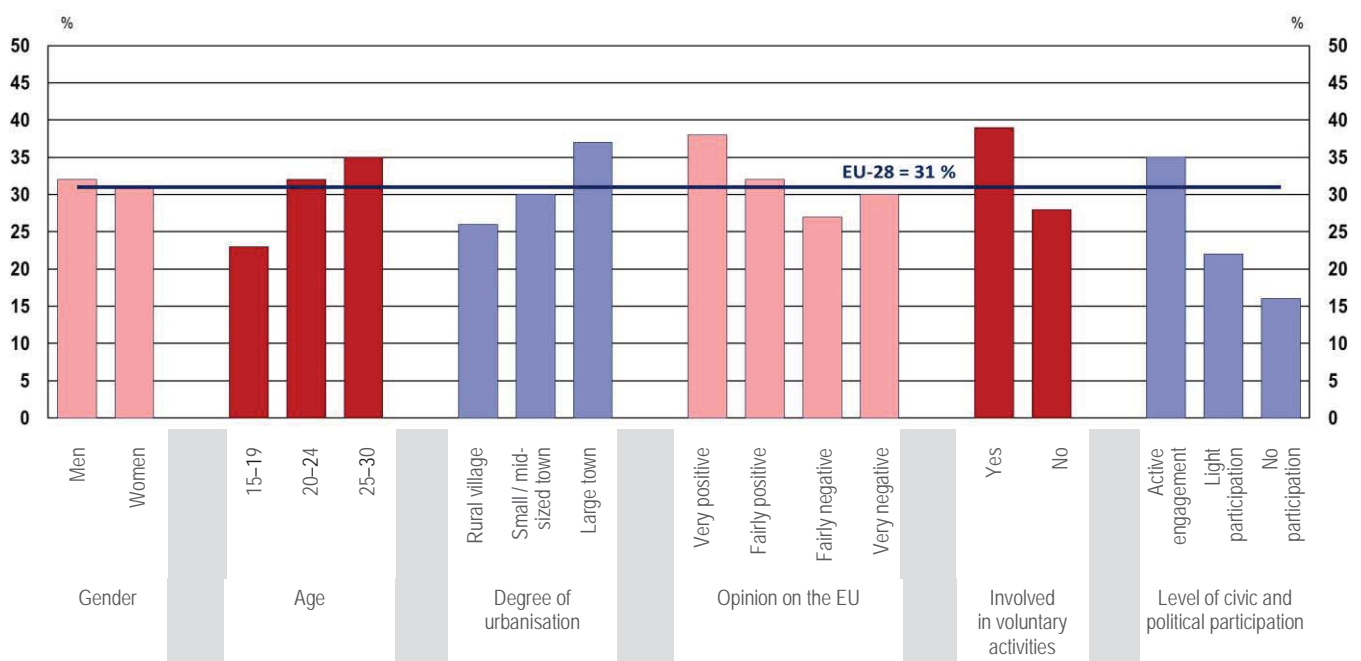
of family-, work- or study-related issues (see Section 4.3). On average, 32 % of young people in the EU-28 had not ever considered taking part in a learning experience abroad.

A larger proportion (37 %) had considered the possibility of taking part in such an experience but had never participated in one. This was the case for 40 % or more of the respondents in Germany, Greece, Spain, Croatia, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia and Finland, and for 39 % in Belgium, Denmark and France.

In all these countries, the ratio of the young people who considered participating in a learning experience abroad but did not participate to all young people who considered participating (including those who took part) was particularly high. Despite their interest, these young people could not go for financial or other reasons (see Section 4.2). In Greece, Croatia and Portugal, more than two in three of the respondents who had considered it did not take part in a learning experience abroad. This was the case for more than one in two of the respondents in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Spain, France, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Finland.

Figure 4.2 shows the EU-28 averages for the proportions of young people who went abroad for at least 2 weeks for learning or volunteering, by gender, age, degree of urbanisation, opinion on the EU, involvement in voluntary activities and level of civic and political participation. The averages for young men and young women are very similar. The differences are larger between age groups, with the outbound mobility increasing with age. On average, only 23 % of the respondents aged under 20 had taken part in a learning experience abroad, compared with 32 % of those aged 20–24, and 35 % of those aged 25–30.

Figure 4.2: Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) reporting having gone abroad for a learning experience of at least 2 weeks by characteristic, 2019



Source: Flash Eurobarometer 478. Volume B. Question D7Q: 'Excluding travel for tourism or living with one's family abroad, have you ever stayed abroad for at least two weeks? For example, for studies, training, work, exchanges or volunteering'.

The outbound mobility among young people living in rural areas was lower than that among young people living in urban areas. While, on average, only 26 % of young people living in a rural area had gone abroad for at least 2 weeks for learning or volunteering, this percentage increased to 30 % for those living in a small or mid-sized town and 37 % for young people living in a large town.

The proportion of young people who had participated in a learning experience abroad was higher among those who had a positive opinion of the EU, were involved in voluntary activities and were more engaged in society by voting or through other forms of participation (see Chapter 2). Recent literature also suggest that better-off students could be participating in larger proportions than young people with a lower socio-economic status. Next sections will provide further insight on the matter by examining the reasons given by young people for not participating in such an experience.

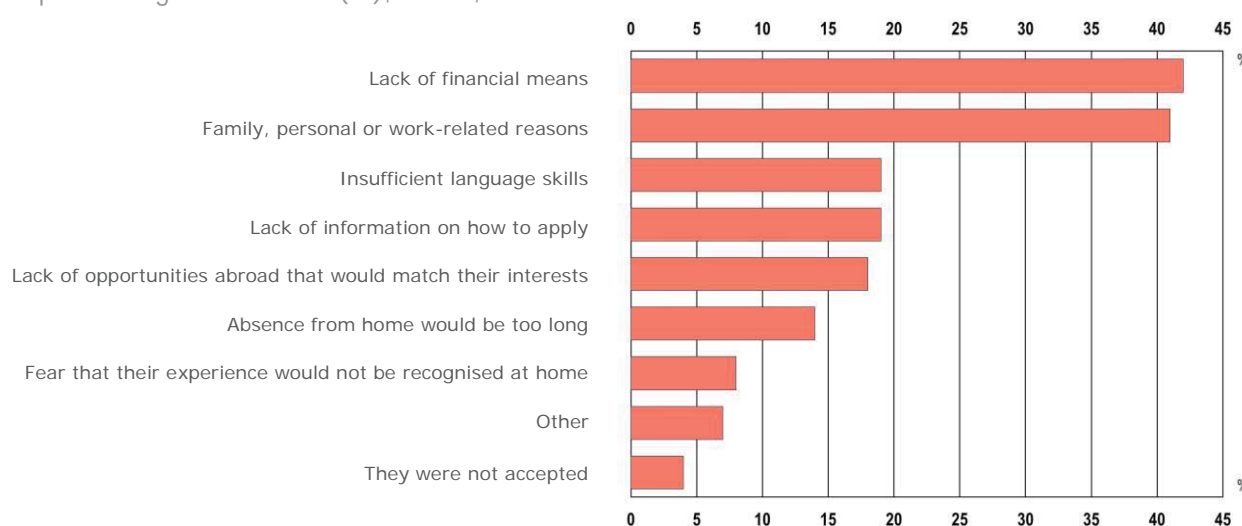
4.2. Reasons for considering but not participating in a learning experience abroad

This section examines the reasons why more than one third of the respondents to the Eurobarometer youth survey considered taking part in a learning experience abroad but did not participate. Considering a learning experience abroad may not have the same meaning for all the respondents. Some may have taken active steps or even applied, while others may have just thought about it.

As illustrated in Figure 4.3, an average of 42 % of these young people reported that they did not have the necessary financial means. A similar proportion (41 %) did not go for family, personal or work-related reasons. These data suggest that many of the young people who considered a learning experience abroad but eventually could not participate could be coming from a low socio-economic background. The 2011 Eurostudent report showed that finances and separation from family is particularly problematic for disadvantaged students ⁽⁸⁾.

Almost 20 % of the respondents said that they did not know the language sufficiently or how to apply. This could also concern to a greater extent young people with a low socio-economic status.

Figure 4.3: Reasons given by young people (aged 15-30) for not taking part in a learning experience abroad despite having considered it (%), EU-28, 2019



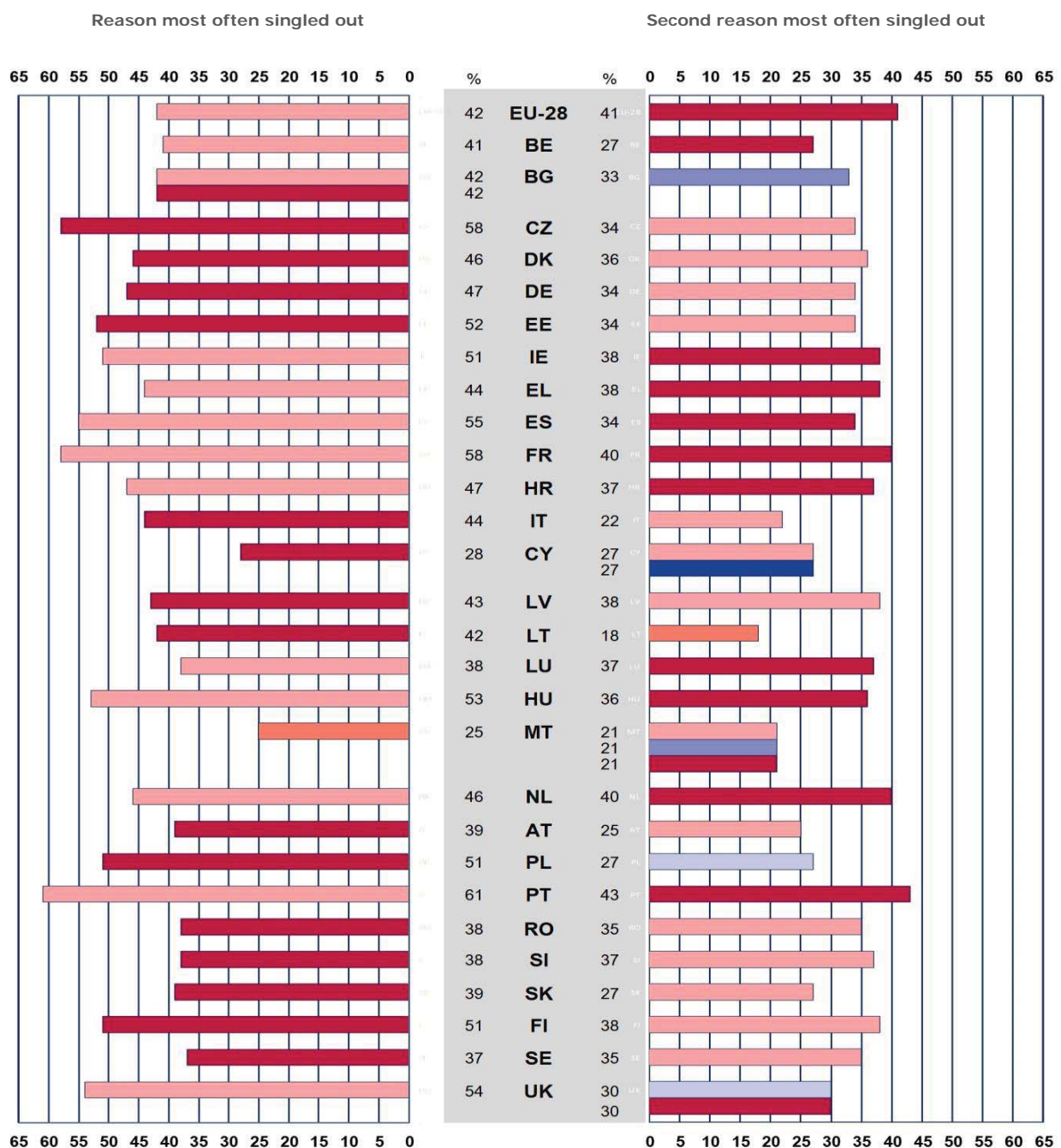
Source: Flash Eurobarometer 478. Volume B. Q3a: 'For which of these reasons did you not take part in a learning experience abroad even though you considered it? (Max. 3 answers)'.

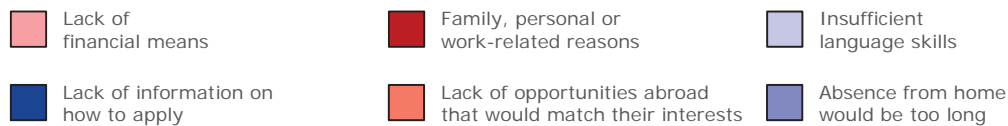
⁽⁸⁾ Orr et al., 2011.

Finally, 18 % of the respondents could not find any opportunities that matched their interests, 14 % felt that their absence from home would be too long, 8 % feared that their experience would not be recognised on their return, and 4 % could not go because their application was not accepted.

Figure 4.4 shows which of these reasons for not taking part in a learning experience abroad were most frequently given by young people in each country. The lack of financial means and family, personal or work-related issues were the main obstacles preventing young people from participating in a learning experience abroad in almost all countries.

Figure 4.4: Reasons given by young people (aged 15-30) for not taking part in a learning experience abroad despite having considered it (%) by country, 2019





Source: Flash Eurobarometer 478. Volume A. Q3a: 'For which of these reasons did you not take part in a learning experience abroad even though you considered it? (Max. 3 answers)'.

Family, personal or work-related reasons was the main obstacle in 15 countries and the lack of financial means was the main obstacle in 11 countries. Each of these reasons was provided by similar proportions of respondents in Bulgaria. Only in Malta was the most common reason neither of these but that respondents could not find any opportunities abroad that matched their interests.

In countries with a high proportion of respondents who had considered participating but had not taken part in a learning experience abroad (see Figure 4.1), the lack of financial means appears to be an important hurdle. This was the case for more than half of these young people in Ireland, Spain, France, Portugal and the United Kingdom. The proportion was almost as high in Belgium, Greece, Croatia and the Netherlands. In all these countries, the second most common factor was work or other personal or family circumstances, which generally affected around one third of the respondents, but more in France, the Netherlands and Portugal.

In Czechia, Denmark, Germany and Finland, where a large proportion of young people had also not participated in a learning experience abroad despite their potential interest, around half or more of the respondents reported family, personal or work-related reasons for not participating, and more than one third reported a lack of financial means. Similarly, in Bulgaria and Slovenia, more than one third of respondents indicated that they did not participate because of a lack of financial means and family, personal or work-related reasons.

As shown in the right panel of Figure 4.4, the lack of financial means was the second most frequent response in 12 countries, and family, personal or work-related issues was the second most frequent response in another 11 countries, including the United Kingdom, where the same number of respondents also reported insufficient language skills as an obstacle. Insufficient language skills was also the second most frequent response in Poland. In Malta, several second reasons were reported by similar proportions of young people, namely the lack of financial means, family, personal or work-related issues and the fact that their absence from home would have been too long. The long absence from home was also the second most frequent response in Bulgaria, while in Cyprus it was the lack of information on how to apply and in Lithuania it was the lack of opportunities matching respondents' interests.

4.3. Reasons for not considering a learning experience abroad

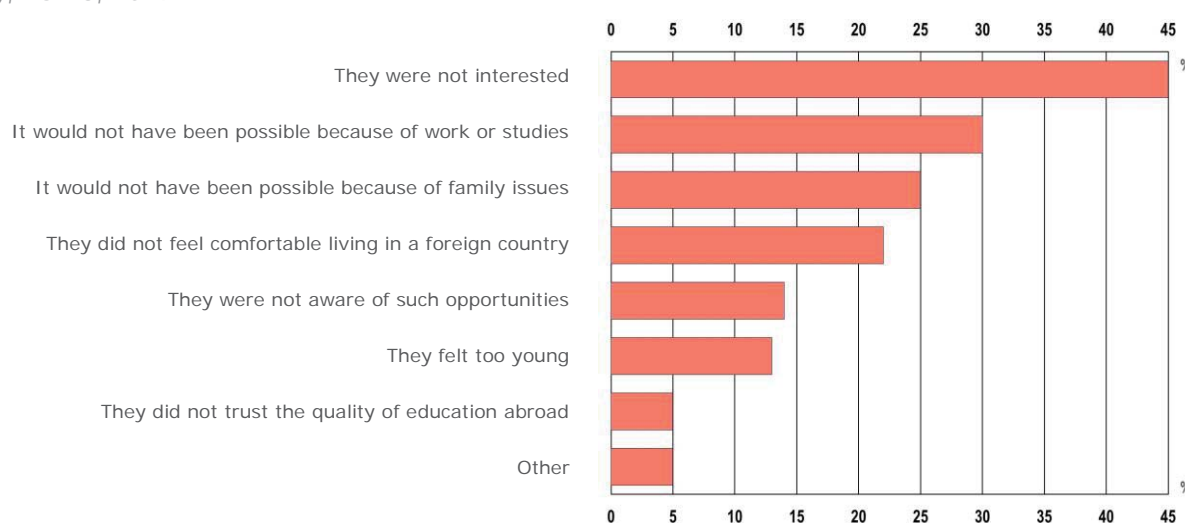
As shown in the previous section, family, personal and work-related issues prevented many young people who were interested in taking part in a learning experience abroad from doing so. Similar reasons prevented many other young people from even considering a learning experience abroad.

Figure 4.5 shows the main reasons given by young people for not considering taking part in a learning experience abroad. On average, 45 % were simply not interested. However, for a large proportion it would not have been possible because of their work or studies (30 %) or family circumstances (25 %). The family situation was a stronger explanatory factor for young women than for young men: 29 % of the female respondents reported family issues as a reason for not considering a learning experience abroad, compared

with 21 % of the male respondents. By contrast, work or studies seemed to be more often an obstacle for young men (32 %) than for young women (27 %).

Factors concerning young people's confidence to live abroad were the next most common reasons reported. An average of 22 % of these young people did not feel comfortable living in a foreign country, and 13 % felt too young for such an experience. A similar percentage (14 %) reported not being aware of such opportunities. Generally, young men (16 %) appeared to be less informed than young women (11 %). There could also be a relationship between the lack of information and young people's socio-economic status, which may be worth further investigation. Finally, only a small percentage of the respondents expressed concerns about the quality of education in the other country.

Figure 4.5: Reasons given by young people (aged 15-30) for not considering a learning experience abroad (%), EU-28, 2019



Source: Flash Eurobarometer 478. Volume B. Q3b: 'For which of these reasons did you not consider taking part in a learning experience abroad? (Max. 3 answers)'.

Figure 4.6 shows the reasons most often provided by young people in each country for not considering the possibility of travelling abroad for learning, working or volunteering. The largest proportion of respondents in all countries except France (where this was the third most common answer), Luxembourg and Hungary (where it was the second) reported a lack of interest.

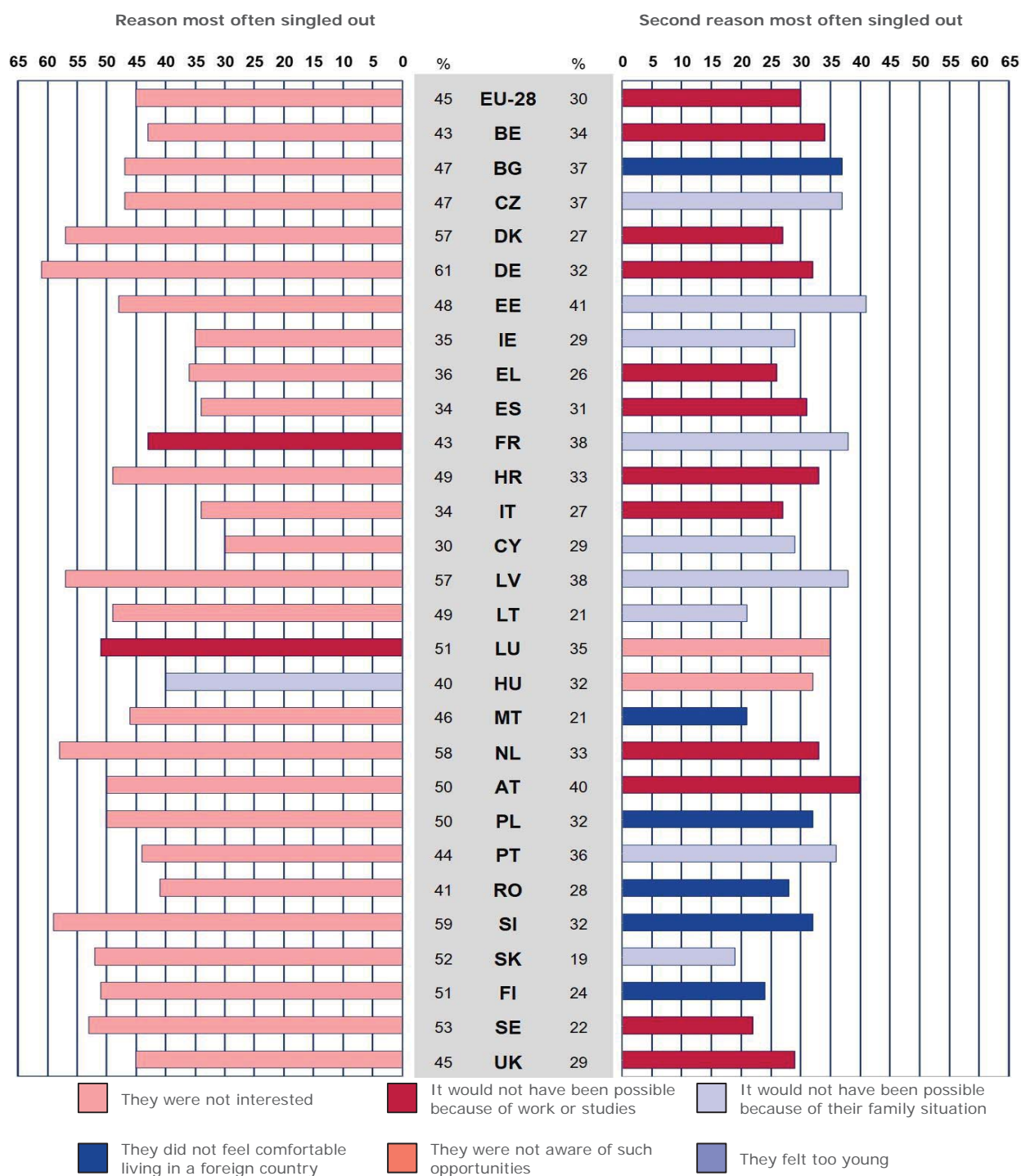
The lack of interest was an explanatory factor for half or more of the respondents in 10 countries (Denmark, Germany, Latvia, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland and Sweden). The proportion was almost as high in another 10 countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Croatia, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, Romania and the United Kingdom).

In France and Luxembourg, the largest proportions of these young people (43 % and 51 %, respectively) reported that a learning experience abroad would not have been possible because of their work or studies. This was the second most reported reason in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

In Hungary, the most common reason reported by young people who had not considered going abroad on a learning experience (40 %) was family circumstances. This was the second most reported reason in Czechia, Estonia, Ireland, France, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal and Slovakia.

In Bulgaria, Poland and Slovenia, more than 30 % of the respondents said that they would not feel comfortable living in a foreign country. In Malta, Romania and Finland, this was also the second most common response.

Figure 4.6: Reasons given by young people (aged 15-30) for not considering a learning experience abroad (%) by country, 2019



Source: Flash Eurobarometer 478. Volume A. Q3b: 'For which of these reasons did you not consider taking part in a learning experience abroad? (Max. 3 answers)'.

4.4. Participation in Erasmus+ learning mobility actions

The 2014–2020 Erasmus+ programme included five actions. Key action 1 aimed to support the mobility of individuals (learners and staff) to allow them to undertake a learning or professional experience in another country ⁽⁹⁾.

For learners (i.e. students, trainees, apprentices and young people), the main aim was to improve their learning, employability and career prospects, their sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, their self-empowerment and self-esteem, their foreign language competences and their motivation to pursue further education or training after the mobility period abroad. The aim was also to promote active participation in society, intercultural understanding, and awareness of the European project and EU values ⁽¹⁰⁾.

This section looks at the participation of learners in Erasmus+ mobility actions of at least 1 month in the fields of higher education (HE) and vocational education and training (VET) ⁽¹¹⁾. The reference years (2015, 2019 and 2020) refer to the starting year of the learning experience abroad ⁽¹²⁾. Many other students from these countries may have studied abroad outside the Erasmus+ programme. The Bologna implementation reports cover in detail the overall credit and degree mobility in higher education ⁽¹³⁾. In addition, the mobility scoreboard includes information on credit mobility by type of mobility scheme ⁽¹⁴⁾.

Figure 4.7 shows the numbers of learners from Erasmus+ countries per 10 000 young people (aged 15–29) who took part in Erasmus+ mobility actions in HE and VET starting in 2019. The table beneath the figure displays the total numbers of learners per country who took part.

Liechtenstein and the Baltic states recorded the highest participation rates. Compared with the sizes of their young populations, engagement in these Erasmus+ mobility actions was also relevant in other small countries such as Slovenia, Malta and Luxembourg. The participation rate was smaller in Cyprus, where a small proportion of graduates go abroad to study some credits only, but around one third study their complete programme abroad ⁽¹⁵⁾.

Medium-sized countries such as the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal and Finland also had high participation rates in Erasmus+ mobility learning actions in the field of HE and VET. Almost 18 800 participants came from the Netherlands, more than twice the number who came from countries with similar populations such as Romania. There were also twice as many participants from Portugal (almost 11 800) as from Greece, Hungary and Sweden. The number of participants from Finland (around 6 500) was also significantly higher than the numbers of participants from other countries with similar populations such as Bulgaria and Slovakia.

⁽⁹⁾ The other four actions were cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices, support for policy reform, Jean Monnet activities and sport.

⁽¹⁰⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about_en

⁽¹¹⁾ The other field of actions were school education, adult education and youth. Youth exchanges have not been included because they usually last up to 21 days, while youth volunteering will be examined in the next section.

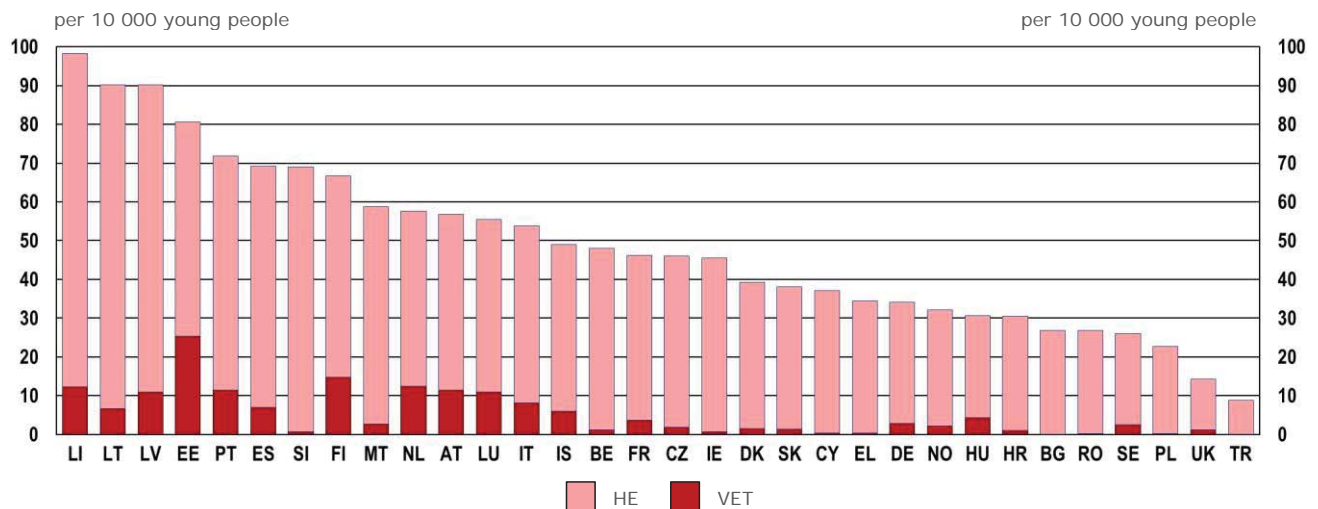
⁽¹²⁾ The data refer to contracted individual mobilities starting in the reference year. They may have been contracted under a previous year's Erasmus+ call or may have ended after the reference year.

⁽¹³⁾ The most recent Bologna implementation report covered the 2016/17 reference year. Data for 2019 are not yet available. See European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020a.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Data from the last mobility scoreboard refer to 2017. See European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020b.

⁽¹⁵⁾ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020b, pp. 98–100.

Figure 4.7: Numbers of learners per 10 000 young people (aged 15-29) who participated in Erasmus+ mobility actions in HE and VET (for at least 1 month) starting in 2019



Numbers of learners participating in Erasmus+ mobility actions in HE and VET (for at least 1 month) starting in 2019

	BE	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU	MT
HE	9 577	2 802	7 233	4 256	43 074	1 182	4 056	5 684	44 499	49 893	2 019	41 106	685	2 375	4 028	522	4 402	549
VET	250	0	301	166	3 944	543	64	54	4 978	4 263	68	7 386	7	330	323	128	728	26
	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE		UK		IS	LI	MK	NO	RS	TR
HE	14 694	7 147	14 625	9 902	8 482	2 111	3 480	5 040	4 452		16 174		333	56	361	3 094	889	16 938
VET	4 075	1 797	99	1 879	51	23	136	1 438	478		1 459		47	8	0	233	0	100

Source: Erasmus+ Dashboard, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (data extracted on 5 March 2021) and Eurostat [yth_demo_060].

Notes: Countries in the column chart are displayed in descending order of number of learners per 10 000 young people who participated in Erasmus+ mobility actions in HE and VET (for at least 1 month) starting in 2019.

In the case of Sweden, a large proportion of young people reported having taken part in an experience abroad in the Eurobarometer youth survey (see Figure 4.1). In fact, the outward mobility in this country is relatively high but most of the credit mobility takes place outside the Erasmus programme ⁽¹⁶⁾.

Among the large countries, young people from Spain and Italy were among those who benefited the most from the Erasmus+ programme, in both relative and absolute terms. Almost 50 000 participants came from each of these countries. More than 54 000 participants came from France, but the number of young people aged 15–29 is higher in this country. By contrast, less than 15 000 came from Poland.

More than 90 % of these learning experiences abroad were in the field of HE, usually consisting of a study period and/or traineeship at a partner higher education institution as part of the study programme to complete a university degree ⁽¹⁷⁾. VET mobility activities, which represented less than 10 % of these learning experiences abroad, usually took the form of a full work placement in a company or a combination of school-based learning and a strong work-based component organised by a VET provider.

In 12 countries, participation in a learning experience abroad in the field of VET was particularly significant. Estonia, Finland and the Netherlands had the highest participation rates per 10 000 young people. They also

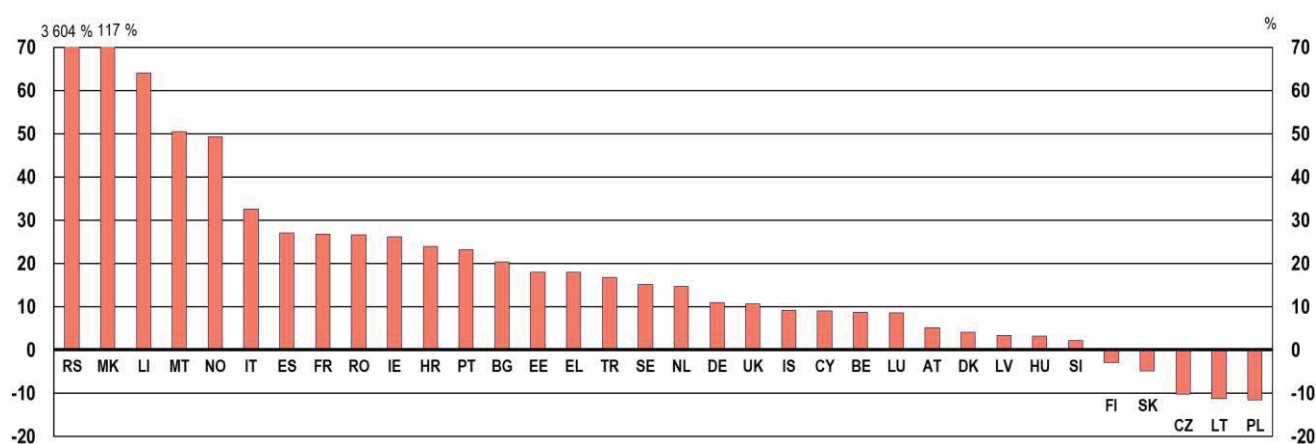
⁽¹⁶⁾ Ibid.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Other activities in the field of HE comprised cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices, support for policy reform, Jean Monnet activities and sport.

had the highest proportions of VET learners, amounting to around 22 % of all learners in the Netherlands and Finland and more than 30 % in Estonia. Participation in VET learning activities abroad relative to the size of the young population was also high in Spain, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Austria, Portugal, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

The total number of learners from these Erasmus+ countries who started a mobility action abroad in 2019 was nearly 17 % higher than in 2015. As shown in Figure 4.8, between 2015 and 2019 the number of participants increased in almost all countries. Only Finland, Slovakia, Czechia, Lithuania and Poland saw a decrease.

Figure 4.8: Percentage differences between 2015 and 2019 in the numbers of learners starting an Erasmus+ mobility action of at least 1 month in HE and VET



Source: Erasmus+ Dashboard, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. Data extracted on 5 March 2021.

Notes: Countries are displayed in descending order of percentage difference between 2015 and 2019 in the number of learners starting an Erasmus+ mobility action of at least 1 month in HE and VET.

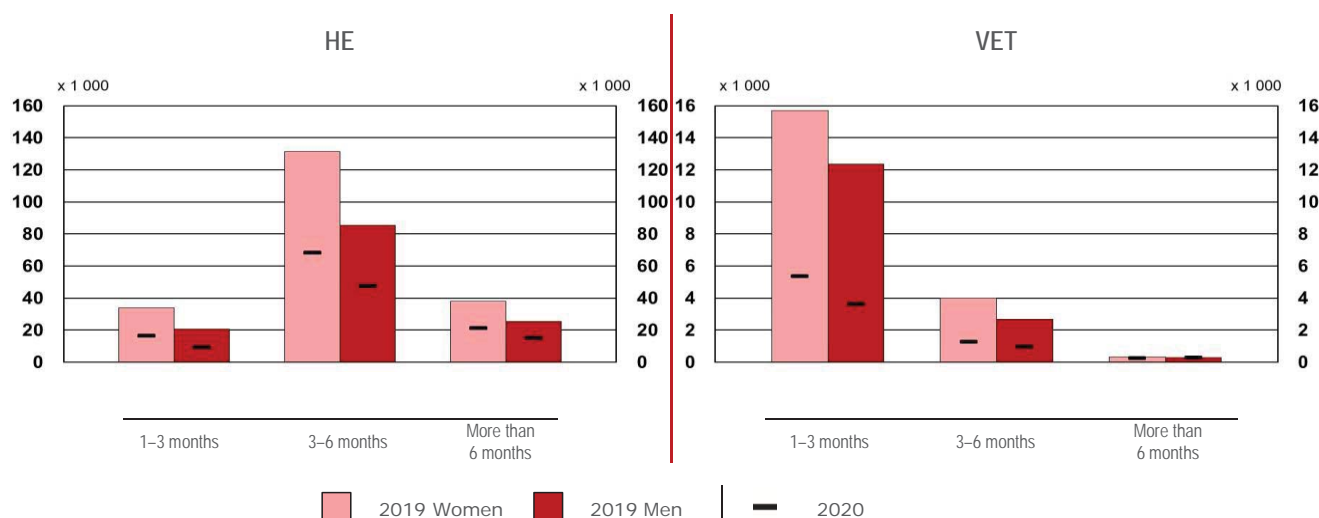
The highest increases took place in countries with the lowest number of participants in 2015, namely Serbia, Northern Macedonia, Liechtenstein and Malta. In 2015, only 24 learners came from Serbia, compared with almost 900 in 2019. There were twice as many participants from Northern Macedonia in 2019 as in 2015, and the numbers of learners increased by more than half in Liechtenstein and Malta.

Similarly, in Norway, the number of participants increased by nearly 50 % in 2019 compared with 2015. In Italy, Spain and France, which had had among the highest numbers of participants in 2015, the increase in 2019 was in the region of 30 %. Romania and Ireland also showed similar increases. In Croatia and Portugal, the numbers of participants increased by more than 20 %.

In terms of gender, around 60 % of the participants were women and 40 % were men. The proportion of male participants was slightly higher for VET than for HE.

Around 60 % of these learning experiences abroad lasted from 3 to 6 months, around 22 % lasted between 1 and 3 months, and around 17 % lasted for more than 6 months. As shown in Figure 4.9, while the learning experience for the great majority of HE students lasted for more than 3 months, for most VET students their experience abroad lasted for 1–3 months. In HE, the proportion of male participants increased with the duration of the learning experience abroad. In VET, activities lasting between 3 and 6 months registered the lowest proportion of male participants.

Figure 4.9: Numbers of learners starting an Erasmus+ mobility action in 2019 and 2020 by gender and duration



Source: Erasmus+ Dashboard, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. Data extracted on 5 March 2021.

Notes: The number of contracted mobility actions starting in 2020 refers to those reported by 5 March 2021. This number may increase with ongoing reporting.

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak had an impact on many of the Erasmus+ activities that started in 2019 and were to continue throughout 2020. A survey conducted by the Erasmus Student Network in March 2020 revealed that one quarter of the students taking part in Erasmus+ mobility actions had had to cancel their experience abroad and return home. This number continued to increase during 2020 ⁽¹⁸⁾. More than one third of respondents experienced problems with arranging transport to return home, with accommodation in the hosting country or with access to basic needs such as food and sanitary products. Half of the students who were able to continue their stay abroad moved to online learning, and another third had their lessons partly moved online or postponed.

The pandemic may also have affected the numbers of participants starting a learning experience in 2020. Although the reporting of these activities is still ongoing and the data available are not final, the provisional data can help to illustrate the effect of the pandemic.

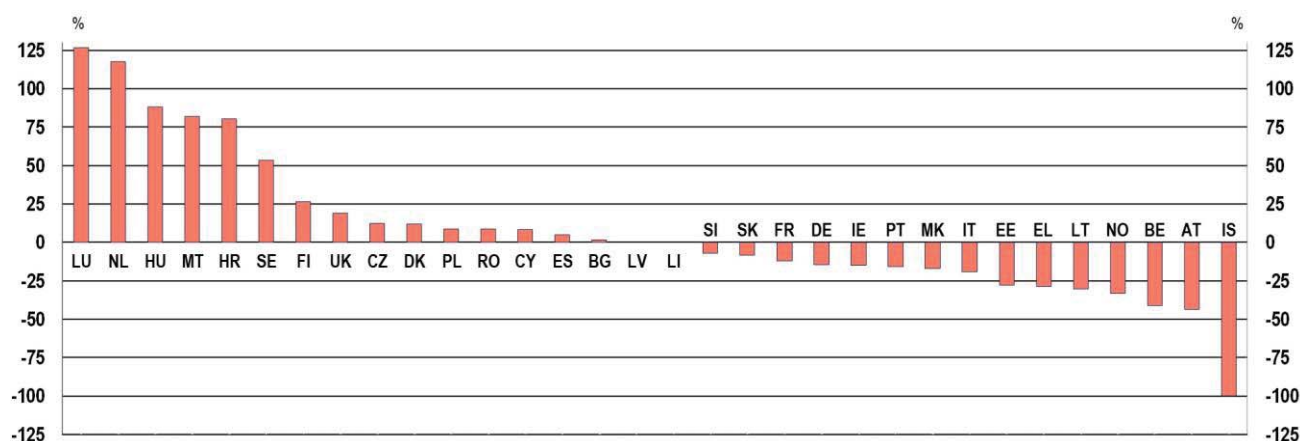
In 2020, the number of learners (from the Erasmus+ programme countries) who started a mobility action of at least 1 month in HE or VET was half that in 2019. The decreases in the numbers of participants from Spain, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Liechtenstein, Norway, Serbia and Turkey were even higher.

The ratio of the number of learners starting in 2020 to the number of learners starting in 2019 increased with the duration of the experience abroad, that is, the shorter the duration, the larger the decrease in number of participants in 2020 in relative terms. This contrast was more remarkable in the field of VET, where the number of learners undertaking experiences of less than 6 months in 2020 was around one third that in 2019 – while the numbers undertaking experiences lasting more than 6 months were almost the same.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Gabriels and Benke-Aberg, 2020.

In fact, ESC volunteering teams were a relevant and strategic instrument to bridge inter-generational and social divides exacerbated by the crisis. When physical cross-border participation was not possible, National Agencies could support volunteering teams with solely physical in-country participation and, where possible, a transnational dimension without or with limited physical mobility (e.g. virtual participation of young people from other countries).

Figure 4.11: Percentage differences between the number of young volunteers starting an activity in the ESC in 2019 and the number of young volunteers starting an activity in the ESC in 2020



Source: ESC Dashboard, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. Data extracted on 15 February 2021.

Notes: Data refer to actual participants. Countries are displayed in descending order of percentage difference between the number of young volunteers starting an activity in the ESC in 2019 and the number of young volunteers starting an activity in the ESC in 2020.

The numbers of volunteers decreased between 2019 and 2020 in around half of these countries. The decrease was particularly significant in Iceland, Austria, Belgium, Norway and Lithuania.

In the remaining countries, the numbers of young volunteers in the ESC increased. In Luxembourg and the Netherlands, more than twice as many volunteers started an ESC project or partnership in 2020 as in 2019. In Croatia, Malta and Hungary, the numbers of young volunteers increased by more than three quarters and in Sweden the number of volunteers increased by more than half.

Conclusions

Youth mobility contributes to the development of young people's skills and competences and to the promotion of intercultural understanding. Young people taking part in a learning experience abroad also tend to be more engaged in society.

According to Eurobarometer youth surveys, nearly one third of young people in Europe have participated in a learning experience abroad (for study, training, work, exchanges or volunteering), more than one third have considered the possibility but never participated, and nearly one third have never considered it.

The lack of financial means and family, personal or work-related issues were the main obstacles preventing young people that were interested from participating in a learning experience abroad. Insufficient language skills and the lack of information on how to apply were also important reasons, although they concerned fewer young people. A large proportion of young people never considered a learning experience abroad because of their work or studies or family circumstances.

The number of learners in Erasmus+ mobility actions in HE and VET increased substantially between 2015 and 2019, but decreased in 2020 as the result of the COVID-19 outbreak. By contrast, participation in the ESC remained stable despite the pandemic.

Young people from Spain and Italy are among those who benefitted the most from these Erasmus+ mobility actions in 2019, in both relative and absolute terms. Compared with the sizes of their young populations, the participation rate was particularly high in Liechtenstein, the Baltic states, Portugal, Slovenia and Finland. The three Baltic states, Portugal and Slovenia also had the highest numbers of volunteers in the ESC per 10 000 young people.

Brussels, 14.10.2021
SWD(2021) 287 final

PART 5/10

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

The situation of young people in the European Union

Accompanying the document

**Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European
Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions**

on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2021

{COM(2021) 636 final} - {SWD(2021) 286 final}

5. Youth and the digital world

The digital revolution has brought major changes to young people's lives. Advances in digital technologies are making new and innovative platforms, applications and networks available to large proportions of young Europeans and shaping their social and communication behaviours.

There are many advantages in a digital society. Connectedness and ease of interpersonal exchanges – particularly when face-to-face interactions are limited – transfer of knowledge and information, social engagement and political participation are all aspects that can be fostered by digital media. Several chapters in this report explore these topics, for example Chapter 2 'Youth engagement in society', Chapter 6 'Education and training' and Chapter 7 'Health and well-being'.

At the same time, digitalisation can expose young people at various risks ⁽¹⁾ and generate and aggravate inequalities between groups in the youth population, depending on their level of formal education and digital skills, the area where they live and their socioeconomic background, as will be illustrated in this chapter.

The chapter begins with an overview of the strategies established in European countries to reinforce media literacy and online safety among young people, which are essential conditions for the effective and responsible use of digital media. Information is sourced from the Youth Wiki, the platform providing information on national policies in the youth field ⁽²⁾.

Drawing from data collected by Eurostat, the second section explores some of the online activities conducted by young people, focusing on two sectors that have been growing rapidly: e-government, and e-commerce and the collaborative economy. It also discusses some of the divides provoked and reinforced by the spread of digital technologies.

The last section discusses young people's trust in digital information and applications during the COVID-19 pandemic and is based on data collected from a Eurobarometer survey conducted at the initiative of the European Parliament in 2020 ⁽³⁾.

5.1. Media literacy and online safety

In its conclusions on media literacy in an ever-changing world, the European Council defines media literacy as 'all the technical, cognitive, social, civic, ethical and creative capacities that allow an individual to access and use information and media effectively, and to safely and responsibly create and share media content through different platforms' ⁽⁴⁾.

Besides the positive transformations brought about by digitalisation, challenges have also emerged, such as exposure to unreliable information and to dangerous content and behaviours (e.g. fake news, cyberbullying

⁽¹⁾ Chaudron, 2018.

⁽²⁾ The Youth Wiki platform is regularly updated to include new policies and initiatives. To access the most recent developments, see the Youth Wiki website available at: <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki>. [Accessed on 24.03.2021]

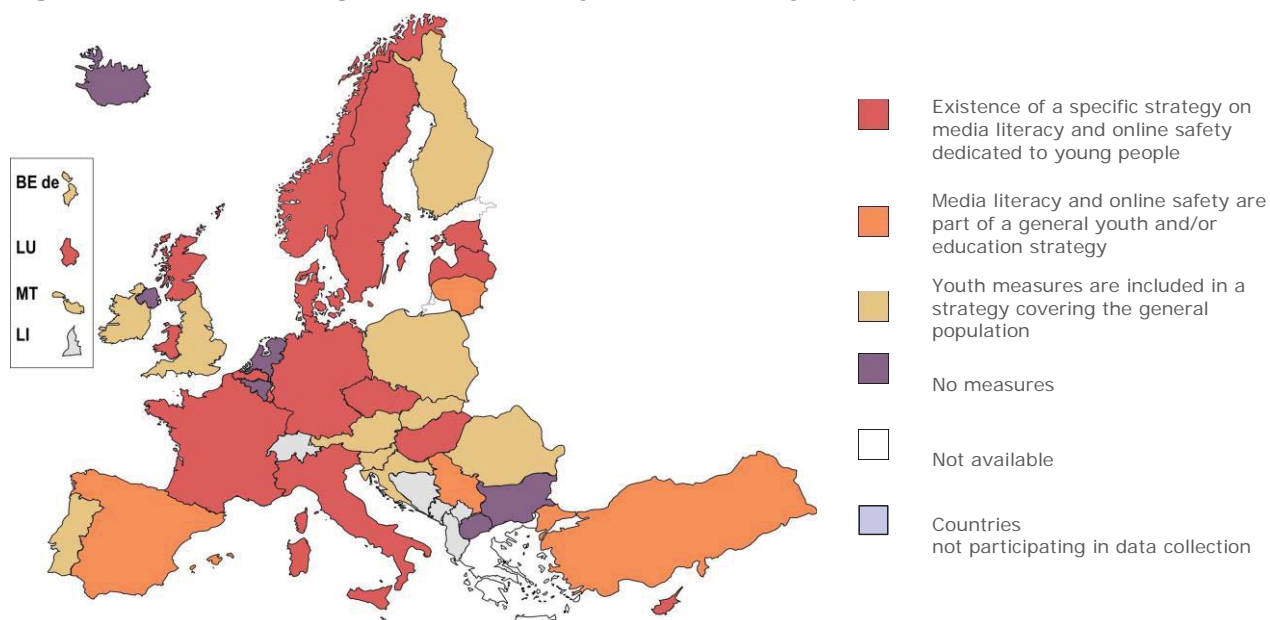
⁽³⁾ European Parliament, 2020a.

⁽⁴⁾ Council of the European Union, 2020a.

and appropriation of personal data). In this context, media literacy is indispensable to increase young people's resilience to online threats and to support their safety, security and privacy ⁽⁵⁾.

To this end, EU Member States have committed to developing systematic approaches to reinforce media literacy and the safe use of digital media among young people.

Figure 5.1: National strategies on media literacy and online safety, September 2020



Source: Youth Wiki, Section 6.8, 'Media literacy and safe use of new media'. Data collected in September 2020.

As Figure 5.1 shows, strategies specifically addressing the needs of young people in the media environment exist in one third of European countries. In these contexts, young people's use of media is identified as a specific priority in youth policy. In some of these countries, strategies focus on formal education.

For example, in **Italy**, the National Plan on Digital School was established by the Ministry of Education in 2015. It aims to strengthen students' media literacy and their ability to use media safely. To this end, the plan supports the upgrading of schools' digital equipment (e.g. fibre-optic networks) and the enhancement of teachers' digital competences. These objectives are upheld by 'digital animators', who promote digital education and innovation.

Some strategies extend media literacy and the safe use of media to non-formal learning.

The Interstate Treaty on the Protection of Minors in the Media of the **German federal states** represents the legal basis for youth protection concerning the risks posed by radio, television and the internet. Its aim is to protect children and adolescents from accessing inappropriate content online that may cause harm to their psychological and emotional well-being.

Other countries include media literacy and online safety in their general youth or education strategies.

For example, in **Spain**, the Organic Law on Education, adopted in 2006, forms the basis for developing media literacy. The law establishes media literacy as part of schools' curricula and defines the competences to be acquired. The subsequent Framework Law for the Improvement in Education of 2013 specifies media literacy and the safe use of media among the essential components of a high-quality education and includes them in teacher training. These measures have been reinforced by a revised education law, approved in November 2020, in light of the transition to e-learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁽⁵⁾ European Commission, 2020b.

A third approach to media literacy and safety consists of including youth-specific measures in general media strategies targeting the entire population.

This is the case in **Romania**, where the national strategy on the digital agenda was adopted in 2014. Its aim is to boost economic development by investing in ICT. The strategy includes a section on education and learning, with the objective of supporting students' learning through the use of digital tools. Media literacy and the safe use of media are part of the curricula, and teaching of these subjects includes the use of online instruments such as open educational resources and e-portfolios. The same section of the strategy also promotes the use of ICT in non-formal learning contexts, such as youth summer camps and international student exchanges.

5.2. Use of the Internet

Young people are often called 'digital natives' as they have grown up in a time when digital technologies are being used in all areas of life. While not a synonym for being adequately equipped with the skills needed to fully and safely use digital technologies, the term 'digital natives' points to young people's unprecedented exposure to and familiarity with digital media and applications ⁽⁶⁾. From education to employment, leisure activities, and civic and political participation, young Europeans are at the forefront of the use of online digital technologies ⁽⁷⁾.

The use of the internet is therefore an essential component of young people's everyday lives. Indeed, Figure 5.2 shows that in nearly all countries, more than 90 % of young people aged 16–29 used the internet daily in 2019; the exceptions are Italy (89 %), Bulgaria (87 %), Romania (86 %) and Turkey (85 %).

Moreover, Figure 5.2 indicates that the share of young people using the internet daily is bigger than the proportion of the total population using the internet daily. Unlike young people, individuals in older age groups have become accustomed to digital technologies at a later stage in life ⁽⁸⁾. On average, in 2019 in the EU-28, the difference between the proportion of young people aged 16–29 using the internet daily (95 %) and the proportion of the total population using the internet daily (79 %) was 16 percentage points (p.p.). The biggest differences were reported in Portugal (31 p.p.) and Romania (29 p.p.), where they are nearly double the EU-28 average, followed by Croatia, Greece and Bulgaria (all 27 p.p.). Conversely, the smallest differences were reported in the Nordic countries: Iceland (2 p.p.), Norway (3 p.p.) and Sweden (4 p.p.), followed by Denmark (6 p.p.) and Finland (8 p.p.). A similar situation was found in the Netherlands (6 p.p.) and the United Kingdom (8 p.p.).

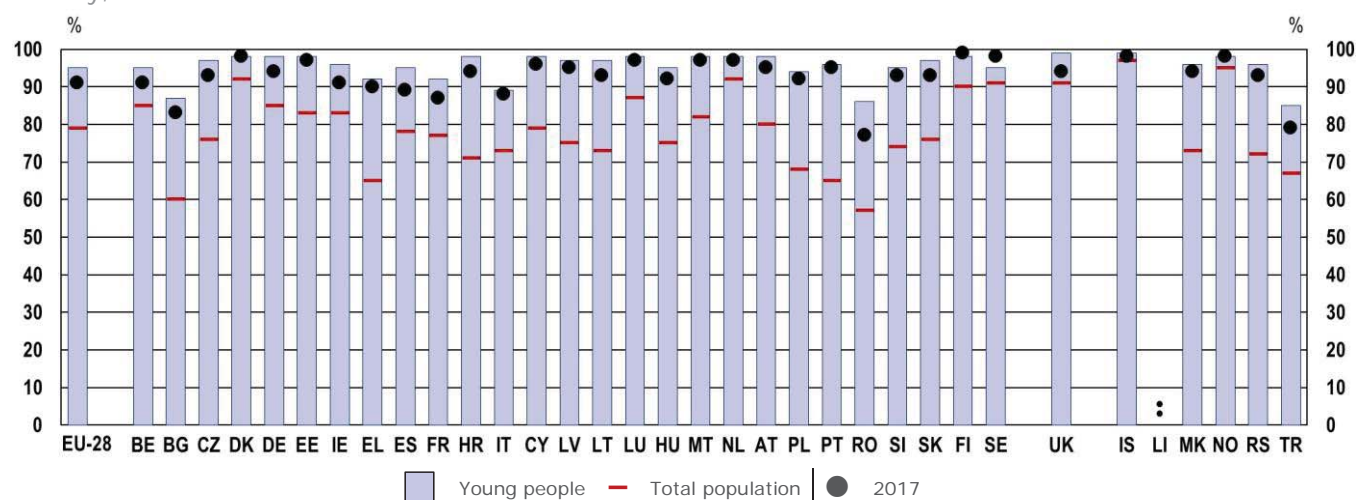
The proportions of young people who used the internet daily in each country did not change much between 2017 and 2019.

⁽⁶⁾ ECDL Foundation, 2014.

⁽⁷⁾ Ibid.

⁽⁸⁾ Prensky, 2001.

Figure 5.2: Shares of young people (16-29) and the total population who used the internet daily, by country, 2017 and 2019



Source: Eurostat [isoc_ci_ifp_fu]. Data extracted on 09.12.2020.

Notes: EU-27 2019: young people 94 %; total population 77 %. 2017: young people 91 %.

Luxembourg: break in time series.

Several factors play a role in the differences seen in the level of internet use. In addition to the availability of devices like personal computers and tablets (strongly associated with the level of households' wealth ⁽⁹⁾), disparities in the level of formal education are key, both between generations and within the youth population. As illustrated in Figure 5.8 in Section 5.2.3, low levels of formal education are associated with less frequent use of digital technologies.

Another important factor giving rise to differences in internet use is the extent of broadband coverage, both between countries and within countries ⁽¹⁰⁾. Internet activities are conducted less frequently in places where fixed and mobile coverage is comparatively limited than in places where coverage is widespread. This is often the case in remote and rural areas, where the necessary infrastructure tends to be less extensive than in urban areas ⁽¹¹⁾.

Obstacles to accessing and using the internet prevent young people from taking advantage of the opportunities provided by digitalisation. The following sections explore two fields where the application of digital technologies has become increasingly diffuse: e-government and the online economy.

5.2.1. E-government: interacting with public authorities

The term 'e-government' describes the application of ICT to government services for citizens and businesses ⁽¹²⁾. Many administrative procedures (e.g. obtaining information, filling in forms and submitting documents) can now be executed by means of online applications. To be effective, e-government must be

⁽⁹⁾ UNICEF and International Telecommunication Union, 2020.

⁽¹⁰⁾ European Commission, 2020a.

⁽¹¹⁾ Ibid.

⁽¹²⁾ UN, 'E-government'. Available at: <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/about/unegovdd-framework>. [Accessed on 22.04.2021]

supported by an efficient infrastructure framework, respond to the demands of citizens and function with transparency and accountability ⁽¹³⁾.

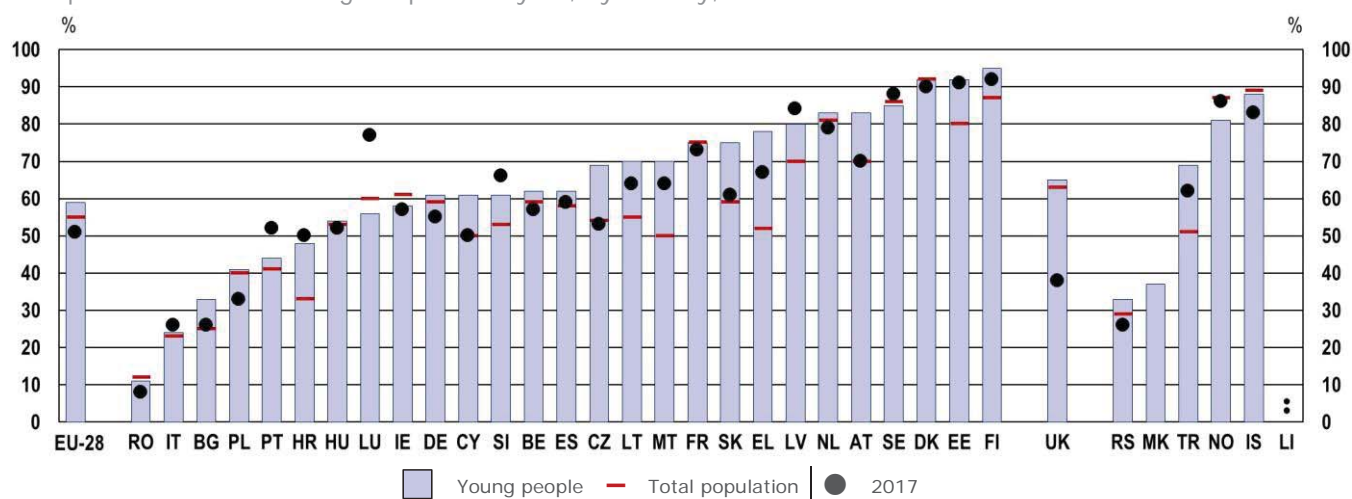
In general, the immediateness and ease of digital interactions is valued by young people ⁽¹⁴⁾. In digital communication settings, senders and receivers of information are on the same level, the exchange of opinions and information happens quickly, and feedback is fast, as opposed to traditional means of communication ⁽¹⁵⁾.

Online applications can therefore facilitate youth interactions with public authorities ⁽¹⁶⁾ and in doing so have a ‘democratising’ effect on access to and communication with institutions ⁽¹⁷⁾.

As shown in Figure 5.3, there are striking differences between countries in the share of young people using the internet to interact with public authorities. Among EU Member States, the highest proportions are reported in Finland (95 %), Denmark and Estonia (both 92 %), followed by Sweden (85 %), the Netherlands and Austria (both 83 %). Iceland (88 %) and Norway (81 %) also report high proportions. On the other hand, in Bulgaria (33 %), Italy (24 %) and especially Romania (11 %), the internet is used infrequently to interact with public authorities. A similar situation is found in Macedonia (37 %) and Serbia (33 %).

In general, the data show that young people in Nordic countries are more used to interacting online with public administrations than young people from other countries.

Figure 5.3: Shares of young people (16-29) and of the total population who used the internet to interact with public authorities during the previous year, by country, 2017 and 2019



Source: Eurostat [isoc_bde15ei]. Data extracted on 24.11.2020.

Notes: EU-27 averages – 2019: young people 57 %, total population 53 %; 2017: young people 53 %.

Czechia and Luxembourg: break in time series.

Countries are ordered by ascending proportion of young people who used the internet to contact public authorities.

In addition to the aspects mentioned earlier (level of formal education and geographical coverage of broadband access), differences in the level of engagement in e-government activities are related to the varying

⁽¹³⁾ Vesnic-Alujevic et al., 2019.

⁽¹⁴⁾ UN, ‘E-government’. Available at: <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/about/unegovdd-framework>. [Accessed on 22.04.2021]

⁽¹⁵⁾ Ibid.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Ibid.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Ibid.

degrees of digitalisation of public administrations ⁽¹⁸⁾. Although the modernisation of public services has become a priority and a trend across European countries, notable differences exist in the level of digitalisation of their administrations ⁽¹⁹⁾.

The absence of large differences between the share of young people and the share of the total population indicates that the use of the internet to interact with public authorities is equally widespread. At EU-28 level, the difference between the share of young people (59 %) and the share of the total population (55 %) using the internet to interact with public authorities is minimal, amounting to 4 p.p. Similarly, in some countries, such as Spain and Serbia, the difference between the two proportions is the same as the EU-28 difference.

Conversely, important disparities between the share of young people and the share of the total population using the internet to interact with public authorities exist in Greece (26 p.p.), Malta (20 p.p.), Turkey (18 p.p.) and Slovakia (16 p.p.). In these countries, there seems to be a considerable gap in the level of use of the internet between young people and the total population. It should also be noted that in some countries – Ireland, Luxembourg, Romania and some Nordic countries (Sweden, Iceland and Norway) – the proportion of young people using the internet to interact with public authorities is smaller than the proportion of the total population using the internet to interact with public authorities. In these countries, people above the age of 29 tend to use the internet to interact with public authorities more often than young people aged between 16 and 29.

The share of young people who used the internet to contact public authorities in each country did not change considerably between 2017 and 2019, except in the United Kingdom (27 p.p.).

5.2.2. E-commerce and collaborative economy

One application of digital technologies that has increasingly expanded over the last decade is the use of the internet for commercial transactions. Platforms for purchasing and selling goods and services have multiplied ⁽²⁰⁾, while opportunities in the collaborative economy – that is, sharing services between individuals, such as booking accommodation and purchasing transport services – have become widespread ⁽²¹⁾.

As the biggest users of digital media, young Europeans have taken huge advantage of these technologies ⁽²²⁾. Ease of access through smartphones and tablets and the affordability of such services are key factors in their success ⁽²³⁾.

Overall, the data in Figure 5.4 show that there are obvious differences between countries in the share of young people making online purchases. Specifically, the United Kingdom (89 %), Denmark, Germany (both 79 %), Estonia and the Netherlands (both 78 %) report the highest proportions for 2019, followed by Sweden (75 %), Ireland, Austria (both 74 %) and Norway (73 %). It is evident that the Nordic countries report some of the

⁽¹⁸⁾ European Commission, 2019.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Ibid.

⁽²⁰⁾ Lee and Lee, 2020.

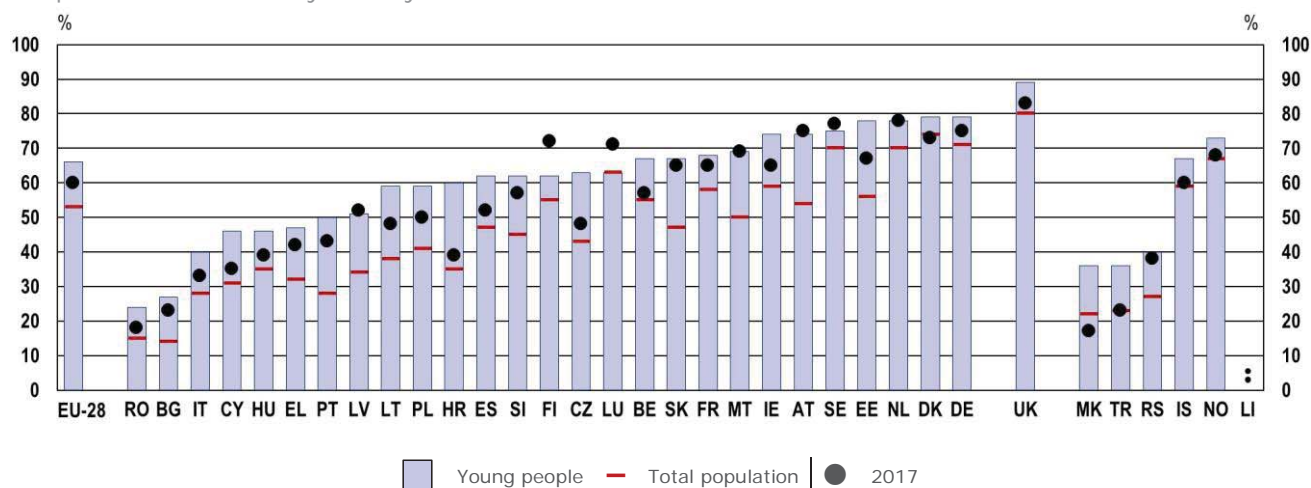
⁽²¹⁾ European Commission, 'Collaborative economy'. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/growth/single-market/services/collaborative-economy_en. [Accessed on 22.04.2021]

⁽²²⁾ Lian and Yen, 2014.

⁽²³⁾ Lee and Lee, 2020.

highest proportions of young people making online purchases. Conversely, the lowest proportions of young people making online purchases are registered in Bulgaria (27 %) and Romania (24 %).

Figure 5.4: Shares of young people (16-29) and of the total population who made an online purchase during the previous 3 months, by country, 2017 and 2019



Source: Eurostat [isoc_ec_ibuy]. Data extracted on 10.12.2020.

Notes: EU-27 averages – 2019: young people 62 %, total population 49 %; 2017: young people 56 %.

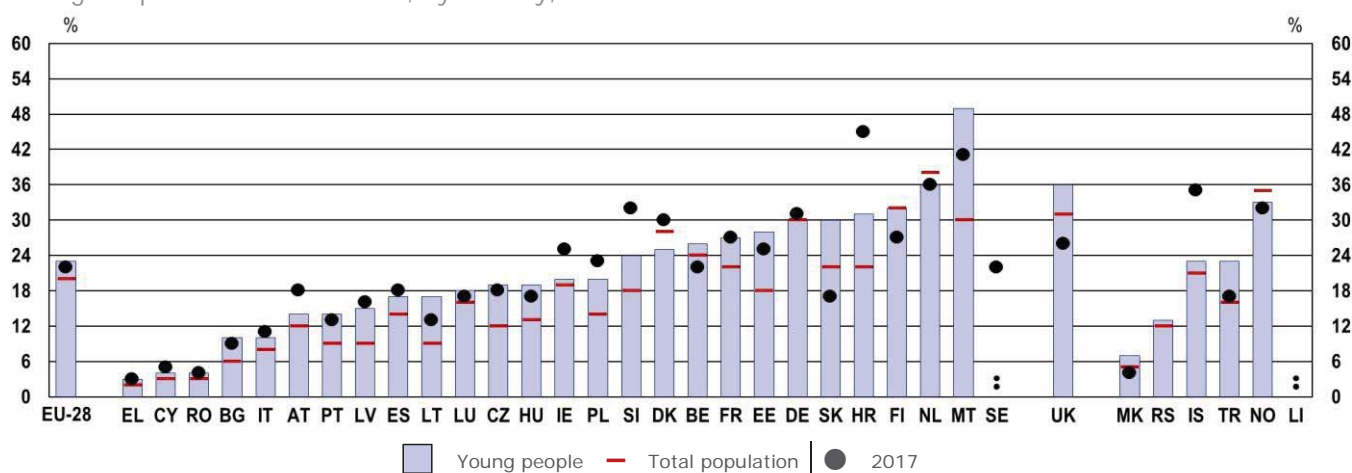
Luxembourg: break in time series.

Countries are ordered by ascending proportion of young people making an online purchase.

Figure 5.5 shows that young people make much less use of the internet to sell than to purchase goods and services. On average, in 2019, 23 % of young people in the EU-28 sold goods and services online. The shares are notably higher in Malta (49 %), the Netherlands (36 %), Finland (32 %), Croatia (31 %), Slovakia, Germany (both 30 %) and Estonia (28 %). The United Kingdom (36 %) and Norway (31 %) also report high proportions.

Countries where young people use the internet the least for selling goods and services are Greece (3 %), Cyprus, Romania (both 4 %), Bulgaria and Italy (both 10 %). North Macedonia, with a percentage of 7 %, is also among the countries where young people selling goods and services online are in a small minority.

Figure 5.5: Shares of young people (16-29) and of the total population who sold goods or services online during the previous three months, by country, 2017 and 2019



Source: Eurostat [isoc_ci_ac_i]. Data extracted on 3.05.2021.

Notes: EU-27 averages – 2019: young people 21 %, total population 18 %; 2017: young people 19 %.

Countries are ordered by ascending proportion of young people selling goods and services online.

Some countries show a pattern in the level of use of e-commerce: in general, in southern Europe, young people are less involved in the purchase and selling of goods and services online, while in some Nordic countries the opposite is true. Moreover, there seems to be a correspondence between buying and selling goods – countries tend to report similar trends for both activities.

The biggest differences between young people and the total population are found in Malta (19 p.p.), Estonia (10 p.p.), Croatia (9 p.p.) and Slovakia (8 p.p.). In contrast, in Germany and Finland, young people sell goods and services online to the same extent as the total population. In the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway, the proportions of the total population selling goods and services online are slightly bigger than the proportions of young people.

Between 2017 and 2019, no change occurred in the proportion of young people selling goods and services online at EU-28 level. However, in Croatia and Slovenia, the share decreased by 14 p.p. and 8 p.p., respectively. Noticeable decreases also occurred in Serbia (–17 p.p.) and Iceland (–12 p.p.). On the other hand, increases in the proportions of young people selling goods and services online were reported in Slovakia (13 p.p.) and Malta (8 p.p.).

When observing the differences between countries and the variations over time, it is important to consider that online platforms for buying and selling goods and services are not equally present in all countries, and changes can occur over time. This also applies in the context of the collaborative economy, where countries have introduced different regulations ⁽²⁴⁾. Furthermore, the disparities in internet coverage have an impact on the ability to take advantage of these opportunities, as mentioned previously.

Participation in the collaborative economy sees young people as both providers and users of goods and services ⁽²⁵⁾. Renting accommodation – for example renting one's apartment for short periods – is a common form of the collaborative economy ⁽²⁶⁾.

Overall, as shown in Figure 5.6, there are remarkable differences between countries in the proportions of young people using digital technologies to arrange accommodation. On the one hand, high proportions are reported in Malta, Luxembourg (both 44 %) and Ireland (38 %), while far fewer young people make use of the internet to arrange accommodation in Czechia, Cyprus (both 7 %) and especially Turkey (4 %).

At EU-28 level, the difference between the share of young people aged 16–29 (26 %) and the share of the total population (21 %) that used a website or application to arrange accommodation is minimal, amounting to 5 p.p.

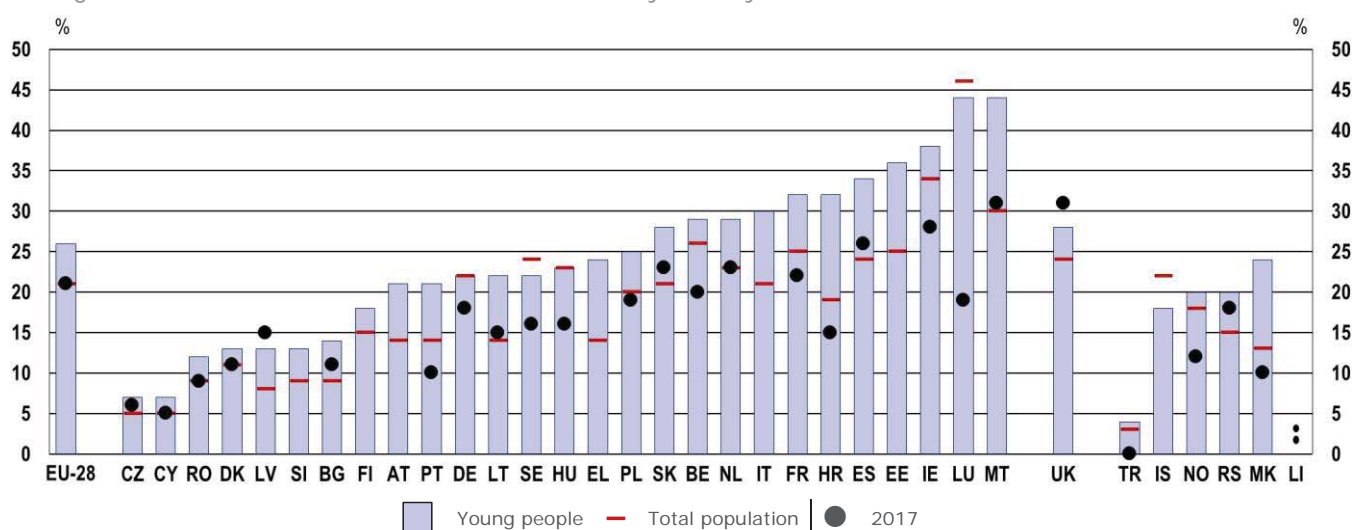
Conversely, Malta (14 p.p.) and Croatia (13 p.p.) report noticeable differences between the two shares. In these countries, there seems to be a considerable gap between young people and the total population in the level of use of the internet for arranging accommodation. It should be noted that the proportions of young people using the internet to arrange accommodation in Luxembourg (44 %), Sweden (22 %) and Iceland (18 %) are smaller than the proportions of the total population doing so (46 %, 24 % and 22 %, respectively). In these countries, people above the age of 29 tend to use the internet to arrange accommodation more often than young people aged between 16 and 29.

⁽²⁴⁾ Clarke et al., 2015.

⁽²⁵⁾ European Commission, 2016.

⁽²⁶⁾ Ibid.

Figure 5.6: Shares of young people (16-29) and of the total population who used any website or app to arrange an accommodation from another individual, by country, 2017 and 2019



Source: Eurostat [isoc_ci_ce_i]. Data extracted on 11.03.2021.

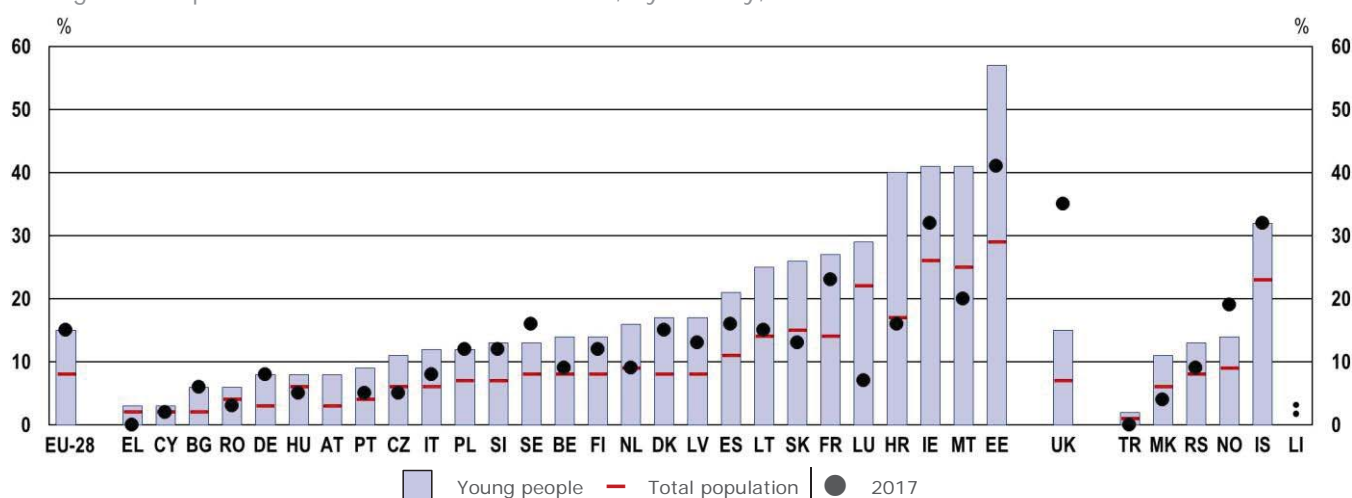
Notes: EU-27 averages – 2019: young people 26 %, total population 21 %; 2017: young people 11 %.

Countries are ordered by ascending proportion of young people who used any website or application to arrange accommodation.

The share of young people who used websites or applications to arrange accommodation did not change radically between 2017 and 2019.

Sharing transport (e.g. sharing a ride or a car with others) is another form of the collaborative economy ⁽²⁷⁾. Overall, data in Figure 5.7 reveal that the use of any website or application to arrange a transport service is particularly widespread among young people in Estonia (57 %), Ireland (41 %), Croatia (40 %), Malta (41 %) and Iceland (32 %). In contrast, Bulgaria, Romania (both 6 %) and especially Greece, Cyprus (both 3 %) and Turkey (2 %) report the lowest proportions of young people using the internet to arrange a transport service.

Figure 5.7: Shares of young people (16-29) and of the total population who used any website or app to arrange a transport service from another individual, by country, 2017 and 2019



Source: Eurostat [isoc_ci_ce_i]. Data extracted on 10.03.2021.

Notes: EU-27 averages – 2019: young people 15 %, total population 8 %; 2017: young people 22 %.

⁽²⁷⁾ European Commission, 2016.

Luxembourg: break in time series.

Countries are ordered by ascending proportion of young people who used any website or application to arrange a transport service.

The figure shows that, on average, the difference between the share of young people aged 16–29 (15 %) and the share of the total population (8 %) who used any website or application to arrange a transport service in 2019 was 7 p.p. Estonia (28 p.p.) and Croatia (23 p.p.) report the biggest differences, suggesting a considerable gap in the use of the internet between young people and the total population. Conversely, the differences between the two proportions in Greece, Cyprus, Turkey (all 1 p.p.), Hungary and Romania (both 2 p.p.) are considerably below the EU-28 average (7 p.p.). In general, the internet is used infrequently to arrange a transport service in these countries, even among young people.

Across countries, the share of young people who used any website or application to arrange a transport service did not change radically between 2017 and 2019 except in Croatia (increase of 24 p.p.), Malta (increase of 21 p.p.) and the United Kingdom (decrease of 20 p.p.).

As for e-commerce, some countries consistently report similar figures when considering participation in the collaborative economy. Bulgaria, Italy and Romania and, to a lesser extent, Greece and Cyprus are the countries where young people use the internet the least to participate in the forms of collaborative economy considered in this chapter. On the other hand, Nordic countries (in particular Iceland and Norway), Estonia and several western European countries report the highest shares of young people engaging in these activities.

5.2.3. Digital divides

Digital technologies and the online opportunities they provide support young people in many areas of their lives. In addition to the activities described in the previous section, they ease civic and political participation (as discussed in Chapter 2), support job searching (as indicated in Chapter 3) and allow students and learners to access education online (illustrated in Chapter 6).

However, digital technologies are also exposing young people to overlapping divides. As digital hardware (computers, tablets and smartphones) has become more widespread – though not ubiquitous –, new types of disparities in the use of digital media have emerged.

As Figure 5.8 indicates, education has an influence on young people's ability to take advantage of digital technologies and media.

While, in general, the level of internet use does not seem to be particularly impacted by young people's level of formal education, the specific activities described in the section are considerably influenced by their level of education.

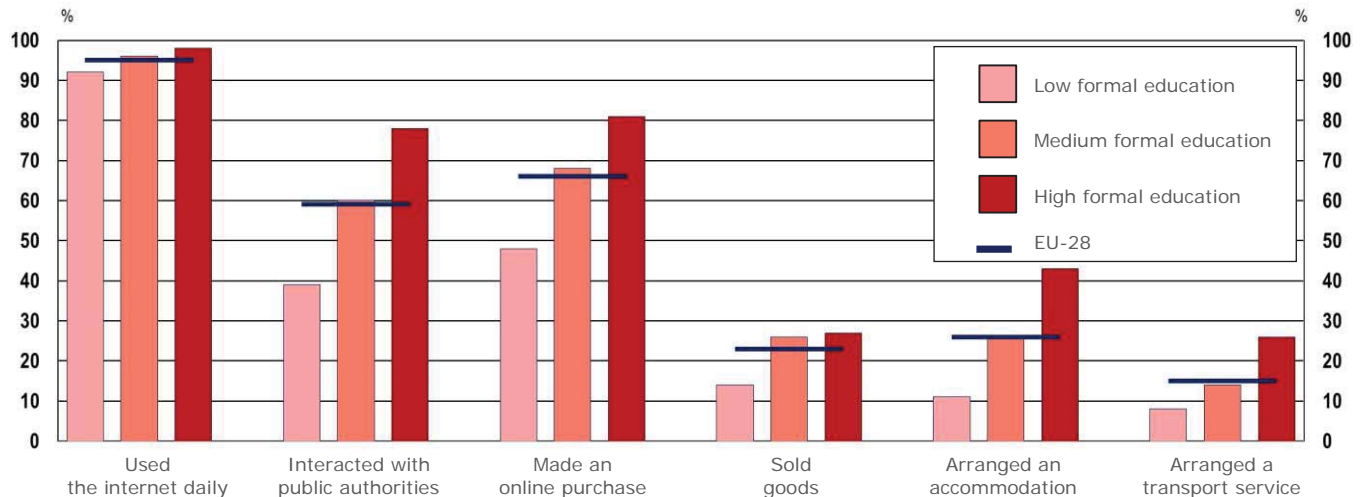
Young Europeans with lower levels of formal education consistently report more limited use of the internet to interact with public authorities, as well as to engage in e-commerce and the collaborative economy.

However, the data must be interpreted in consideration of the different characteristics of the age cohorts in the youth population. Individuals in the youngest cohort (aged 15–19) have lower levels of formal educational attainment and tend to be less active in the activities described.

With regard to the opportunities that young people have to engage in online activities, a second divide is seen between urban and rural regions, as mentioned earlier. Urban regions tend to have better internet access than

rural ones. This goes hand in hand with the existence of online platforms and networks for e-commerce and the collaborative economy, which tend to occur less frequently in isolated areas ⁽²⁸⁾.

Figure 5.8: Share of young people (16-29) who used the internet daily, used it to interact with public authorities, to make an online purchase, to sell goods or services, to arrange accommodation and to arrange a transport service by level of education, EU-28, 2019



Source: Eurostat [isoc_ci_ifp_fu], [isoc_bde15ei], [isoc_ec_ibuy], [isoc_ci_ac_i]. Data extracted on 10.03.2021.

Notes:

	EU-27 averages:			
	Total	Low level of education	Medium level of education	High level of education
Used the internet daily	94 %	96 %	97 %	98 %
Interacted with public authorities	57 %	39 %	60 %	79 %
Made an online purchase	62 %	48 %	63 %	78 %
Sold goods	21 %	14 %	23 %	26 %
Arranged an accommodation	26 %	11 %	27 %	44 %
Arranged a transport service	15 %	8 %	15 %	26 %

Furthermore, a more recent perspective on the digital divide has considered the purpose and content of digital applications ⁽²⁹⁾. Research has found that socioeconomic background affects the types of activities conducted online. Young people from higher socioeconomic backgrounds tend to use the internet for self-enhancing activities, such as attending education, obtaining information about social and political issues, and engaging in politics. Conversely, young users from more disadvantaged backgrounds mainly use the internet for recreational activities, searching for entertainment and cultivating relational exchanges with their peers ⁽³⁰⁾.

Notably, a gap has been detected in the ability to critically assess information obtained online based on socioeconomic background ⁽³¹⁾. Compared with their peers from less privileged backgrounds, young people from higher income families tend to be more sceptical about information disseminated on social media, more skilled at detecting fake news and more protective of their online privacy.

⁽²⁸⁾ Ibid.

⁽²⁹⁾ European Commission, 2018d.

⁽³⁰⁾ Ibid.

⁽³¹⁾ Micheli, 2016.

This divide is particularly concerning at a time when a great deal of information is provided by a multitude of online media sites and the ability to identify reliable sources is of outmost importance ⁽³²⁾.

5.3. Online information and communication during the COVID-19 pandemic

Since the beginning of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has been at the centre of online and offline media coverage. Along with sources of factual information, a great deal of unreliable news is disseminated, particularly on social media ⁽³³⁾. As this represents one of the most common sources of information for young people ⁽³⁴⁾, they are particularly exposed to misleading information ⁽³⁵⁾.

Nonetheless, the level of awareness of news unreliability has been growing during the pandemic ⁽³⁶⁾. Children and young people report being able to detect fake news more often than before. This can partly be explained by them spending more time with family members during the lockdowns introduced in response to the pandemic, with family members having a mediating effect in relation to news content ⁽³⁷⁾.

In parallel, a survey conducted in 2020 indicates that young people's trust in national governments increased during the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the survey, an important determinant of young people's trust in national governments is their assessment of how national institutions have managed the pandemic's outbreak, also in consideration of the reliability of the information communicated ⁽³⁸⁾.

Data collected by a Eurobarometer survey show the different levels of trust that young people have in various sources of information on the COVID-19 pandemic. Figure 5.9 illustrates the results obtained for national authorities, scientific and medical professionals and the media ⁽³⁹⁾.

Of the different sources of information, young Europeans report trusting scientific sources (scientists, the World Health Organization and national health authorities) the most. Young people in Greece (60 %), Germany (49 %), Italy, Slovenia (both 47 %) and France (45 %) have the most trust in scientists. Governments are the next most trusted source of information on COVID-19, particularly in the Netherlands and Austria (both 40 %), Finland (38 %) and Ireland (34 %).

Traditional news outlets are trusted much less. On average, they are considered trustworthy by only 1 in 10 young Europeans. Exceptions are young people in Belgium, Italy, Portugal and Slovakia, who have higher levels of trust in news outlets than the EU-27 average. Citizens' opinions, such as those shared on social media, are deemed the least reliable when it comes to information on COVID-19: on average, only 6 % of the youth population report trusting them. An exception is Poland, where the proportion of young people trusting citizens' opinions is more than twice the EU-27 average.

⁽³²⁾ Ibid.

⁽³³⁾ Strömbäck et al., 2020.

⁽³⁴⁾ Brennen et al., 2020.

⁽³⁵⁾ OECD, 2020b.

⁽³⁶⁾ Lobe et al., 2020.

⁽³⁷⁾ Brennen et al., 2020.

⁽³⁸⁾ OECD, 2020b.

⁽³⁹⁾ Other sources of information included in the survey were 'My doctor', 'My family members and friends', 'Local and regional authorities', 'Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working on health and social issues', 'My pharmacist' and 'EU institutions such as the European Commission or the European Parliament'.

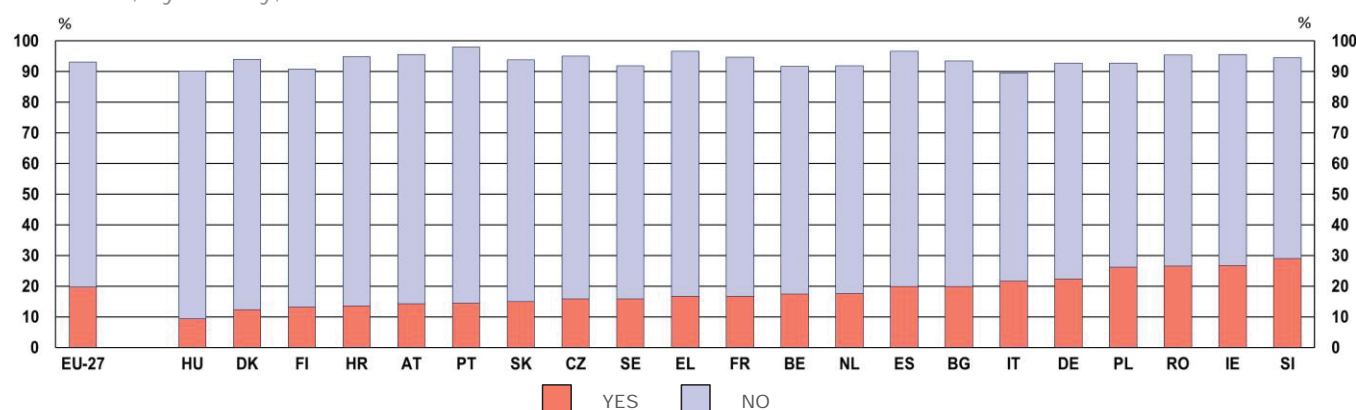
Figure 5.9: Level of young people's trust in various sources of information about the COVID-19 pandemic, age group 16-24, by country, 2020



Source: European Parliament Eurobarometer, 2020. Q16. 'From the following list, who do you trust the most to inform you about the coronavirus pandemic? (Max. 3 answers)'.

Scepticism about the reliability of citizens' opinions – such as those found on social media – may be one of the reasons why the majority of young Europeans do not engage in online debates about the measures implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 5.10).

Figure 5.10: Share of young people (16-24) who engage or not in online debates on the measures against COVID-19, by country, 2020



Source: European Parliament Eurobarometer, 2020. Q14. 'For each of the following situations that can occur since the beginning of the

coronavirus pandemic, please tell me if it applies to you – I engage online in debates on the measures against the coronavirus pandemic’.

Notes: Figure 5.10 does not show the proportions of young people who responded ‘do not know / not applicable’.

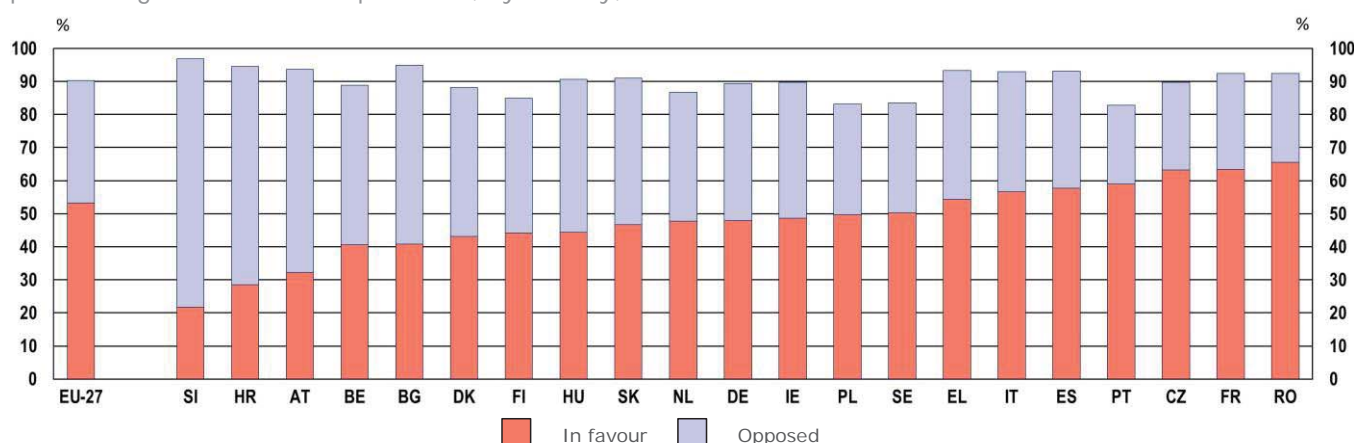
Countries are ordered by ascending level of the proportion of respondents reporting that they engage in online debates.

Overall, 20 % of young people report engaging in online debates, while 73 % report that they do not engage in debates.

Slovenia (29 %) reports the highest share of young people engaging in online debates, followed by Ireland, Romania and Poland, with percentages around 26 %. In contrast, in Hungary, only 1 in 10 young respondents reports engaging in online debates.

An aspect linked to the trust that young people put in national authorities and the reliability of information they disseminate is their willingness to accept public authorities’ use of mobile phone applications to fight the pandemic (Figure 5.11). On average, 53 % of young people in the EU-27 are in favour, while 37 % of young people are opposed.

Figure 5.11: Share of young people (16-24) in favour of public authorities using applications on their mobile phone to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, by country, 2020



Source: European Parliament Eurobarometer, 2020. Q10. ‘Would you be in favour or opposed to your country’s public authorities using applications on your mobile phone to fight the virus’ expansion?’.

Notes: Figure 5.11 does not show the proportions of young people who responded ‘do not know / not applicable’.

Countries are ordered by ascending proportion of respondents reporting that they are in favour of the use of mobile phone applications.

Romania (66 %), France (63 %) and Czechia (63 %) report the highest levels of support for this measure. In contrast, the proportions supporting this measure are 22 %, 29 % and 32 % in Slovenia, Croatia and Austria, respectively.

In line with the research findings that show that young people are becoming more prompt in detecting misleading information on the COVID-19 pandemic⁽⁴⁰⁾, the data presented in this section show that they consider official sources of information (scientific and institutional sources, at both international and national levels) to be the most reliable. Conversely, news and opinions reported by traditional news outlets and social media are perceived as less trustworthy. These results are of particular relevance considering that – as mentioned at the beginning of this section – social media sites are generally one of the most common sources of information among young people.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Lobe et al., 2020.

Conclusions

Digital technologies provide young people with numerous opportunities. New and innovative platforms, applications and networks support them in many areas of their life. For example, the immediateness and ease of communication through digital means facilitate interactions with public authorities and so increase access to administrative and political processes (see also Chapter 2). Digitalization also fosters young people's inclusion in economic activities, such as e-commerce and collaborative economy.

At the same time, digital media can expose young people to risks such as unreliable information and dangerous content and behaviours. To tackle these risks, as the chapter shows, national governments in the vast majority of European countries have implemented measures to support digital literacy and safe use of new media.

Despite giving access to many opportunities, digital technologies can aggravate inequalities among groups in the youth population. Young people with low levels of formal education, living in rural areas and coming from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds risk staying at the margins of the digital society. Such challenges become ever more serious in present times as the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically increased the use of digital applications by young people (for example in the field of education, as discussed in Chapter 6).

Brussels, 14.10.2021
SWD(2021) 287 final

PART 6/10

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

The situation of young people in the European Union

Accompanying the document

**Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European
Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions**

on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2021

{COM(2021) 636 final} - {SWD(2021) 286 final}

6. Education and training

Participation in formal education and non-formal learning allows children and young people to develop their personal and social potential: they acquire skills and competences and the ability to be active citizens and integrated members of society.

Indeed, education and learning are recognised as the building blocks of an inclusive and cohesive society ⁽¹⁾. High-quality and accessible education is considered crucial to reduce youth social exclusion ⁽²⁾. In order to achieve this aim, education and learning must be inclusive towards all young people, irrespective of their social, economic and cultural background and of the environment – physical or digital – in which it takes place ⁽³⁾. This is particularly important at a time when the world of education is undergoing considerable transformations.

Digitalisation has a powerful impact on both the way we learn and what we learn. New technologies often require substantial adaptation from teachers, trainers and learners themselves, with additional skills needed to navigate new digital learning environments.

In these changing circumstances, young people must be equipped with digital competences to thrive in a digital society and to take advantage of digital learning ⁽⁴⁾. In this context, digital education in schools is a priority. A recent report illustrates that European countries are increasingly investing in digital infrastructure in schools and providing teachers with continuing professional development in digital education ⁽⁵⁾.

Non-formal learning is also adapting to the process of digitalisation. Training in digital skills is more and more in demand ⁽⁶⁾ and mechanisms of skills recognition have to adapt to new online learning modalities ⁽⁷⁾.

The first section of this chapter illustrates the level of participation of young people in non-formal learning and its development over the last few years. The second section discusses young people's digital skills and the impact of different levels of formal education. The final section considers the increasing use of digital technologies in education and learning.

6.1. Non-formal learning

Non-formal learning covers any institutionalised, intentional and organised learning activities outside the formal education system. Non-formal education and training comprises courses, seminars and workshops, private lessons and instruction and guided on-the-job training ⁽⁸⁾.

⁽¹⁾ Council of the European Union, 2010.

⁽²⁾ Council of the European Union, 2017.

⁽³⁾ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021a.
European Commission, 2020b.

⁽⁴⁾ Ibid.

⁽⁵⁾ European Commission, Education/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019.

⁽⁶⁾ Council of Europe, 2012.

⁽⁷⁾ Information on policies, programmes and initiatives supporting young people's innovation skills in the context of non-formal learning is available in Section 6.7 of the Youth Wiki platform. Available at: <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki>. [Accessed on 10.03.2021]

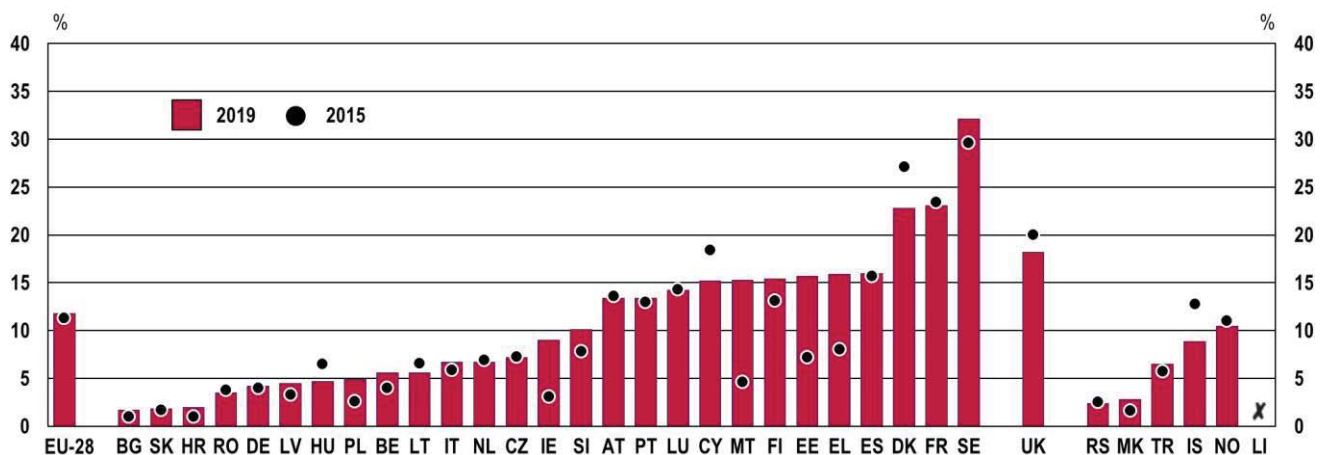
⁽⁸⁾ Eurostat, 2021q.

Non-formal learning represents a key asset for releasing the potential of young people, particularly for developing specific skills, reconciling learning and work, and compensating for low levels of formal qualifications ⁽⁹⁾. It is a crucial factor in social inclusion, especially for socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals ⁽¹⁰⁾.

On average, in the European Union, 1 in 10 young people participate in non-formal learning (Figure 6.1). Across countries, considerable differences exist. Within the EU-28, the highest shares of participation in non-formal learning by young people are found in Sweden (32.1 %), France (23.8 %) and Denmark (22.8 %). Young people participate the least in non-formal learning in Bulgaria (1.7 %), Slovakia (1.8 %) and Croatia (2 %).

Differences in policies concerning labour markets can explain some of the variation across countries. For example, where training linked to re-skilling for job mobility is common, the level of participation in non-formal learning tends to be higher ⁽¹¹⁾.

Figure 6.1: Share of young people (15-29) participating in non-formal learning and training by country, 2015 and 2019



Source: Eurostat [trng_lfs_09]. Data extracted on 01.03.2021.

Notes: Participation in non-formal education in the last 4 weeks preceding the survey. . Non-formal education excludes guided on-the-job training. Countries are ordered by ascending level of participation in non-formal learning.

EU-27 average: 2015: 9.9 %; 2019: 10.8 %.

Figure 6.1 also shows that, while, on average across the EU-28, no particular variation in the share of participation in non-formal learning took place between 2015 and 2019, participation rates in non-formal learning changed considerably in several countries. Substantial increases in participation took place in Malta (10.7 percentage points), Estonia (8.5 p.p.), Greece (7.9 p.p.) and Ireland (5.9 p.p.). In contrast, Denmark and Cyprus registered decreases in participation (by 4.3 and 3.2 p.p. respectively).

Concerning gender balance, the average proportions of young women and young men participating in non-formal learning are similar (data not shown ⁽¹²⁾).

⁽⁹⁾ European Commission, 2020e.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Ibid.

⁽¹¹⁾ Eurostat, 2009.

⁽¹²⁾ Source: Eurostat [trng_lfs_09]. Data extracted on 01.03.2021

As in all dimensions of life, digitalisation has transformed the way that young Europeans participate in non-formal learning. For example, more and more learning activities are being conducted online, and this requires adaptation of the procedures used for the recognition and validation of the competences acquired; this has especially been the case since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 ⁽¹³⁾. Chapter 9 illustrates the impact of digitalisation on youth work, one of the contexts where non-formal learning takes place.

Connected to these developments, proficiency in the use of digital technologies and media is indispensable to effectively take advantage of new learning opportunities. The following section offers insights into young people's levels of digital skills and the application of these skills to education and learning.

6.2. Digital skills

Digital skills are defined as 'a range of abilities to use digital devices, communication applications, and networks to access and manage information' ⁽¹⁴⁾. Digital skills are essential for identifying and creating digital content, communicating through digital media and problem-solving in digital environments.

Having a limited grasp of these skills hampers the ability to benefit from the opportunities offered by new technologies. To this end, the EU digital education action plan supports the objective of the European skills agenda of ensuring that 70 % of 16- to 74-year-olds have at least basic digital skills by 2025 ⁽¹⁵⁾.

As the main consumers of digital media (e.g. social media, communication platforms, online gaming) ⁽¹⁶⁾, young people must be equipped with the necessary skills to effectively manage their use and avoid potential risks, such as grooming ⁽¹⁷⁾, cyberbullying ⁽¹⁸⁾ and misinformation (information on how European countries address these challenges is available in the last section of Chapter 5).

To enhance the acquisition of digital skills, many European countries have reinforced the digital education space in their curricula and developed agencies that support teachers in the pedagogical use of digital technologies ⁽¹⁹⁾.

6.2.1. Level of digital skills

A composite indicator is used by Eurostat to measure individuals' digital skills. This is based on selected activities in four specific areas of internet use: information, communication, problem-solving, software skills ⁽²⁰⁾. The indicator makes a distinction between low, basic and above-basic levels of skills based on the number of activities that respondents can perform.

⁽¹³⁾ European Parliament Research Service, 2020.

⁽¹⁴⁾ UNESCO, 2018.

⁽¹⁵⁾ European Commission, 2020b.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Correa, T., 2016.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Grooming consists of actions deliberately undertaken with the aim of befriending and establishing an emotional connection with a child, in preparation for sexual activity with the child or exploitation (European Commission, 2012. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – European strategy for a better internet for children, COM(2012) 196 final, 2.5.2012, p. 9).

⁽¹⁸⁾ Cyberbullying is an aggressive, intentional act or behaviour that is carried out by a group or an individual repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him- or herself. See https://ec.europa.eu/justice/grants/results/daphne-toolkit/content/cyberbullying-adolescence-investigation-and-intervention-six-european-countries_en. [Accessed on 12.03.2021]

⁽¹⁹⁾ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019.

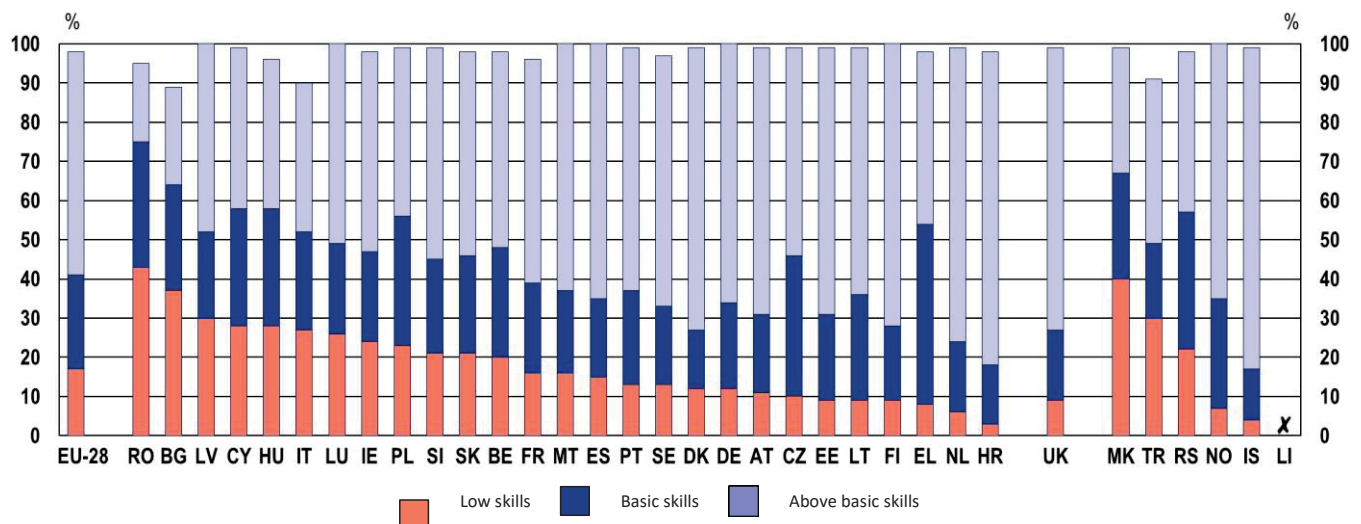
⁽²⁰⁾ The main components of digital competence are identified in the European digital competence framework. Information is available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/digcomp/digital-competence-framework>. [Accessed on 12.03.2021]

Figure 6.2 indicates that, on average in the EU-28, 17 % of young people have a low level of digital skills, 27 % have basic skills and 57 % have above-basic skills.

The highest proportions of young people with a low level of digital skills are found in several southern and eastern Member States: Romania (43 %), Bulgaria (37 %), Cyprus (28 %), Hungary (28 %) and Italy (24 %). Outside the EU-28, North Macedonia and Turkey report the highest proportions (40 % and 30 %). In Romania, Bulgaria and Greece, more than 50 % of young people have a low or basic level of skills (75 %, 64 % and 54 %, respectively). This is also the case in North Macedonia (67 %) and Serbia (57 %).

Conversely, high proportions of young people possess above-basic skills in Croatia (80 %), the Netherlands (75 %), Denmark and Finland (both 72 %). Across all countries studied, Iceland (82 %) has the largest proportion of young people with an above-basic level of digital skills. The proportions of young people with basic skills are similar across countries, except for Greece and Czechia, where the proportions are 46 % and 36 %, respectively.

Figure 6.2: Share of young people (16-29) with low, basic and above-basic levels of digital skills by country, 2019



Source: Eurostat [isoc_sk_dskl_i]. Data extracted on 01.03.2021.

Notes: Countries are ordered by descending level of low digital skills.

The percentage of those answering 'No use of internet in the last 3 months' is not included in the graph.

EU-27 average: low skills 18 %; basic skills 24 %; above basic skills 55 %.

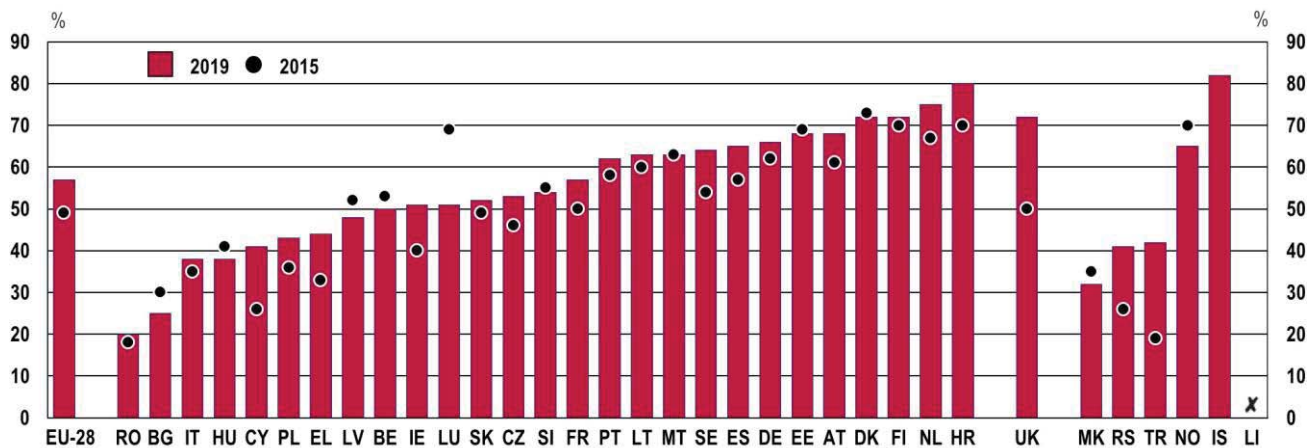
There are no particular differences between young men and young women in their levels of digital skills (data not shown ⁽²¹⁾). Differences exist in a few countries only for above-basic skills. In Malta, Finland and Austria, the proportion of women holding above-basic digital skills is considerably higher than that of men (by between 10 and 15 p.p.).

The growing application of digital technologies in all spheres of society has driven the acquisition and improvement of relevant skills. Being at the forefront in the use of digital communication ⁽²²⁾, there has been an increasing trend in the proportion of young people strengthening their skills over time (Figure 6.3).

⁽²¹⁾ Source: Eurostat [isoc_sk_dskl_i]. Data extracted on 01.03.2021

⁽²²⁾ Correa, T., 2016.

Figure 6.3: Trend in the share of young people (16-29) with above-basic digital skills by country, 2015 and 2019



Source: Eurostat [isoc_sk_dskl_i]. Data extracted on 15.02.2021.

Notes: Countries are ordered by ascending level of above basic digital skills in 2019. Breaks in time series in CZ, IT, LV and LU.

EU-27 average: 2015: 49 %; 2019: 55 %.

Indeed, on average in the EU-28, the share of young people with above-basic digital skills increased by 8 p.p. between 2015 and 2019. In some countries (Cyprus, Serbia, Turkey and the United Kingdom), the increase was larger. Conversely, the proportion of young people with above-basic skills decreased by 18 p.p. in Luxembourg.

The trend over time for young men and young women is very similar to the trend at EU-28 level (an increase of 9 p.p. for men and of 7 p.p. for women) (data not shown ⁽²³⁾).

6.2.2. Digital skills and digital divide

While the general picture of the level of and trend in young people's digital skills is positive, inequalities within the youth population exist. In this context, the 'digital divide' is defined as 'the gap between individuals with regard to both their opportunities to access information and communication technologies (ICTs) and to their use of the Internet for a wide variety of activities' ⁽²⁴⁾.

The digital divide is at the root of digital exclusion ⁽²⁵⁾. Those with poor skills are prevented from taking advantage of the opportunities offered by digitalisation. Education, employment, cultural and social participation, and health services are making use of digital means to an increasing extent (information about online activities conducted by young people is provided in Chapter 5). A lack of ability to access and use these instruments contributes to pushing young people to the margins of society ⁽²⁶⁾.

Research describes offline and online social exclusion as mutually reinforcing ⁽²⁷⁾. Social and economic exclusion lead to fewer opportunities for accessing technologies and acquiring skills; in turn, a limited online presence hinders participation in all aspect of social and economic life.

⁽²³⁾ Source: Eurostat [isoc_sk_dskl_i]. Data extracted on 15.02.2021

⁽²⁴⁾ OECD, 2002.

⁽²⁵⁾ Council of Europe and European Commission, 2020.

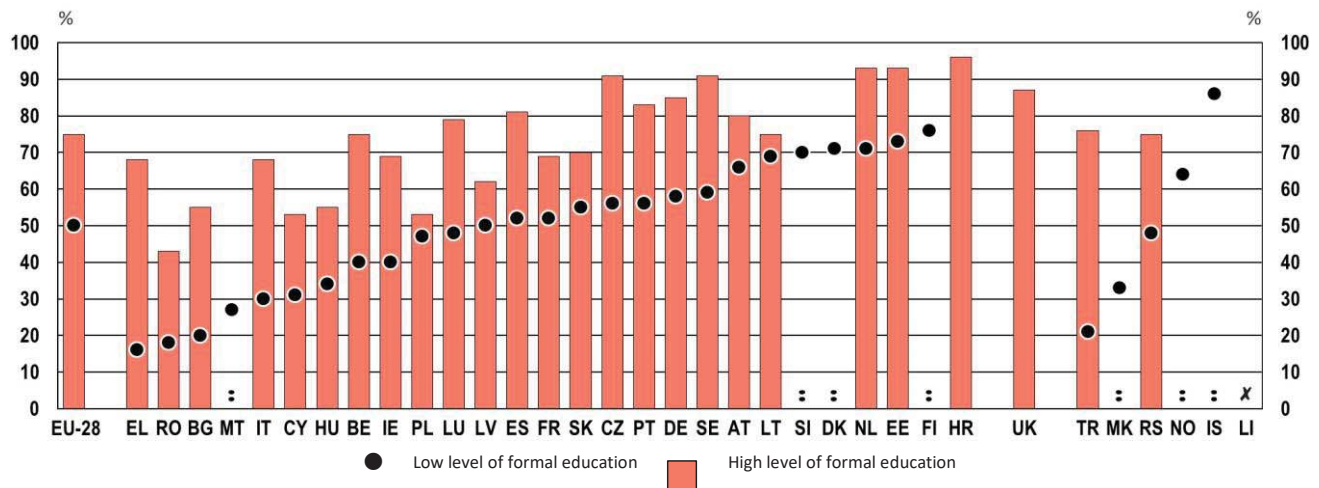
⁽²⁶⁾ Helsper, 2012.

⁽²⁷⁾ Ibid.

People's levels of digital skills and digital inclusion are strongly influenced by their sociodemographic characteristics. Young age, being self-employed, living in urban areas and having a high level of formal education are associated with better digital skills ⁽²⁸⁾.

Figure 6.4 illustrates the relation between level of educational attainment and possession of above-basic digital skills for young people. Considerable variation exists across countries.

Figure 6.4: Share of young people (16-24) with above-basic digital skills by country and level of educational attainment, 2019



Source: Eurostat [isoc_sk_dskl_i]. Data extracted on 15.02.2021.

Notes: A low level of formal education corresponds to having completed at most lower secondary education (ISCED level 2). A high level of formal education corresponds to having completed tertiary education (ISCED levels 5–8).

Countries are ordered by ascending share of young people with a low level of formal education.

EU-27 average: low level of formal education 50 %; high level of formal education 73 %.

Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Italy, Hungary, Malta, Finland, United Kingdom, Iceland, North Macedonia, Serbia: low reliability.

In the EU-28, 50 % of young people with a low level of educational attainment have above-basic digital skills, whereas 75 % of those with a high level of education have above-basic digital skills, a gap of 25 p.p.

However, in some countries, the difference between the two groups is notably bigger, suggesting a stronger impact of education on young people's level of digital skills. In Greece, only 16 % of young people with a low level of education possess above-basic digital skills, compared with 68 % of those with a highest level of attainment, a gap of 52 p.p. The situation is similar in Turkey, with corresponding proportions of 21 % and 76 %, respectively, a gap of 55 p.p. In Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Italy, Luxembourg and Sweden, the difference in the proportion of people with above-basic digital skills between the different educational attainment groups is between 31 and 38 p.p.

In contrast, in some countries, the level of educational attainment seems to have less of an influence on young people's level of digital skills. The smallest differences in above-basic digital skills between those with low and those with high levels of education are found in Lithuania and Poland (both 6 p.p.), followed by Latvia, Austria and Slovakia (12 p.p., 14 p.p. and 15 p.p., respectively).

Adequate digital skills are becoming indispensable in the education and learning environment. As mentioned in the introduction, they are essential for the fruitful participation of young people in the learning

⁽²⁸⁾ European Commission, 2021a.

opportunities provided by digital technologies. The following section addresses the topic of e-learning: first, the diffusion of e-learning in Europe is reported and, then, some of the challenges it can pose are highlighted.

6.3. E-learning

E-learning is ‘the learning supported by digital electronic tools and media’ ⁽²⁹⁾. It is based on digital technologies and internet applications, and makes use of instruments such as communication platforms, media sharing tools and virtual settings. E-learning usually takes the form of online courses and virtual classrooms where learners and instructors collaborate. As a form of distance or blended learning ⁽³⁰⁾, it takes place when learners and instructors either are not in the same place or are in the same place but not at the same time ⁽³¹⁾.

E-learning has been increasingly used in the last two decades – often in conjunction with traditional face-to-face modalities – especially in higher education ⁽³²⁾.

As recognised by the EU Digital Education Action Plan 2020 ⁽³³⁾, the advantages of e-learning are numerous. It supports flexible and personalised learning modes and facilitates collaboration among learners, particularly in the creation and sharing of digital content. It transforms knowledge and the learning experience into a ubiquitous commodity that can be accessed from anywhere, at any time, by (potentially) anyone. Indeed, e-learning ensures the accessibility of learning whenever face-to-face environments are not available or are hard to reach (e.g. because of physical disability or geographical distance).

At the same time, e-learning can pose a different type of barrier to accessing education and learning, and aggravate pre-existing inequalities ⁽³⁴⁾: learners lacking the necessary equipment and digital skills can be excluded from participating in education and training ⁽³⁵⁾. This challenge becomes particularly serious in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, when frequent lockdowns make e-learning the only way to access education and learning. This issue is debated in the second part of next section.

6.3.1. E-learning among young Europeans

In this section, e-learning is operationalised as conducting any of the learning activities covered by the Eurostat ICT survey: taking an online course, using online learning material, and communicating with instructors or students using educational websites/portals ⁽³⁶⁾.

Figure 6.5 shows that, in the EU-28 in 2019, 45 % of young people (aged 16–29) engaged in e-learning activities. Across all countries studied, Iceland (89 %) had the highest percentage of young people engaging in e-learning, whereas, among EU Member States, Finland (72 %), Estonia (64 %), Sweden (60 %) and the Netherlands (57 %) had the highest percentages of young people engaging in e-learning. Conversely, across

⁽²⁹⁾ Kumar et al., 2018.

⁽³⁰⁾ Blended learning refers to a combination of face-to-face teaching, workshops or seminars and online distance learning techniques. See EQAVET, 2021.

⁽³¹⁾ Ibid.

⁽³²⁾ Zheng et al., 2020; Al-Fraihat et al., 2020.

⁽³³⁾ European Commission, 2021a.

⁽³⁴⁾ For an overview of the determinants of inequalities in access to quality education and their trend over time: European Youth Forum, 2021.

⁽³⁵⁾ Ibid.

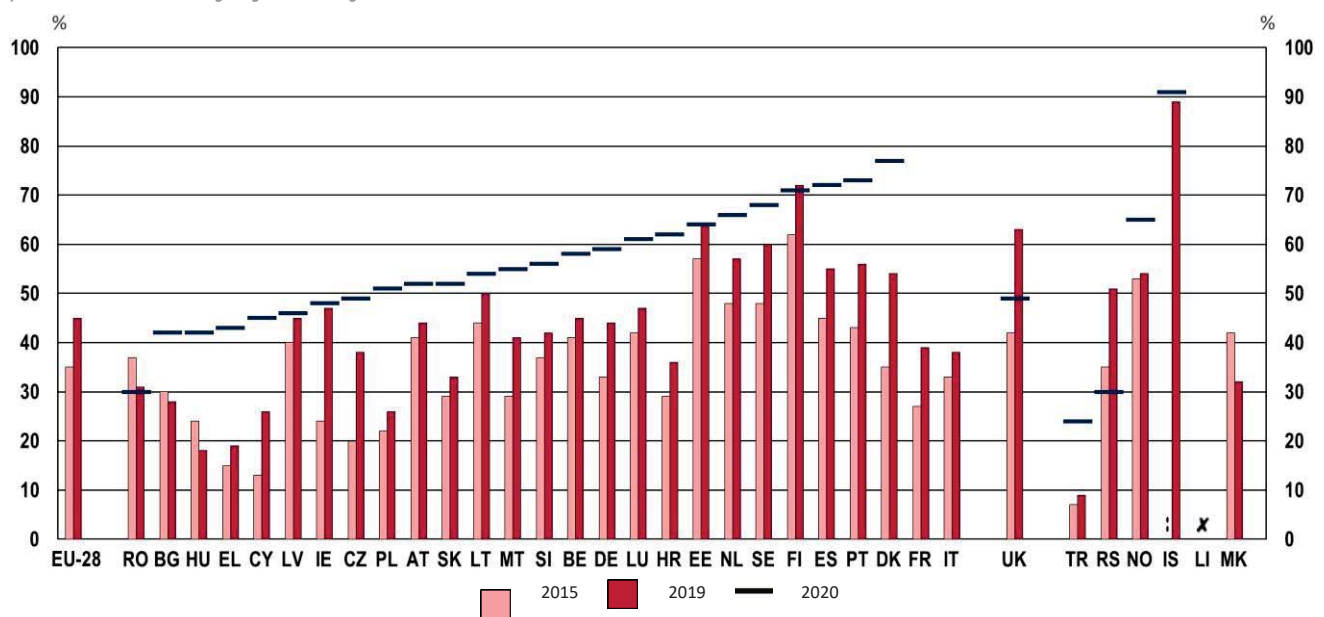
⁽³⁶⁾ Source: Eurostat [i_iuolc, i_iuolm, i_iuocis]. Data extracted on 15.02.2021.

all countries, the lowest rates of participation in e-learning were found in Greece (19 %), Hungary (18 %) and Turkey (9 %).

Between 2015 and 2019, on average in the EU-28, the proportion of young people engaging in e-learning grew by 10 p.p. The greatest increases took place in Ireland (23 p.p.), Denmark (19 p.p.), Czechia (18 p.p.), Portugal (13 p.p.) and Cyprus (13 p.p.). Outside the EU, the United Kingdom and Serbia reported the largest increases in e-learning among young people (21 and 16 p.p. respectively). Conversely, Romania and Hungary (6 p.p. for both) as well as North Macedonia (10 p.p.) saw a decline in the use of e-learning.

Young men and young women engaged with e-learning to similar degrees (data not shown ⁽³⁷⁾).

Figure 6.5: Share of young people (16-29) using the internet for learning activities during the three months prior to the survey by country, 2015, 2019 and 2020



Source: Eurostat [isoc_ci_ac_i]. Data extracted on 15.02.2021.

Notes: Countries are ordered by ascending share of young people engaged in e-learning activities in 2020.

EU-27 average: 2015: 34 %; 2019: 42 %; 2020: 52 %.

Czechia, Latvia, Luxembourg and Sweden: break in time series.

While the EU-28 average is not available for 2020, the variation in percentages at country level indicate an almost uniform increase across European countries (with the exception of the United Kingdom and Serbia that saw considerable decreases). The countries where there were no particular increases were those where the levels of e-learning were already among the highest in 2019, such as Finland, Estonia and Sweden. Furthermore, for the vast majority of countries, the increase in e-learning between 2019 and 2020 was bigger than that between 2015 and 2019 (for example, 21 p.p. in Poland, 20 p.p. in Greece and 19 p.p. in Croatia).

The data suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic, and the lockdowns imposed as a consequence, have accelerated the move from face-to-face to online learning.

⁽³⁷⁾ Source: Eurostat [isoc_ci_ac_i]. Data extracted on 15.02.2021

6.3.2. Inequalities in the access to e-learning

The transfer of learning activities from physical environments to digital environments has a number of implications for young people's lives. Social relations with peers, family dynamics, and interactions with teachers and instructors are impacted ⁽³⁸⁾. Emotional and psychological well-being can also be challenged, as discussed in Chapter 7.

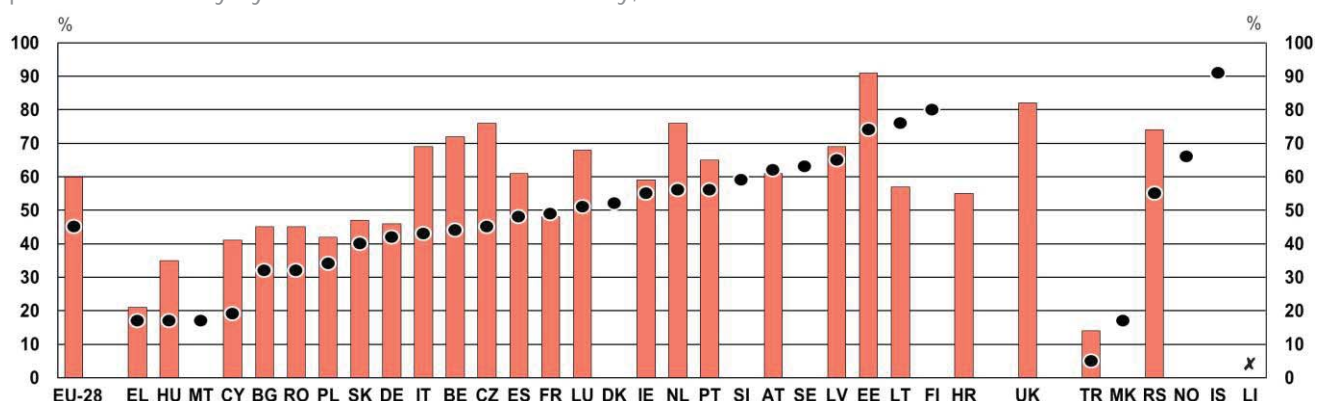
In addition, e-learning can have consequences for overall participation in learning. In the absence of personal interactions, students can experience disengagement from activities, the rate of absenteeism can increase and educational achievement can be negatively affected ⁽³⁹⁾. This is particularly true for youth who are vulnerable to social exclusion ⁽⁴⁰⁾.

Beside structural conditions (e.g. the availability of a broadband internet connection ⁽⁴¹⁾), the socioeconomic characteristics of young people and their families exert a crucial influence on participation in e-learning. Education level and the affordability of the necessary equipment and internet connection are particularly relevant ⁽⁴²⁾.

A relation between the level of formal education and the degree of involvement in e-learning is suggested by the data illustrated in Figure 6.6. This can be at least partially explained by the impact of education level on the level of digital skills, discussed in Section 6.2.1.

In the EU-28, in 2019, 45 % of young people (aged 16–24) with a low level of education and 60 % with a high level of education participate in e-learning activities. At country level, the widest gaps are found in Belgium (28 p.p.), Italy (26 p.p.), Cyprus (22 p.p.), the Netherlands (20 p.p.) and Czechia (18 p.p.). In these countries, the relation between different levels of education and participation in e-learning seems stronger than in the EU-28 as a whole. In a few countries (France, Austria, Greece, Germany, Ireland and Latvia), educational level has no or little impact on the level of e-learning.

Figure 6.6: Share of young people (16-24) using the internet for learning activities during the three months prior to the survey by level of education and country, 2019



⁽³⁸⁾ Carretero et al., 2021.

⁽³⁹⁾ Wigfield et al., 2015.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Drane, et al., 2020.

⁽⁴¹⁾ The European Commission 2020 DESI report indicates that broadband coverage of rural areas remains a challenge as 10 % of households are not covered by any fixed network and 41 % are not covered by any next generation access technology (European Commission, 2021a).

⁽⁴²⁾ Carretero et al., 2021.



Source: Eurostat [isoc_ci_ac_i]. Data extracted on 15.02.2021.

Notes: A low level of formal education corresponds to having completed at most lower secondary education (ISCED level 2). A high level of formal education corresponds to having completed tertiary education (ISCED levels 5–8). Countries are ordered by ascending proportion of young people with low levels of education participating in e-learning. EU-27 average: low level of formal education 45 %; high level of formal education 55 %.

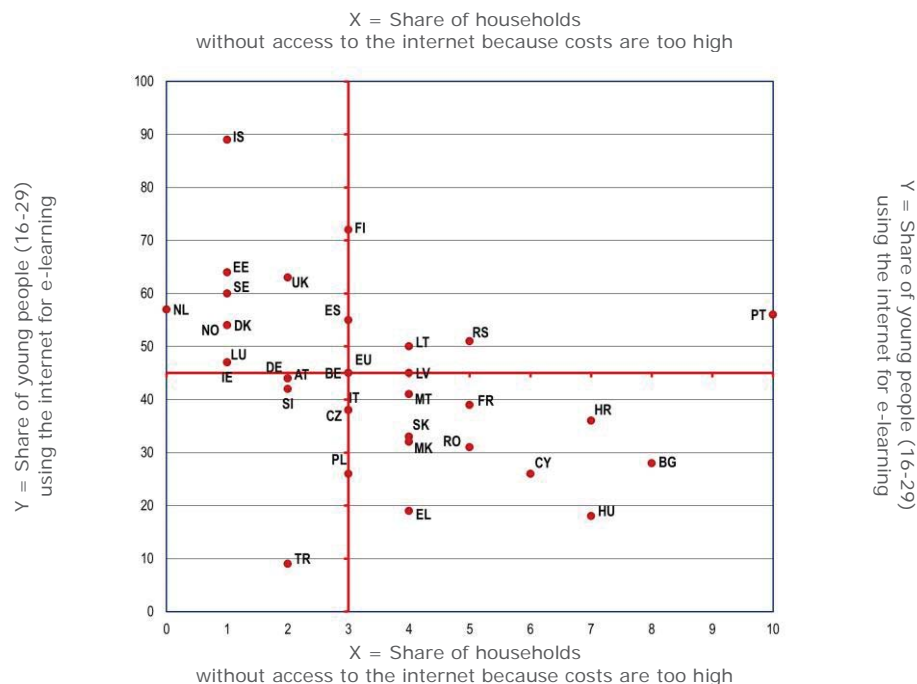
Czechia, Latvia, Luxembourg and Sweden: break in time series.

The level of educational attainment does not have a different impact on young men and young women (data not shown) ⁽⁴³⁾.

In addition to education attainment, research indicates that participation in e-learning is affected by the possibility to afford the related costs ⁽⁴⁴⁾. E-learning requires appropriate equipment (computer, tablets or smartphones) and broadband internet connection. Their affordability is a crucial factor in allowing young people to access online education. Across Europe, 32 % of private households without internet connection indicate excessive costs as the main reason ⁽⁴⁵⁾. For young people living in such circumstances, economic and education disadvantages add up and increase the risk of social exclusion.

Figure 6.7 illustrates, for each country, the level of young people's participation in e-learning and the share of households which cannot afford internet connection. The representation aims at observing the distribution of countries along the two dimensions, with no intent at establishing a causal relation.

Figure 6.7: Country distribution based on the share of young people (16-29) using the internet for e-learning and the share of households without access to the internet because costs are too high, 2019



Source: Eurostat [isoc_ci_ac_i, isoc_pibi_rni]. Data extracted on 20.02.2021.

The majority of countries fall into two main groups. The first group is composed of countries where the proportion of households that cannot afford internet access is higher than the EU-28 average, and the

⁽⁴³⁾ Source: Eurostat [isoc_ci_ac_i]. Data extracted on 15.02.2021

⁽⁴⁴⁾ Carretero et al., 2021.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ Source: Eurostat [isoc_pibi_rni]. Data extracted on 15.02.2021

proportion of young people participating in e-learning is below the average. This group includes several southern and eastern countries (e.g. Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, North Macedonia, Romania and Slovakia). The second group is represented by countries (mainly in Scandinavia and the northern regions of Europe) where the proportion of households that cannot afford internet access is lower than the EU-28 average, and the proportion of young people participating in e-learning is above the average.

Some countries do not belong to either of the groups. For example, in Belgium, Czechia and Spain, the proportions of young people engaging in e-learning and households finding that internet costs are unaffordable are close to the EU-28 averages.

Although the data presented do not allow a cause-effect relation to be identified, results from other research corroborate the relation between the unaffordability of digital instruments and exclusion from e-learning ⁽⁴⁶⁾. As digital equipment and an internet connection become indispensable for learning, the associated costs of education cannot be sustained equally across all of society.

Conclusions

The growing application of digital technologies in all spheres of society has driven the acquisition and improvement of relevant skills. As a result, the share of young people with above-basic digital skills increased considerably between 2015 and 2019. At the same time, digitalisation may penalise those who do not have adequate digital skills and resources. In this context, the chapter has illustrated the relation between level of formal education and possession of above-basic digital skills for young people.

Adequate digital skills have become indispensable also in the education and learning environment, where e-learning has been increasingly used. Between 2015 and 2020, the proportion of young people engaging in e-learning grew substantially. Against this background, e-learning can represent a barrier to accessing education and learning, and aggravate pre-existing inequalities. A relation between the level of formal education and the degree of involvement in e-learning is detected by the data discussed.

In addition, participation in e-learning is affected by the possibility to afford the related costs. In several European countries, above-average rates of households that cannot afford internet access are associated with below-average rates of young people participating in e-learning.

The huge increase in e-learning during the COVID-19 pandemic risks exacerbating pre-existing inequalities in access to education and learning based on economic circumstances. In this respect, economic and educational disadvantages combine to increase the social exclusion of the frailest segments of the youth population.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ Carretero et al., 2021.

Brussels, 14.10.2021
SWD(2021) 287 final

PART 7/10

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

The situation of young people in the European Union

Accompanying the document

**Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European
Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions**

on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2021

{COM(2021) 636 final} - {SWD(2021) 286 final}

7. Health and wellbeing

Enjoying a good level of physical and mental health and well-being during childhood and adolescence is the foundation of good health in adult life ⁽¹⁾. Having a healthy and active lifestyle at a young age reduces not only non-communicable diseases, including cancer, at a later stage in life, but also shapes one's future capacity to cope with physical, mental and emotional challenges ⁽²⁾.

While, on average, young people are less affected by physical illness than the total population, the transition from childhood to adulthood makes them vulnerable to many sources of psychological distress ⁽³⁾.

Young people's mental and emotional well-being is affected by a variety of factors. On one hand, the natural physical and behavioural transformations that occur during the transition to adulthood (puberty, changing social roles, self-determination of lifestyle) play a crucial role. In parallel, the use of drugs, excessive alcohol consumption and risk-taking (e.g. dangerous driving) – often linked to adolescent experimentation – are among the unhealthy behaviours that can deeply affect youth well-being ⁽⁴⁾. Relational and social difficulties (such as peer pressure and bullying) can also have long-lasting consequences.

In addition to these challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic is having an unprecedented impact on young people's mental and emotional health. It is dramatically transforming their interpersonal relations and triggering feelings of serious concern and apprehension ⁽⁵⁾. Overall, the pandemic has further increased inequalities and negatively affected vulnerable young people. These include young people from lower socio-economic groups, young people with a migrant background and young people with disabilities.

Reduced personal interactions, physical distancing, restrictions on leisure activities (such as practising sport and attending cultural events) and the move from face-to-face to online learning have joined together to make young people feel more isolated ⁽⁶⁾. This is often aggravated by an increased sedentary lifestyle and an excessive use of online applications, which, in addition, increases the risk of being exposed to harmful content and interactions, misinformation, targeted advertising, including for harmful products and activities such as tobacco, alcohol, unhealthy food, and gambling ⁽⁷⁾.

In order to illustrate these aspects, the first section of this chapter addresses the levels of distress provoked by living for long periods in isolation and facing the health risks posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The second section explores the changes that have occurred in interpersonal relations, which greatly affect youth emotional well-being. The last section draws a comparison between the responses of young people and those of the general population to the pandemic. Information is drawn from the European Commission Standard Eurobarometer 93.1 – 'The EU and the coronavirus outbreak' (conducted between July and August 2020) ⁽⁸⁾.

⁽¹⁾ Sawyer et al., 2012.

⁽²⁾ Ibid.

⁽³⁾ Eurostat, 2021o.

⁽⁴⁾ Ibid.

⁽⁵⁾ Ellis et al., 2020.

⁽⁶⁾ Ibid.

⁽⁷⁾ Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe (Youth Partnership), 2020.

⁽⁸⁾ European Commission, 2020f.

and from the European Parliament Eurobarometer *Uncertainty/EU/Hope – Public opinion in times of COVID-19* (conducted in October 2020) ⁽⁹⁾.

7.1. Psychological distress

Psychological distress is a general term used to cover a variety of mental health conditions ⁽¹⁰⁾. This chapter uses the following definition of psychological distress: a ‘state of emotional suffering characterised by symptoms of depression and anxiety’ ⁽¹¹⁾.

As for any other segment of the population, the causes of psychological distress for young people are countless. For example, tensions in the family, the pressure to conform to peers and poor living conditions are powerful triggers ⁽¹²⁾.

Social media and online applications can also become sources of psychological distress. Research has illustrated that the more time spent on social media, the higher the incidence of depressive symptoms ⁽¹³⁾. Several causes have been identified. For example, young people may compare themselves with their peers and role models based on what they share online, which may not correspond to reality. In doing so, they run the risk of developing unrealistic social and physical expectations, which may affect their self-esteem ⁽¹⁴⁾. Others can experience loneliness, isolation and relational difficulties because of the excessive time spent online – a condition labelled ‘internet addiction’ ⁽¹⁵⁾. Another significant challenge that comes with online presence is the exposure to violence. This can refer to easy access or exposure to harmful content such as cyberbullying, online abuse and harassment. Young people aged 16 to 29 report experiencing cyber harassment more than older age groups ⁽¹⁶⁾.

These challenges have become even more serious during the social confinement imposed in many European countries to contain the spread of COVID-19. Young people have spent considerably more time online since the start of the pandemic than they did previously ⁽¹⁷⁾.

Data collected by a study carried out in the United Kingdom show that young people are one of the groups that have been most vulnerable to anxiety and depression during the pandemic ⁽¹⁸⁾. Twice as many young adults reported psychological distress than before the pandemic, and this is at least partly because of the emotional effects of social distancing and confinement ⁽¹⁹⁾. In addition, lockdowns hamper the ability of young people to access mental health services when in need ⁽²⁰⁾.

On average, in the EU-27, one in three young people have found it difficult to cope with the confinement measures imposed by national governments to contain the spread of COVID-19 (Figure 7.1). Important

⁽⁹⁾ European Parliament, 2020b.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Drapeau et al., 2012.

⁽¹¹⁾ Ibid.

⁽¹²⁾ WHO, 2020a.

⁽¹³⁾ Radovic et al., 2017.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Ibid.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Błachnio et al., 2019.

⁽¹⁶⁾ FRA, 2020.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Ellis et al., 2020.

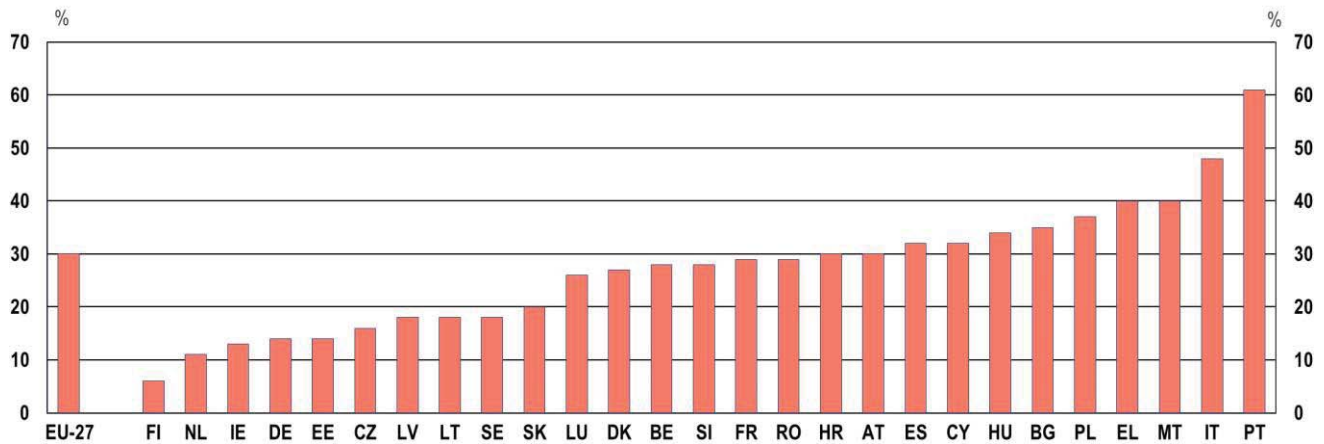
⁽¹⁸⁾ Kwong et al., 2020. The other groups most at risk of anxiety and depression are women and individuals with pre-existing medical conditions.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Ibid.

⁽²⁰⁾ Ibid.

differences exist between countries. The lowest proportions are found in Finland (6 %), the Netherlands (11 %), Ireland (13 %), Germany and Estonia (both 14 %). Conversely, several southern countries (Portugal 61 %, Italy 48 %, Malta 40 % and Greece 40 %) report the highest proportions.

Figure 7.1: Share of young people (15-24) who found confinement measures difficult to cope with by country, 2020



Source: European Commission, 2020. Standard Eurobarometer 93.1 – The EU and the coronavirus outbreak.

QA30. Thinking about the measures taken to fight the Coronavirus outbreak, in particular the confinement measures, would you say that it was an experience easy or difficult to cope with?

Notes: Countries are ordered by ascending proportion of respondents finding it difficult to cope with confinement measures.

While no straightforward explanation exists for the differences between countries, possible factors are the duration of quarantine, whether the measures are recommended or compulsory, and the strictness of the rules imposed ⁽²¹⁾.

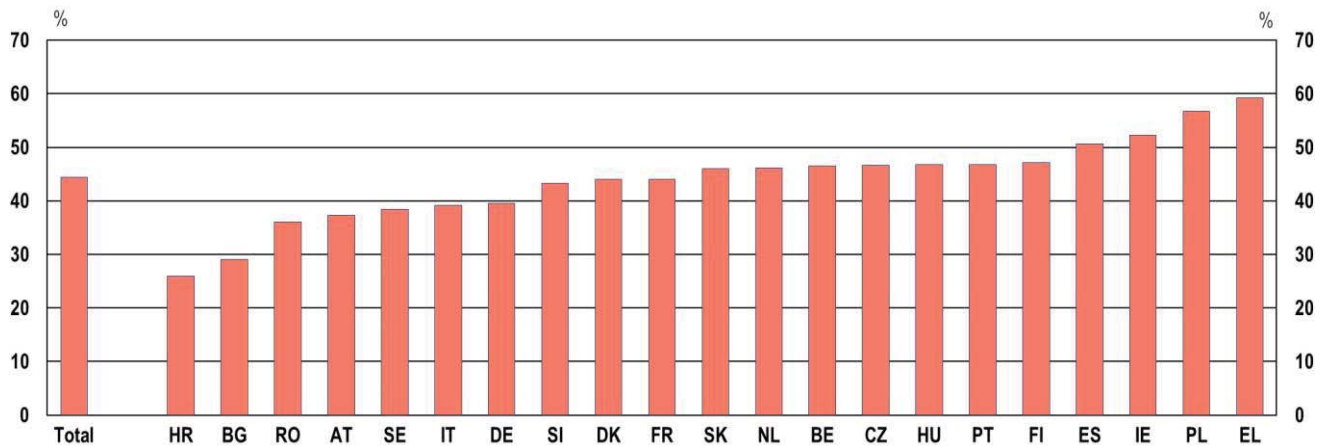
The Eurobarometer survey conducted by the European Parliament has shed light on the main feelings and attitudes about the COVID-19 pandemic among young Europeans ⁽²²⁾.

The survey found that ‘uncertainty’ is the most common feeling reported. Figure 7.2 shows that an average of 44 % of respondents experienced uncertainty. The highest levels of uncertainty were observed in Greece (59 %), Poland (57 %), Ireland (52 %) and Spain (50 %). In contrast, the lowest levels of uncertainty were experienced by young people in Croatia (25 %) and Bulgaria (29 %).

⁽²¹⁾ Francisco et al., 2020.

⁽²²⁾ European Parliament, 2020b.

Figure 7.2: Share of young people (16-24) experiencing uncertainty as their most common feeling about the pandemic by country, 2020



Source: European Parliament Eurobarometer, 2020 *Uncertainty/EU/Hope – Public opinion in times of COVID-19*.

Q11. What feelings best describes your current emotional status? – Uncertainty (Max 3 answers).

Notes: Countries are ordered by ascending share of respondents experiencing uncertainty. The term 'total' is used to indicate the average of respondents from the 21 countries participating in the survey. Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg and Malta were not part of the data collection; therefore, results for the EU-27 average are not available.

Uncertainty has been shown to have a strong effect on the level of distress suffered by people during the COVID-19 pandemic⁽²³⁾. Part of the reason for this may reside in the economic crisis provoked by the lockdowns, which hit young Europeans very hard. As discussed in Chapter 8 'Social inclusion', the sectors most affected by the economic downturn are those where young people tend to work (the wholesale, retail, accommodation and food sectors). An international survey conducted by the International Labour Organization found that young people who lost their jobs were almost twice as likely to experience anxiety and depression as those who remained employed⁽²⁴⁾.

The pandemic has not thrown young people just into a state of uncertainty. It has also generated strong concerns about the threats posed to physical health. The European Parliament Eurobarometer has provided insights into young people's levels of apprehension about the impact of COVID-19 on their health and that of their relatives and friends. Data indicate that young Europeans are less concerned about the effects of COVID-19 on their own health than the effects on their families and friends (Figure 7.3).

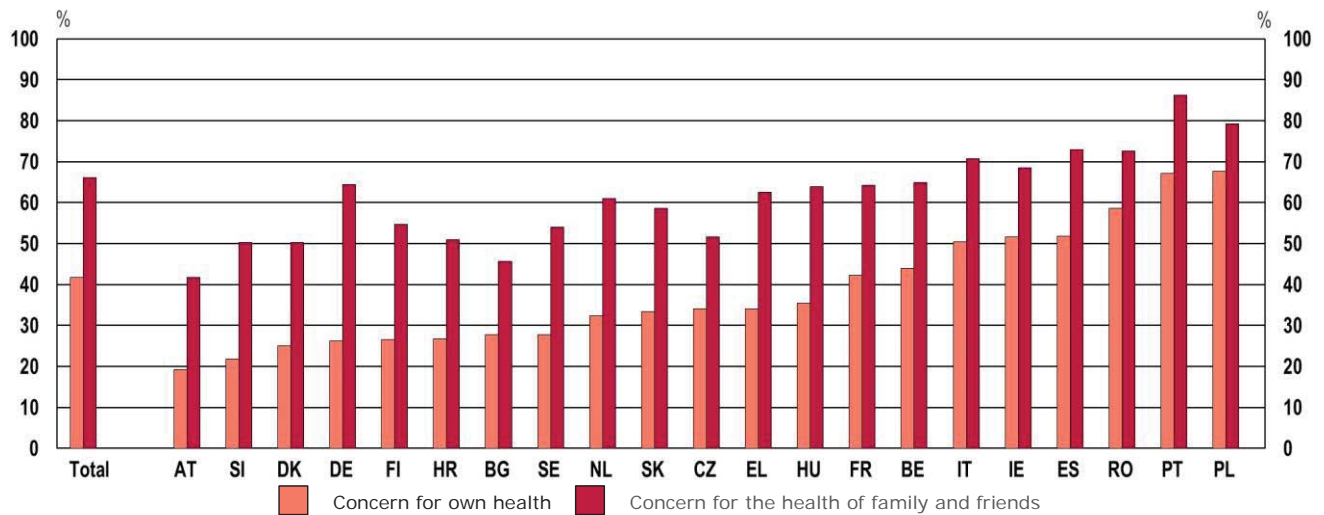
On average, 40 % of young people report fearing for their own health. The highest shares of respondents expressing this concern are found in Poland and Portugal (both 68 %), Romania (59 %), Ireland and Spain (both at 52 %). The lowest proportions of young people fearing for their own health are reported in Austria (19 %), Slovenia (22 %), Denmark (25 %), Germany, Croatia and Finland (all 26 %).

Compared with their own health, higher proportions of young people express concern about the health of their family and friends. On average, 66 % of young individuals report being worried about how the health of their loved ones may be affected. The countries where this concern is reported the most are Portugal (86 %), Poland (79 %), Romania (77 %) and Spain (73 %). These are also the countries with the highest proportions of respondents concerned about their own health.

⁽²³⁾ Rettie and Daniels, 2020.

⁽²⁴⁾ ILO, 2020b.

Figure 7.3: Share of young people (16-24) concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on their health and that of their family and friends by country, 2020



Source: European Parliament Eurobarometer, 2020. *Uncertainty/EU/Hope – Public opinion in times of COVID-19*.

Q12. Still thinking about the coronavirus pandemic, how concerned are you about each of the following? – How this might affect my own health/How this might affect the health of family and friends.

Notes: Countries are ordered by ascending share of young people reporting concern about their health. The term 'total' is used to indicate the averages of respondents from the 21 countries participating in the survey. Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg and Malta were not part of the data collection; therefore, EU-27 averages are not available.

The data seem to be consistent with the higher risk posed by the COVID-19 virus to older groups in the population than to young people ⁽²⁵⁾.

Young people's concern for the well-being of their relatives and friends is often exacerbated by being unable to offer care and support because of the quarantine measures imposed ⁽²⁶⁾. Indeed, the psychological distress suffered by young Europeans has been aggravated by the disruption to their social and emotional relations during the lockdowns. Against this background, the next section first discusses the impact of the pandemic on young people's relational well-being. It then looks at the patterns in how young people from different countries have coped with the distressing conditions described in this chapter.

7.2. Relational well-being

Positive interpersonal relations are an important source of psychological well-being ⁽²⁷⁾. In particular, close bonds and interactions with family and friends nurture feelings of happiness and meaningfulness. When these relations are weakened, individuals can experience anxiety, loneliness and emotional exclusion ⁽²⁸⁾.

Adolescents and young adults are badly affected by disruptions to family and social ties ⁽²⁹⁾. They live through a developmental stage of their lives, which profoundly shapes their personalities. Contacts with relatives, friends and members of their community are an essential protective factor at times of stress ⁽³⁰⁾. This is especially crucial in order to help them cope with feelings of stress and anxiety that have emerged during

⁽²⁵⁾ WHO, 2020b.

⁽²⁶⁾ Fioretti et al., 2020.

⁽²⁷⁾ White, 2017.

⁽²⁸⁾ Ibid.

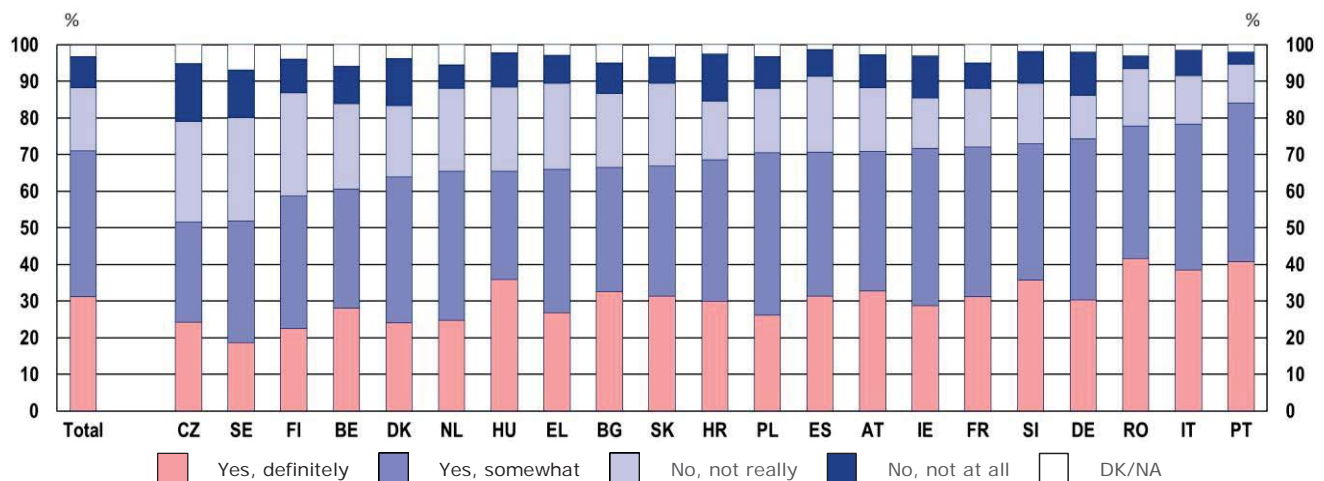
⁽²⁹⁾ Council of Europe and European Commission, 2020.

⁽³⁰⁾ Ibid.

the COVID-19 pandemic ⁽³¹⁾. Indeed, a survey conducted in Italy shows that young people report rediscovering the importance of family as a positive consequence of the pandemic ⁽³²⁾.

On average, 70 % of young people surveyed by the European Parliament Eurobarometer reported talking more often to people than before the outbreak of the pandemic (Figure 7.4). The situation varies between countries. The lowest proportions were reported in the Nordic countries: Sweden (52 %), Finland (59 %) and Denmark (64 %). Conversely, young people talked to family and friends more often than usual in Portugal (84 %), Italy (78 %) and Romania (78 %).

Figure 7.4: Share of young people (16-24) talking more often to people than before the pandemic by country, 2020



Source: European Parliament Eurobarometer, 2020. *Uncertainty/EU/Hope – Public opinion in times of COVID-19*.

Q14. For each of the following situations that can occur since the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic, please tell me if it applies to you? – I talk more often to people.

Notes: Countries are ordered by ascending share of young people answering 'yes, definitely'/'yes, somewhat'. The term 'total' is used to indicate the average of the respondents from the 21 countries participating in the survey. Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg and Malta were not part of the data collection; therefore, the EU-27 average is not available.

In addition to communicating with people, exchanging mutual support to overcome adversity is another essential part of relational well-being ⁽³³⁾. Moreover, perceived disparities in the level of mutual aid during the pandemic may cause discontent with the general level of solidarity in society ⁽³⁴⁾.

Figure 7.5 indicates that, across the countries analysed, about one third of young individuals received help from people around them during the pandemic. Caution is required in the interpretation of the data as the survey question does not specify whether receiving help was a necessity for coping with the difficulties encountered. For example, the perception of not receiving help may have been linked to feeling resilient enough to cope with the adversities caused by the pandemic, to considering that the available support is inadequate or to not finding sufficient support.

Finland (52 %), Slovenia (49 %) and Hungary (47 %) – followed by Spain, Ireland and Belgium (with percentages of 44 %) – reported the highest shares of young people receiving help. Conversely, the lowest proportions were reported in Croatia (15 %), Denmark (16 %), Austria (21 %) and Czechia (23 %).

⁽³¹⁾ Ibid.

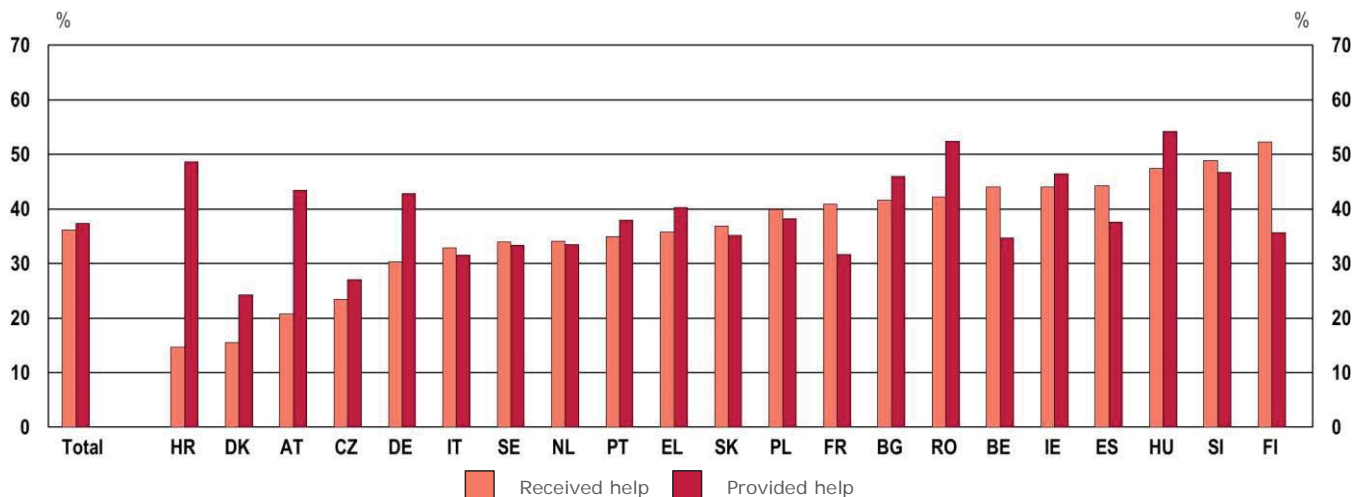
⁽³²⁾ Fioretti et al., 2020.

⁽³³⁾ White, 2017.

⁽³⁴⁾ OECD, 2020b.

Figure 7.5 also shows the proportions of young people providing help to people in need across the countries analysed, with more than one third of respondents doing so on average. The survey conducted by the International Labour Organization shows that, during the pandemic, the help that young people provided to family and friends mainly consisted of self-discipline in terms of respecting hygiene measures, caring for close friends and family members, taking personal responsibility by following the rules and protecting themselves, and extending emotional support to family and friends ⁽³⁵⁾.

Figure 7.5: Share of young people (16-24) who received help from people and provided help to persons in need by country, 2020



Source: European Parliament Eurobarometer, 2020. *Uncertainty/EU/Hope – Public opinion in times of COVID-19*.

Q14. For each of the following situations that can occur since the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic, please tell me if it applies to you – I receive help from people/I am helping persons in need.

Notes: Countries are ordered by ascending level of young people receiving help. The term 'total' is used to indicate the average of respondents from the 21 countries participating in the survey. Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg and Malta were not part of the data collection; therefore, the EU-27 average is not available.

While, on average, the proportions of young people receiving help and those providing help are similar, there are differences between countries. In Croatia, Denmark, Austria and Germany, higher proportions of young people reported providing help than receiving help. These countries also registered the lowest percentages of respondents who feel supported.

From the discussion on the previous indicators, two patterns can be identified among the countries included in the surveys. Portugal, Poland, Romania, Italy, Greece and Ireland tend to report higher percentages of young people struggling to cope with the effects of the pandemic. In these countries, above average proportions of young people find it difficult to adapt to the confinements measures, perceive uncertainty as their prevalent emotion and are concerned about the impact of the pandemic on their health and that of their families and friends. Perhaps as a coping measure, they also report talking to family and friends more often than usual.

In contrast, young people in Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Austria and Croatia consistently report levels of concern and emotional strain below the average. At the same time, lower proportions of these young individuals report talking more often than usual with people around them. These results may suggest less of a need to compensate for the psychological and emotional suffering caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

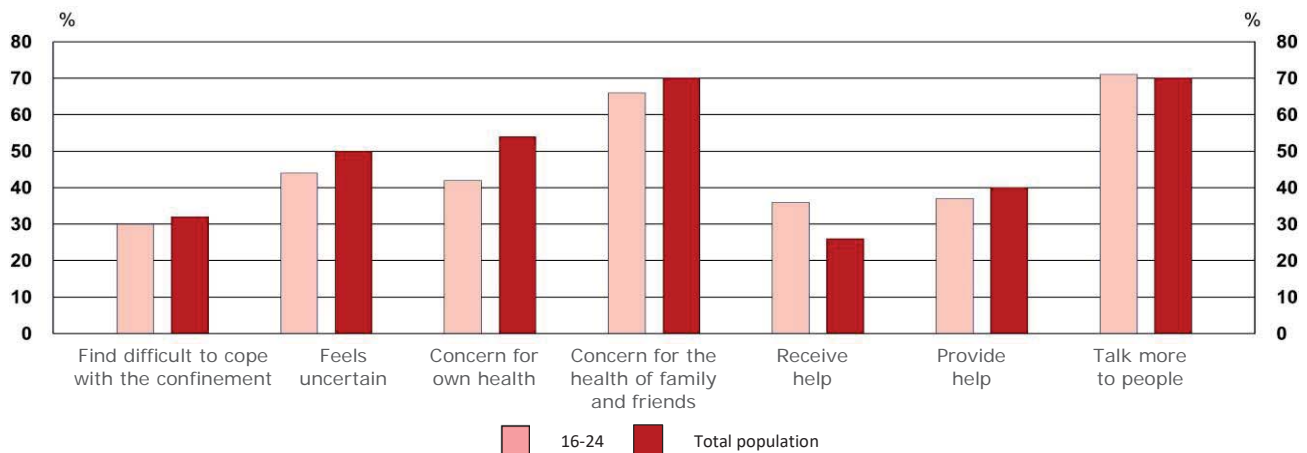
To contextualise the experiences of young Europeans, and detect potential specificities, the next section draws comparisons with data for the total population.

⁽³⁵⁾ ILO, 2020b.

7.3. Impact of COVID-19 on the psychological wellbeing of youth and the total population

Just as COVID-19 affects the physical health of different age cohorts differently, so it affects their psychological well-being differently⁽³⁶⁾. Figure 7.6 compares the perceptions of young people and those of the total population regarding the effects of the pandemic on their mental well-being.

Figure 7.6: Psychological distress factors among young people (15-24) and the total population, EU-27, 2020



Source: European Commission, Standard Eurobarometer 93.1 – 2020. The EU and the coronavirus outbreak, and European Parliament Eurobarometer, 2020. *Uncertainty/EU/Hope – Public opinion in times of COVID-19, 2020.*

Notes: The youth age group used in the European Commission Standard Eurobarometer 93.1 is 15–24 years.

No considerable differences exist in the level of difficulty in coping with the confinement measures and in the frequency of conversations with people. Conversely, the feeling of uncertainty and the concern for one's own health are more widespread among the total population. This may be related to the higher risks posed by the COVID-19 virus to the health, professional stability and family responsibilities of older age groups in the population.

To lesser degrees, the total population also records a higher level of concern for the health of family and friends and a higher level of providing help to those in need.

Interestingly, receiving help is the only indicator for which the proportion of young people is bigger than that of the total population. To explain this result, a few hypotheses can be advanced.

First, it must be considered that the younger the cohort the more likely it is that those in the cohort live with family members (see Chapter 8 'Social inclusion'). Regardless of the pandemic, they are still supported in many respects by their parents and relatives. Furthermore, the closure of schools and the move to e-learning as a result of the pandemic has been likely to require additional support from family members to ensure learning continuity at home (for more details, see Chapter 6 'Education and learning').

Second, young adults have been disproportionately hit by the contraction in labour demand caused by the pandemic. As mentioned in Section 7.1, the sectors most affected by the crisis are those where most young Europeans work. In these circumstances, support from families can be a necessity to overcome periods of unemployment.

⁽³⁶⁾ WHO, 2020b.

A third potential factor behind the comparatively higher proportion of young people receiving help may be their higher use of social media ⁽³⁷⁾. While excessive amounts of time spent online and lack of awareness of potential dangers pose risks (mentioned in Section 7.1 of this chapter and in Chapter 6), using social media can be helpful for maintaining interpersonal relations and finding support ⁽³⁸⁾. Young people can share their experiences with and receive advice from their peers. They can access information and insights on coping with difficulties. Moreover, when needed, they can obtain professional help to cope with their psychological and emotional distress ⁽³⁹⁾.

Conclusions

The chapter has investigated the mental health and psychological wellbeing of young Europeans, as a foundation of their good health in adult life. In this context, the focus has been placed on the unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. By dramatically transforming their interpersonal relations and lifestyles, the pandemic poses serious challenges to the wellbeing of many young Europeans.

On average, one in three young people have found it difficult to cope with the confinement measures imposed by national governments to contain the spread of COVID-19, especially because of the feeling of uncertainty it has induced. The pandemic has also generated strong concerns about the threats posed to physical health. On average, 40 % of young people report fearing for their own health and 66 % for the health of their families and friends.

The psychological distress suffered by young Europeans has been aggravated by the disruption to their social and emotional relations during the lockdowns. To counteract this situation, young people report talking more often to people than before the outbreak of the pandemic and exchanging support with others. In this respect, young Europeans seem to show resilience to the stress provoked by the pandemic by nurturing family and social contacts.

⁽³⁷⁾ Correa, 2016.

⁽³⁸⁾ Frith, 2017.

⁽³⁹⁾ Ibid.

Brussels, 14.10.2021
SWD(2021) 287 final

PART 8/10

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

The situation of young people in the European Union

Accompanying the document

**Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European
Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions**

on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2021

{COM(2021) 636 final} - {SWD(2021) 286 final}

8. Social inclusion

The risk of poverty or social exclusion affects large numbers of young people in Europe ⁽¹⁾. Often, exclusion is the result of multiple disadvantages: low income, unemployment or job precariousness, low educational attainment and physical and mental disabilities all converge to push young people to the margins. Exclusion prevents young people from acquiring the necessary resources to secure adequate living conditions, actively participate in society and, ultimately, enjoy their social rights ⁽²⁾.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have exposed young people to ever-greater challenges. Discontinuity in learning activities, contraction of employment and social isolation have added to existing risks (for an analysis of these themes, see Chapter 6, ‘Education and Training’, and Chapter 3, ‘Employment and entrepreneurship’).

Against this background, it is more important than ever that young people receive support to (re)integrate into the labour market, stay in education and enjoy a satisfactory level of relational and material well-being.

Youth work (discussed in Chapter 9) is a crucial factor in addressing these challenges.

This chapter first sets the context for social inclusion by analysing the age at which young people leave the family home and become independent. This is a transition that is liable to provoke financial insecurity and a deterioration of living standards. Furthermore, the analysis addresses the fundamental factors of exclusion: poverty, low intensity of employment and material deprivation. The final section brings into focus one of the groups in the youth population at high risk of exclusion: those who are not in employment, education or training (NEET).

8.1. Moving towards independence: young people leaving the parental home

Leaving the parental house and establishing one’s own home is one of the most remarkable steps in a person’s life. It marks the passage from reliance on the family of origin for personal, material and economic support to independence. This often coincides with other crucial transitions (not least from education to work) and therefore is a particularly vulnerable phase. Job insecurity, economic hardship and material deprivation can push young people into social exclusion. Not without reason, leaving the parental household is considered one of the factors of youth homelessness ⁽³⁾ and the strongest predictor of youth poverty ⁽⁴⁾.

Figure 8.1 shows that, on average, young people in the EU-28 leave the family home at the age of 26 and that no substantial changes occurred between 2015 and 2019. The analysis of data across countries indicates that, in general, young people in northern and western Member States tend to establish an independent home at an earlier age than their peers from southern and eastern Member States. For example, in Sweden, Luxembourg, Denmark, Finland and Estonia, the average age at leaving the parental house is between 18 and 22 years,

⁽¹⁾ Source: Eurostat [ilc_peps01]. Data extracted on 09.02.2021

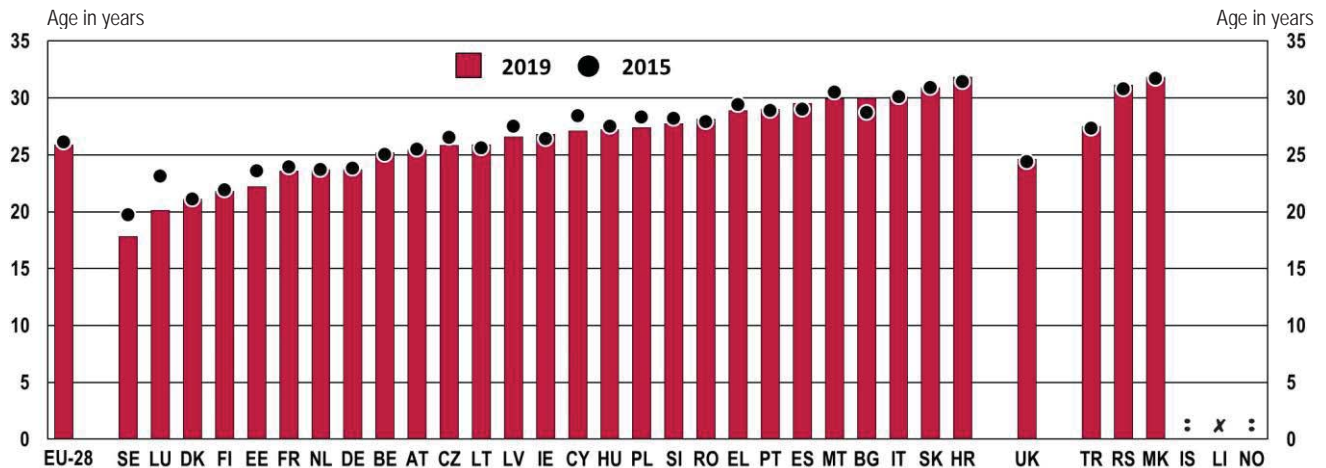
⁽²⁾ European Commission, 2021b.

⁽³⁾ Aratani, 2009; FEANTSA 2021

⁽⁴⁾ Aassve et al., 2007.

whereas Malta, Bulgaria, Italy, Slovakia and Croatia report average ages of 30 or above. Similar ages on leaving the family home are reported in Serbia and North Macedonia.

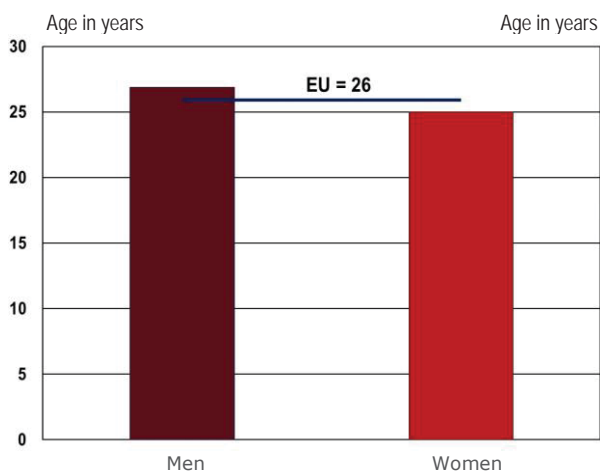
Figure 8.1: Estimated average age of young people when leaving the parental household, by country, 2015 and 2019



Source: Eurostat [yth_demo_030]. Data extracted on 08.01.2021.

Notes: EU-27 average: 2019: 26.2; 2015: 26.4.

Figure 8.2: Estimated average age of young people when leaving the parental household, by gender, EU-28, 2019



Source: Eurostat [yth_demo_030]. Data extracted on 08.01.2021.

Notes: EU-27: 26.2; men: 27.1; women 25.2

While cultural traditions play a role in when young people leave the family home, economic and social factors are crucial. In Nordic and western countries, students in higher education can rely on solid forms of support, for example in the form of grants⁽⁵⁾, and on more receptive labour markets⁽⁶⁾, which help them become independent at an earlier age. Where these circumstances are not present, young people are compelled to rely for longer on support from their families.

The age at which young Europeans establish their own homes also depends on gender. Women tend to leave the parental home 2 years earlier than men (Figure 8.2).

One of the reasons is that, on average, young women start to live with their partners at an earlier

age than men⁽⁷⁾.

Data by country (not shown) reveal that the higher the average age on leaving the family household, the larger the gap between women and men⁽⁸⁾.

⁽⁵⁾ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020c.

⁽⁶⁾ Bertolini et al., 2018.

⁽⁷⁾ Eurostat, 2021m.

⁽⁸⁾ Data by country are available at the Eurostat online database [yth_demo_030].

For example, in Croatia, where, on average, young people leave the family home at 31.8 years, the difference between men and women is 3.7 years. Similarly, the gender difference in Bulgaria is 4.5 years, with young people leaving the parental household at an average age of 30 years. Conversely, in countries such as Sweden, Denmark and Estonia, where the average age on leaving the family home is 17.8, 21 and 22 years, respectively, the gender gap between men and women is only a few months.

As a result, the divide between western and northern Member States and southern and eastern Member States also applies to differences by gender.

8.2. Poverty, low work intensity and deprivation

There are three main factors leading to poverty and social exclusion: scarce financial resources (income poverty), precarious participation in the labour market (reflected in low work intensity) and inadequate living conditions (material deprivation) ⁽⁹⁾. These dimensions have been used to monitor the level of poverty or social exclusion in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy ⁽¹⁰⁾. The risk of poverty, low work intensity and severe material deprivation are measured using the Eurostat indicator ‘at risk of poverty or social exclusion’ (AROPE), which corresponds to the sum of persons who are either at risk of poverty, or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity ⁽¹¹⁾. The indicator is used in this chapter to illustrate the degree of poverty or exclusion suffered by young people in Europe.

In addition to youth (aged 16–29), children (aged less than 16) and the total population are included in the analysis to contextualise the situation of young people in society ⁽¹²⁾. Indeed, as is evident in the discussion of the data, young people are particularly vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion, which sets them apart from the rest of the population.

The following section provides an overview of the AROPE indicator. The subsequent sections address each of its three components in detail.

8.2.1. The risk of poverty or social exclusion

In the EU-28, one in four young people aged between 16 and 29 years are at risk of poverty or social exclusion (Figure 8.3). In some south and eastern countries, such as Greece (38.1 %), Romania (34.2 %), Spain (31.7 %), Italy (30.7 %) and Bulgaria (30.6 %), this ratio rises to one in three. The high percentages reported in some Nordic countries (e.g. Denmark and Finland) should be contextualised according to the characteristics of their youth populations. As discussed in the previous section, in these countries, young people tend to leave the parental household early. At the same time, they tend to stay in education into their late twenties, therefore not working or working with low intensity ⁽¹³⁾. However, the lack of income from work and low work intensity of their households are often offset by forms of support such as student financial aid schemes ⁽¹⁴⁾.

Data show that, at EU-28 level, young people are more at risk of poverty or social exclusion than children and the total population. This pattern is found in the majority of EU Member States. Besides Denmark, Finland

⁽⁹⁾ Verbunt, and Guio, 2019.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Eurostat, 2021p.

⁽¹¹⁾ Eurostat, 2021n.

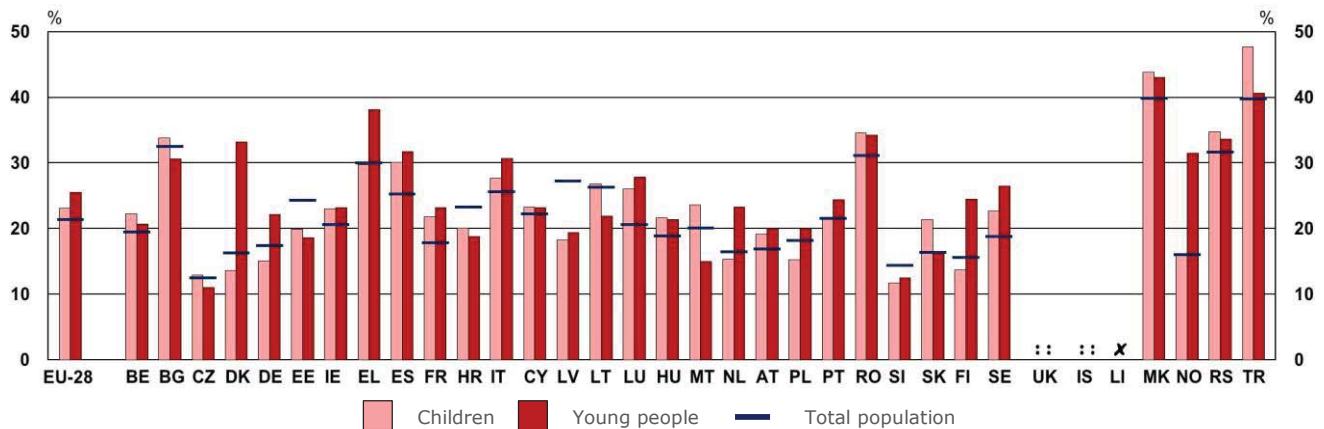
⁽¹²⁾ Based on the available data breakdowns, the age groups 16-29 for young people and ‘less than 16’ for children are used for this and the following indicators on the risk of poverty or social exclusion.

⁽¹³⁾ Data on participation in education and training are available at the Eurostat online database [educ_uae_enrt07].

⁽¹⁴⁾ Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, European Commission, 2011, and Student Aid in the Nordic Countries, 2016

and Sweden (where the difference is extremely pronounced because of the factors mentioned above), Greece, Italy and Spain report large proportions of young people in the 16–29 years age group at risk of poverty or exclusion compared with the total population. Outside the EU, North Macedonia, Norway and Turkey register the highest AROPE rates for young people (43 % and 40.6 %).

Figure 8.3: At-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate of young people (16-29) compared to children (younger than 16) and total population, by country, 2019

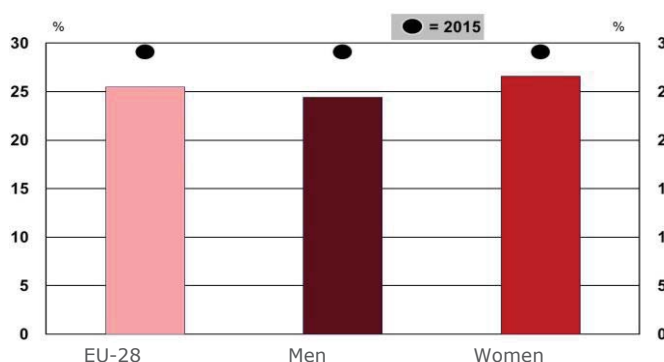


Source: Eurostat [ilc_peps01]. Data extracted on 09.02.2021.

Notes: EU-27 average: young people 25.1 %; children 21.8 %; total population 20.9 %.

Between 2015 and 2019, the share of young people at risk of poverty and exclusion in the EU-28 decreased by 3.6 percentage points (p.p.) (Figure 8.4). Across Europe, the biggest decreases (10 p.p. or more) took place in Cyprus, Ireland and several countries in the central European and Balkan regions (Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary and Serbia) (data not shown ⁽¹⁵⁾).

Figure 8.4: At-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate for young people (16-29), by gender, EU-28, 2015 and 2019



Source: Eurostat [ilc_peps01]. Data extracted on 09.02.2021.

Notes:

	EU-27 average (2019)	EU-27 average (2015)
Total	25.1 %	29.2 %
Men	24.3 %	29.2 %
Women	25.8 %	29.3 %

Against the background of a general reduction in the AROPE rate for young people, there is a divide between young women and young men. Whereas in 2015 in the EU-28, men and women had the same AROPE rates, 4 years later the rate for women was 2.2 p.p. higher than that for men. Indeed, the decrease in rate between 2015 and 2019 was bigger for men (4.7 p.p.) than for women (2.5 p.p.).

As explained in the following sections, the analysis of each of the three factors behind the risk of poverty and of the social exclusion indicator (the risk of poverty, very low work intensity of the household and severe material deprivation) reveals that this gender gap is mostly due to the higher risk of monetary poverty faced by young women.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Data by country are available at the Eurostat online database [ilc_li02].

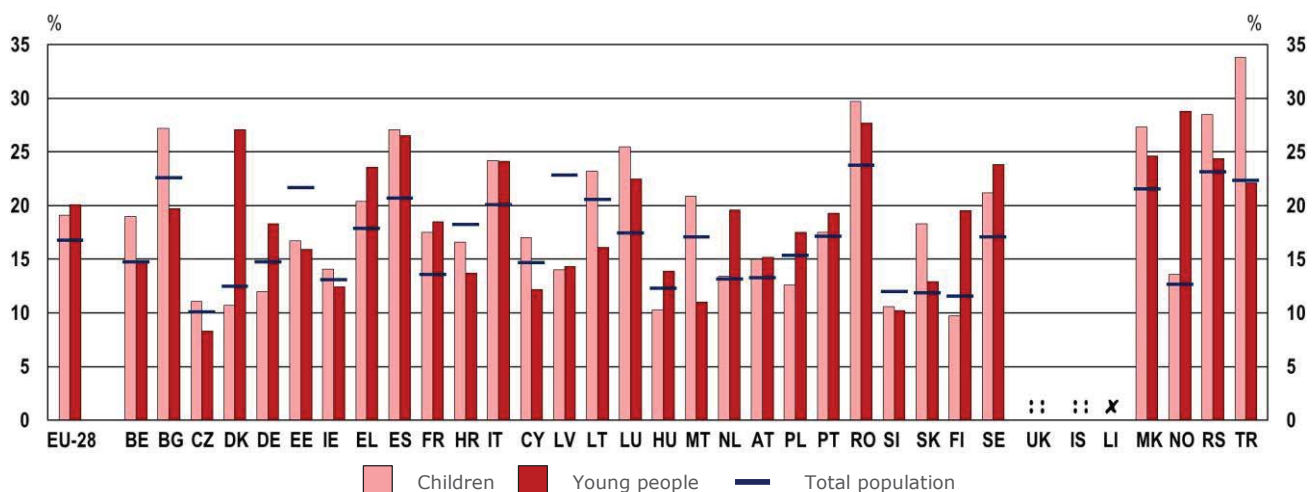
8.2.2. The risk of poverty

The level of poverty experienced by young people is intrinsically connected to their situation in the labour market (for an analysis of youth unemployment, see Chapter 3). High rates of inactivity, unemployment, job instability and in-work poverty⁽¹⁶⁾ translate into lower levels of income⁽¹⁷⁾. When combined with other factors such as high rents and scarce social protection, financial precariousness leads young people into poverty and exclusion.

The indicator used for this analysis is the ‘at-risk-of-poverty rate’, which considers individuals with an equivalised disposable income below a certain poverty threshold as being exposed to poverty⁽¹⁸⁾.

When analysing the youth cohort, it is important to consider several factors that can affect the risk of poverty. On average, many between 16 and 24 years of age are still in education and live in the parental household (as illustrated in the first section of the chapter). In this context, as emphasised above, in Nordic countries the risk of poverty is affected by the fact that young people leave the parental home at an earlier age. The inclusion of children (aged younger than 16) and the total population in analyses helps to contextualise the risk of poverty faced by the youth cohort.

Figure 8.5: At-risk-of-poverty rate of young people (16-29) compared to children (younger than 16) and total population by country, 2019



Source: Eurostat [ilc_li02]. Data extracted on 09.02.2021.

Notes: EU-27 average: young people 20 %; children 18.1 %; total population 16.5 %.

Figure 8.5 shows that, on average, one in five children and young people in the EU-28 are at risk of poverty. Both age groups present higher percentages than the total population. Children tend to be confronted with the risk of being poor as much as young individuals.

Excluding the countries where young people leave the parental household very early, the highest percentages of youth at risk of poverty are found in southern European countries (Spain 26.5 %, Greece 23.6 %, and Italy 24.1 %) as well as in Romania (27.7 %) and Luxembourg (22.5 %). These are also among the countries where

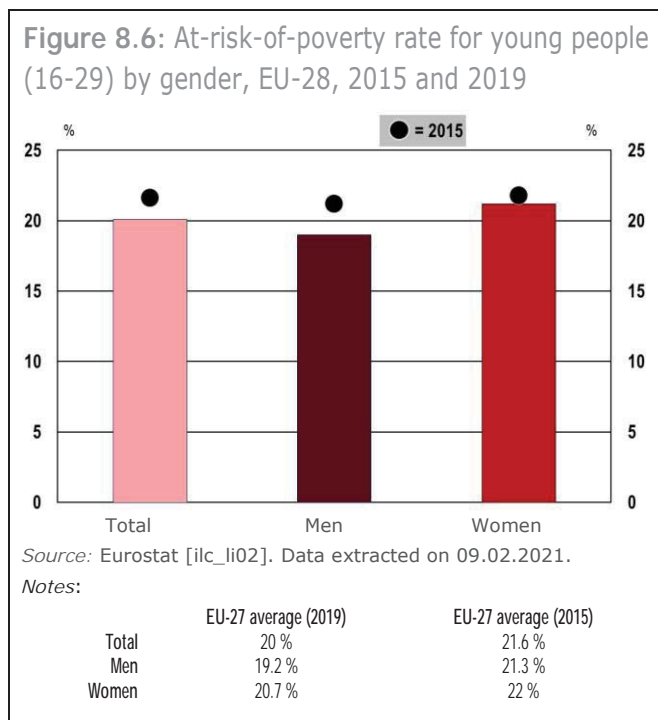
⁽¹⁶⁾ The ‘in-work poverty risk’ is measured as the rate of poverty risk among individuals who are ‘in work’, meaning individuals who were employed for more than half the reference period (Eurostat, 2010).

⁽¹⁷⁾ IMF, 2018.

⁽¹⁸⁾ The ‘at-risk-of-poverty rate’ is the share of people with an equivalised disposable income (after social transfer) below the ‘at-risk-of-poverty’ threshold, which is set at 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers. Eurostat, 2020.

the difference between the risk of poverty for youth and for the total population is biggest. Similar high rates are reported in countries outside the EU.

In the EU-28, a positive trend was reported between 2015 and 2019 (Figure 8.6). On average, the share of young people at risk of poverty decreased by 1.4 p.p. Ireland, Hungary, Cyprus and Lithuania saw a considerable decrease, with the proportion of youth at risk of poverty dropping by 9.4 p.p., 6.4 p.p., 6.1 p.p. and 5 p.p. respectively (data not shown ⁽¹⁹⁾). Outside the EU, in Serbia, the rate decreased by 5.1 p.p. On the other hand, the proportion of youth at risk of poverty increased in Luxembourg by 3.9 p.p.



There are also differences between men and women in the share of youth at risk of poverty. Figure 8.6 illustrates that, on average in 2019, young women were more exposed to the risk of poverty than young men. This divide is also visible across years. Indeed, the decrease in the proportion of youth at risk of poverty between 2015 and 2019 was not equal between women and men, with a reduction of 2.2 p.p. among men and 0.6 p.p. among women. This is reflected in the widening of the gender gap across the 4 years: from 0.6 p.p. in 2015 to 2.2 p.p. in 2019.

The reasons behind this trend are common to other age groups in the female population. In comparison with men, women are less involved in the labour market, earn less and experience a higher degree of job precariousness (e.g. more women than men are

on temporary and part-time contracts) ⁽²⁰⁾. All these factors contribute to the greater risk of poverty for young women when transitioning from education to the labour market. Among this group, young women living alone are particularly vulnerable ⁽²¹⁾.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Data by country are available at the Eurostat online database [ilc_li02].

⁽²⁰⁾ Data by gender for activity rate [lfsq_argan], part-time [lfsq_eppga] and temporary [lfsq_etpga] employment, and low-wage earners [earn_ses_pub1s] are available at the Eurostat online database.

⁽²¹⁾ European Parliament, 2008.

8.2.3. Households with very low work intensity

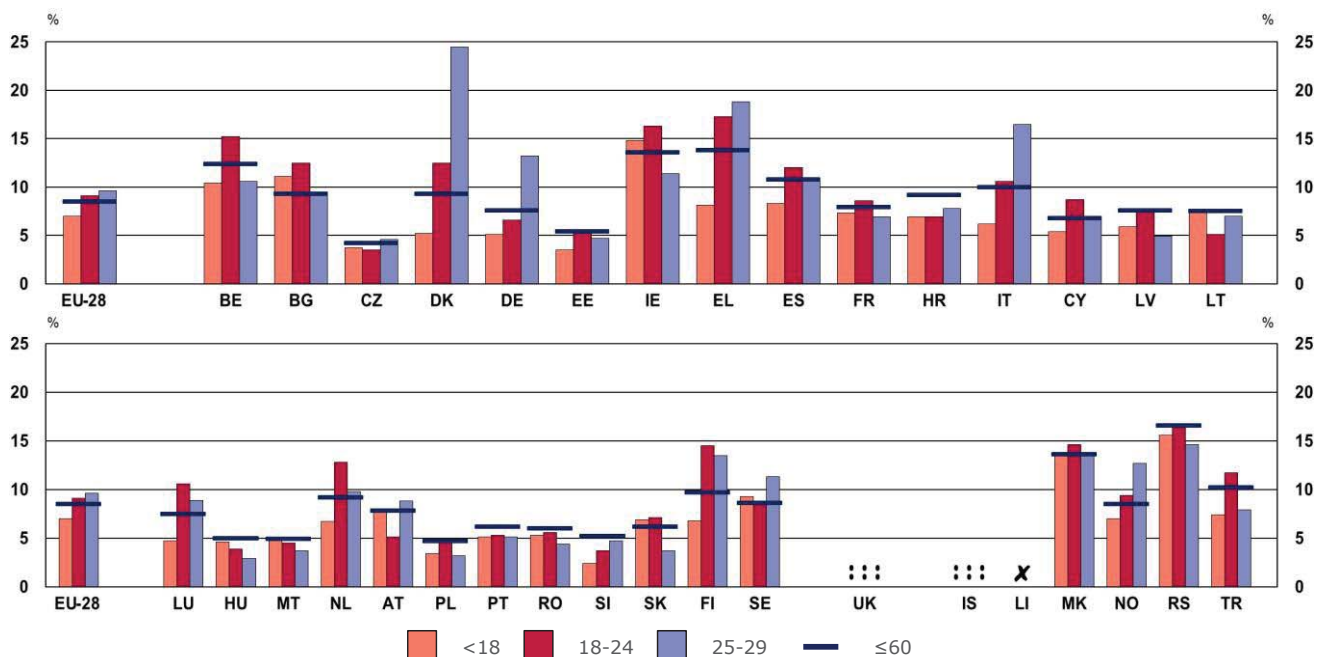
The risk of poverty is closely related to the intensity of work. Occasional employment does not guarantee a stable income; hence, it translates into significant exposure to financial insecurity.

A household ⁽²²⁾ with very low work intensity is one in which working-age members work for 20 % or less of the total number of months they could potentially have worked within a given reference period, i.e. the total work intensity of household members is below the threshold of 0.20 ⁽²³⁾. Households composed only of children, of students aged less than 25 and/or people aged 60 or more are excluded from the calculation.

For this indicator, the analysis divides the youth population into two age groups: from 18 to 24 years and from 25 to 29 years. This because the group aged from 18 to 24 years includes many students, who are not counted among household members of 'working age'. The analysis also includes the total population of individuals aged up to 59 years, as after 60 years retired people predominate.

Figure 8.7 illustrates that, in the EU-28, higher percentages of young people aged 18–24 and 25–29 than people aged under 18 or the whole population live in households with very low work intensity. In the group aged 25–29, young people tend to have concluded their studies and started working.

Figure 8.7: Proportion of people living in households with very low work intensity by age groups and country, 2019



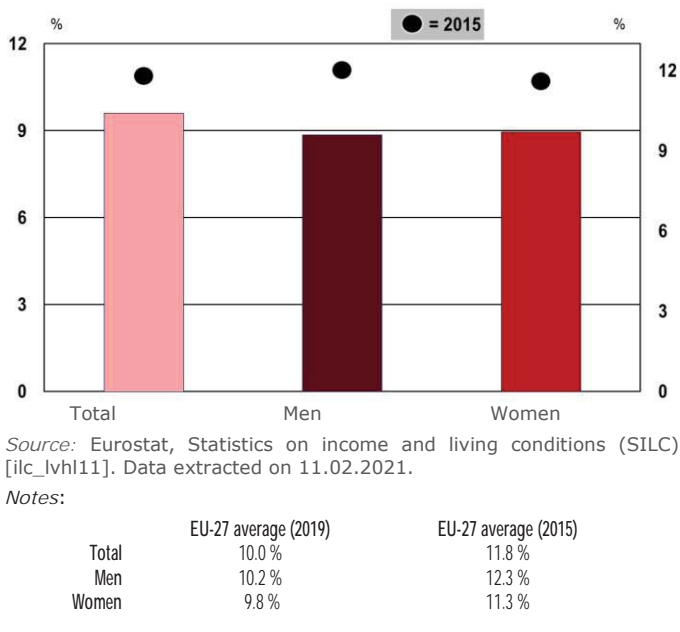
Source: Eurostat [ilc_lvhl11]. Data extracted on 11.02.2021.

Notes: EU-27 average: <18: 6.5 %; 18-24: 8.7 %; 25-29: 10 %; ≤60: 8.3 %.

⁽²²⁾ A household consists of 'a person living alone or a group of people who live together in the same private dwelling and share expenditures, including the joint provision of the essentials of living'. Eurostat. Eurostat metadata. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/en/ilc_esms.htm. [Accessed on 25.03.2021]

⁽²³⁾ A working-age person is a person aged 18-59 years, with the exclusion of students in the age group between 18 and 24 years. Eurostat, 2021i.

Figure 8.8: Proportions of young people (25-29) living in households with very low work intensity by gender, EU-28, 2015 and 2019



The challenges often encountered by young people in finding gainful and stable employment after concluding their studies may result in a large proportion of them living in households with very low work intensity.

Greece (18.8 %) and Italy (16.5 %) are among the countries with the highest shares of youth (aged 25–29) living in households with very low work intensity. As discussed above, the situation in Denmark (24.5 %), and – to a lesser extent – Finland (13.5 %), Sweden (11.3 %) and, Norway (12.7 %), is influenced by the fact that young people start living independently at a comparatively earlier age while staying in education into the last part of their twenties. Many in the age cohort 25-29 tend to belong to households with low work intensity because they are still students⁽²⁴⁾. However, they often benefit from public student schemes and support from families thus are not necessarily

living in poor conditions (as illustrated in the next section). North Macedonia and Serbia also report percentages higher than the EU-28 average (13.5 % and 14.6 %).

Since 2015, the proportion of young people aged 25–29 living in households with very low work intensity has declined by approximately 2 p.p. (Figure 8.8). The most significant decreases took place in Ireland (9.9 p.p.), Cyprus (6.3 p.p.), Portugal (5.7 p.p.) and Spain (5.6 p.p.) (data not shown⁽²⁵⁾).

The difference between young men and young women aged 25–29 is minor; however, the focus on households may conceal to some extent the gender disparities in the level of work intensity. In general, women tend to have a more precarious foothold in the labour market, and more family responsibilities and therefore tend to work less frequently⁽²⁶⁾. Households composed of women living alone are particularly affected by precarious conditions caused by the irregular frequency of work⁽²⁷⁾.

8.2.4. Severe material deprivation

Monetary poverty and/or living in a household with very low work intensity can have a profound impact on the living conditions of young people. Sporadic and precarious employment, low wages and the ensuing monetary poverty can be powerful drivers of material deprivation. Living in geographical areas where opportunities and services (e.g. employment agencies, social services, learning facilities) are hard to reach may add further strain to those who live in severe material deprivation⁽²⁸⁾.

⁽²⁴⁾ Povlsen et al., 2018.

⁽²⁵⁾ Data by country are available at the Eurostat online database [ilc_lvgl11].

⁽²⁶⁾ Data on gender equality, including on employment and childcare, are available at the Eurostat online database [eq_gend].

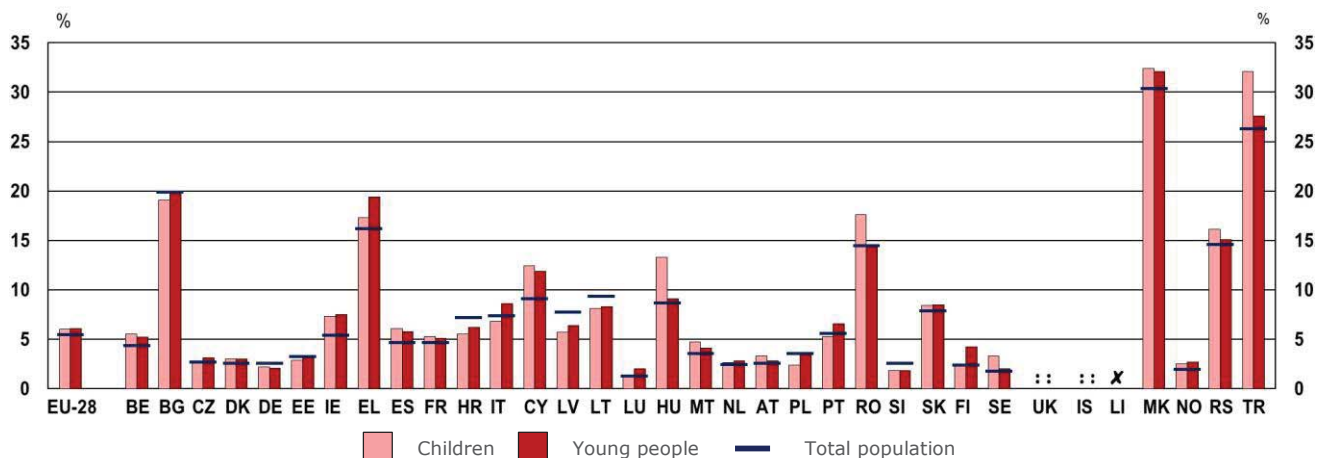
⁽²⁷⁾ European Anti-Poverty Network, 2019.

⁽²⁸⁾ European Commission, 2015a.

In turn, material deprivation has serious and long-lasting repercussions for young people. Homelessness, challenges to physical and mental health, social isolation and discrimination are among the main threats ⁽²⁹⁾.

The severe material deprivation rate may be interpreted as a more encompassing measure of poverty. Instead of referring to the level of income and the intensity of employment – with their significant differences across countries, age groups and gender – this indicator gives a picture of the actual level of hardship encountered in daily life. The indicator defines severe material deprivation as the inability to satisfy fundamental needs, such as paying the costs of accommodation, keeping one's home adequately warm, facing unexpected expenses and buying indispensable appliances (e.g. a refrigerator or telephone) ⁽³⁰⁾.

Figure 8.9: Severe material deprivation rate for young people (16-29) compared to children (younger than 16) and the total population, by country, 2019



Source: Eurostat [ilc_mddd11]. Data extracted on 10.02.2021.

Notes: EU-27 average: children 5.7 %; young people 5.8 %; total population 5.4 %.

On average, unlike the risk of poverty, children, young people and the general population suffer from material deprivation to similar extents (Figure 8.9).

Regarding the severe material deprivation rate of young people, countries can be divided into three main groups. In the first group, rates are well below the EU-28 average. This group includes the Nordic countries and several western and central European countries. The low rates registered in the Nordic countries are in line with what was discussed in previous sections: the indicators of at-risk-of-poverty and very low work intensity overlook the fact that young people leave the parental home very early and tend to stay longer in education.

The second group, mainly comprising southern and eastern countries, reports rates of young people suffering from severe material deprivation that are close to the EU-28 average. The last group (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece and Romania) reports particularly high rates, between 11.9 % and 19.9 %. In North Macedonia and Turkey, the rates are very high: respectively one in three and one in four young people are at risk of material deprivation.

⁽²⁹⁾ Mikkonen, 2011.

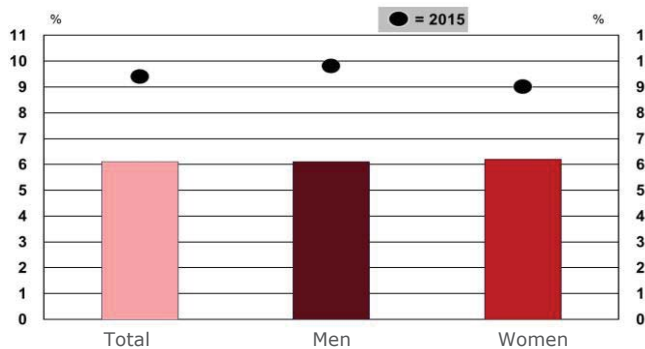
⁽³⁰⁾ The full definition of severe material deprivation rate is the percentage of the population that cannot afford at least four of the following nine predefined items: (1) to pay their rent, mortgage or utility bills, (2) to keep their home adequately warm, (3) to face unexpected expenses, (4) to eat meat or protein regularly, (5) to go on holiday, or to buy a (6) television, (7) refrigerator, (8) car or (9) telephone. Eurostat, 2021j.

Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece and Romania also reported some of the highest reductions between 2015 and 2019 in the proportion of young people affected by severe material deprivation (data not shown ⁽³¹⁾). While the decrease at EU-28 level was 3.3 p.p. (Figure 8.10), it was 14 p.p. in Bulgaria, 10.5 p.p. in Romania, 9.4 p.p. in

Greece and 9 p.p. in Cyprus. Hungary also reported a considerable decrease (13.2 p.p.).

No significant differences in severe material deprivation rates were found between young women and young men (Figure 8.10). In 2015, the severe material deprivation rate was 0.8 p.p. lower in women, while in 2019 the rates were equal.

Figure 8.10: Severe material deprivation rates for young people (16-29) by gender, EU-28, 2015 and 2019



Source: Eurostat [ilc_mddd11]. Data extracted on 10.02.2021.

Notes:

	EU-27 average (2019)	EU-27 average (2015)
Total	5.8 %	9.7 %
Men	6.0 %	10.1 %
Women	5.7 %	9.2 %

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

As touched on earlier, the passage from adolescence to adulthood sees young people exposed to potential social and economic risks. During those years, the majority of young people transition from education to the world of work. Factors such as early school leaving, lacking basic skills and failing to find employment converge to push youth to the margins of society. Many find it difficult to re-enter education, training and gain a solid foothold in the labour market.

The term ‘NEET’, which refers to ‘individuals who are neither in employment nor in education or training’ is used to identify this particular group among the youth population. This condition is often described as having ‘scarring’ effects on young people who are NEETs for long periods of time ⁽³²⁾. While some experience being NEET occasionally, for example in periods between jobs, others remain longer in such condition and therefore stay at the margin of the labour market, are more exposed to poor mental health and interpersonal isolation, and participate less in society and politics ⁽³³⁾.

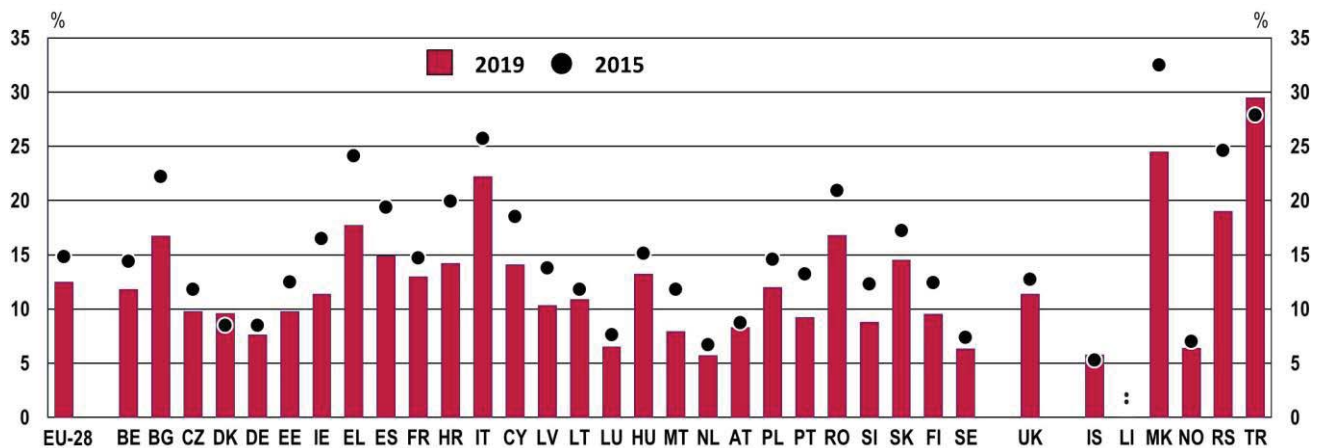
On average, in the EU-28, approximately 1 in every 10 young people (12.5 %) is NEET (Figure 8.11). The highest rates are found notably in Italy (22.2 %) and in Greece (17.7 %), Romania (16.8 %) and Bulgaria (16.7 %). Outside the EU, very high rates are also reported in Turkey (29.3 %), North Macedonia (24.4 %) and Serbia (19 %).

⁽³¹⁾ Data by country are available at the Eurostat online database [ilc_mddd11].

⁽³²⁾ Balan, 2016.

⁽³³⁾ Ibid.

Figure 8.11: Proportion of young people (15-29) not in employment, education or training (NEET rate), by country, 2015 and 2019



Source: Eurostat [yth_empl_150]. Data extracted on 18.01.2021.

Notes: EU-27 average: 2019: 12.6 %; 2015: 15.2 %.

Since 2015, the NEET rate has declined by 2.3 p.p. Large decreases have been reported in Greece (6.4 p.p.), Croatia (5.7 p.p.), Bulgaria (5.5 p.p.) and Ireland (5.1 p.p.). Outside the EU, the NEET rate has decreased the most in North Macedonia (8 p.p.) and Serbia (5.6 p.p.). In contrast, the NEET rate in Turkey has slightly increased (1.6 p.p.).

It is important to highlight that NEETs do not constitute a homogeneous group, as their status in the labour market varies. A first distinction must be made between those who are active and those who are inactive. The first category consists of young people who are actively seeking employment with no success (the unemployed). The second category consists of individuals who are not looking for a job. For some, this is a personal choice, as they do not wish to work. For others, it is unavoidable: they would like to work if conditions allowed (e.g. young carers and individuals with a disability).

Figure 8.12 shows that, in 2019, out of the total of NEETs, 4.6 % were unemployed, while 7.8 % were not seeking employment (inactive).

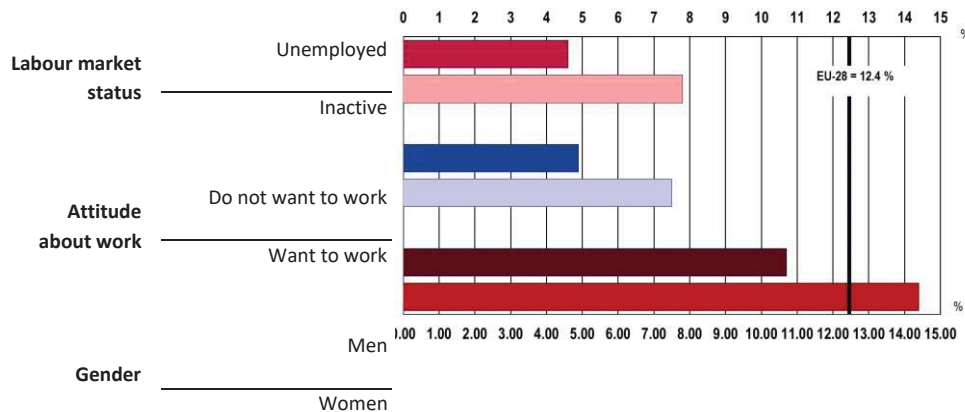
Considering their attitude to work, around two thirds of NEETs (out of employment either because they were unable to find a job or because of unavoidable personal circumstances) expressed the wish to have a job (even if they did not search it actively).

On average, the proportion of women who are NEET is markedly higher than that of men: in 2019, the NEET rate was of 14.4 % for women and 10.6 % for men. This divide is more pronounced in certain countries, such as Hungary, Czechia and Romania, where the difference between women and men was 4.3, 4.9 and 6.4 p.p. respectively (not shown) ⁽³⁴⁾. A closer look at the gender gap reveals that women are more often inactive than men (7.1 % vs 5.2 %), who in turn are more frequently unemployed (4.7 % vs 3.3 %) (not shown) ⁽³⁵⁾. The fact that women tend to bear more family responsibilities and hold more precarious positions in the labour market than men may explain the move into inactivity.

⁽³⁴⁾ Data are available at the Eurostat online database [yth_empl_150].

⁽³⁵⁾ Data are available at the Eurostat online database [yth_empl_150].

Figure 8.12: Proportion of young people (15-29) not in employment, education or training (NEET rate) by labour market status, attitudes towards work, and gender, EU-28, 2019



Source: Eurostat [yth_empl_150]. Data extracted on 18.01.2021.

Notes: The value EU-28 in the graph refers to the overall EU-28 NEET rate.

EU-27 average: total 12.6 %; unemployed 4.8 %; inactive 7.8 %; do not want to work 4.9 %; want to work 7.8 %; men 10.8 %; women 14.6 %

8.4. Social inclusion and the COVID-19 pandemic

While data have not yet been systematically collected across Europe, a first evaluation of the available evidence points to a rise in the level of social exclusion during 2020 ⁽³⁶⁾. Young people and children emerge as those most at risk, especially those already suffering from difficult conditions such as poverty, disability and disadvantage ⁽³⁷⁾.

A report from the International Labour Organization identifies the main driver of the worsening conditions as the rise in unemployment during the pandemic ⁽³⁸⁾. Loss of employment has hit young people harder than other segments of the population. The economic sectors that have suffered the most from lockdowns (the wholesale, retail, accommodation and food sectors) are those in which high shares of young Europeans tend to work, often with temporary contracts ⁽³⁹⁾.

Data collected by Eurostat illustrate the trend in the share of young NEETs during 2020. As indicated in Figure 8.11, the share of NEETs in 2019 in the EU-27 was 12.6 %. Figure 8.13 shows that, in 2020, this proportion amounted at 12.9 % in the first quarter, 14.7 % in the second, 13.8 % in the third and 13.3 % in the fourth. Although there has been a decrease in the share of NEETs during the last 3 months of 2020, it was still higher than that before the start of the pandemic. The trend affected men and women equally.

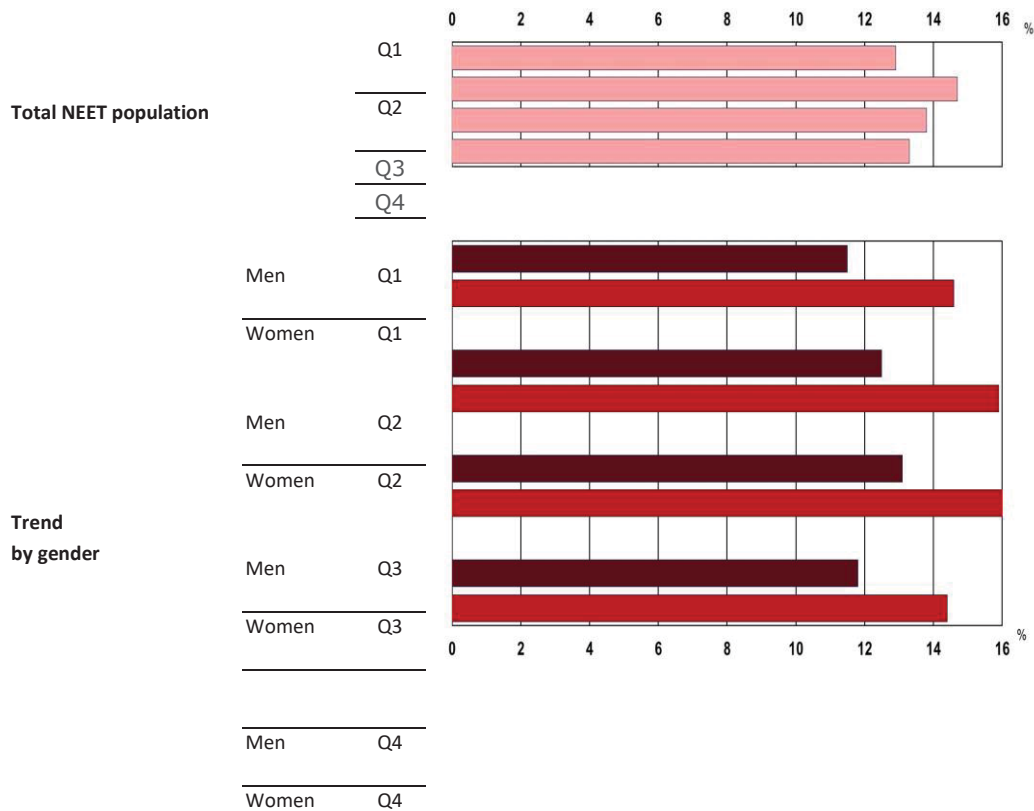
⁽³⁶⁾ Furceri et al., 2020.

⁽³⁷⁾ UNICEF, 2020.

⁽³⁸⁾ ILO, 2021.

⁽³⁹⁾ Ibid.

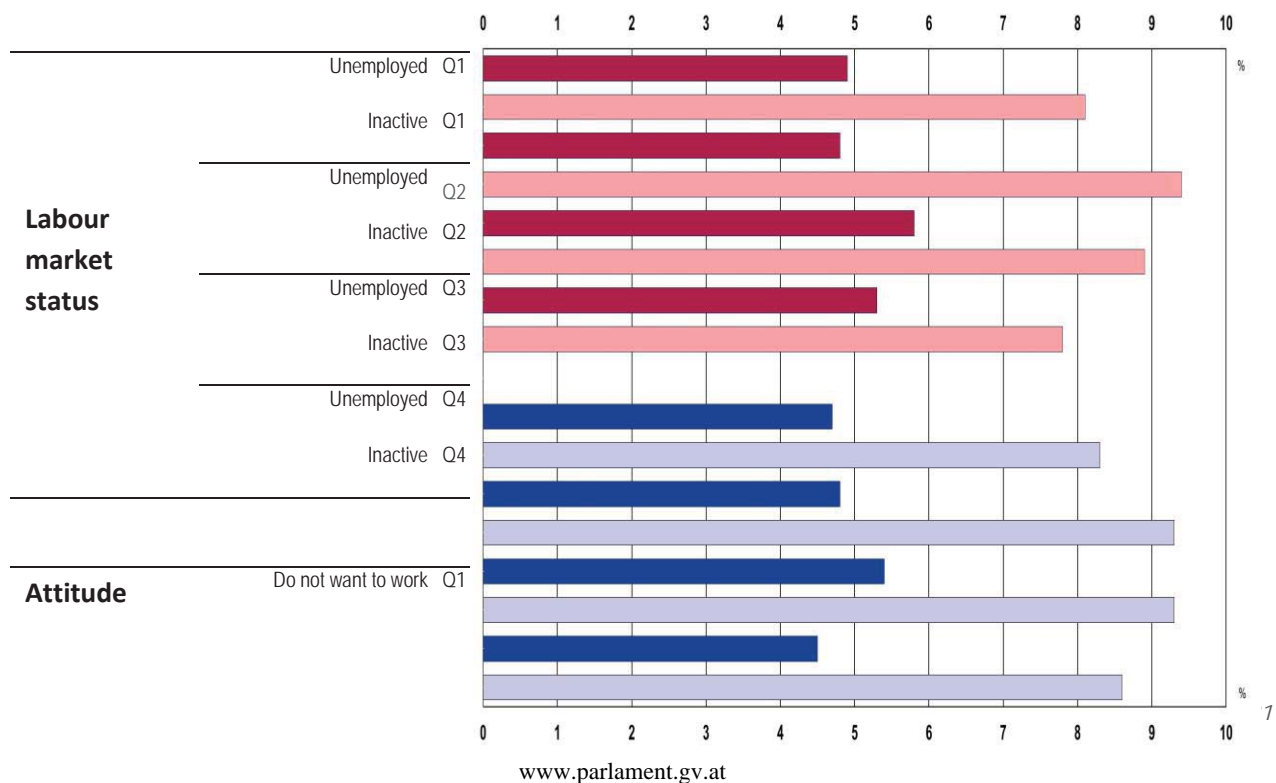
Figure 8.13: Proportion of young people (15-29) not in employment, education or training (NEET rate), total and by gender, EU-27, by quarter, 2020



Source: Eurostat [yth_empl_150]. Ad-hoc extraction 23.02.2021.

Considering the status of young NEETs in the labour market (Figure 8.14), the share of inactive NEETs (not looking for a job) increased the most in the second quarter of 2020 while that of the unemployed in the third.

Figure 8.14: Proportions of young people (15-29) not in employment, education or training (NEET rate) by labour status and attitude towards work, EU-27, by quarter, 2020



about work

Want to work Q1

Do not want to work Q2

Want to work Q2

Do not want to work Q3

Want to work Q3

Do not want to work Q4

Want to work Q4

Source: Eurostat [yth_empl_150]. Ad-hoc extraction 23.02.2021.

The comparative increase in the proportion of young people who are inactive in the first part of 2020, and of those who are unemployed in the second, can be at least partially explained by the recurring periods of confinement across Europe to contain the spread of the COVID-19. Strict restrictions on movement have hampered the possibility to seek jobs ⁽⁴⁰⁾. Coupled with the halt in economic sectors where young people are most frequently employed (mentioned above), lockdowns have pushed many young people into forced inactivity and unemployment ⁽⁴¹⁾.

Concomitantly, the share of NEETs who are either inactive or unemployed and would like to have a job has increased, with a considerable jump in the second and third quarters of the year (Figure 8.14). The reduction that followed during the last part of 2020 did not bring the share back to the values of 2019. This increase is comparatively bigger than that in the proportion of those who do not want to work.

In addition to threatening the social inclusion of the general youth population, the COVID-19 pandemic deepens pre-existing inequalities between different groups. For example, research shows that those already having a precarious position in the labour market (such as low-skilled workers and long-term unemployed) are disproportionally affected by the economic downturn ⁽⁴²⁾.

Similarly, the disparities in participation in the labour market between young men and young women – already present as illustrated in the section on poverty – are aggravated. During lock-downs, when for many pupils school attendance is replaced by e-learning (an aspect dealt with in chapter 4), many women are obliged to reduce their (online) working time to care for children ⁽⁴³⁾. This unequal sharing of family responsibilities is also behind the fact that young women aged 18–34 were more likely to lose their job than men of the same age (11 % vs 9 %) ⁽⁴⁴⁾.

Conclusions

Between 2015 and 2019, which was a period of economic recovery and expansion, the level of social inclusion of young Europeans has improved. All indicators analysed in this chapter showed positive trends. The share of young people at risk of poverty and exclusion decreased by 3.6 percentage points. Similarly, the proportions of young people living in poverty, in households with low work intensity and in conditions of material deprivation declined. The rate of NEETs also diminished.

However, data show that challenges continue to exist. Young people are more at risk of poverty or social exclusion than children and the total population. Moreover, the divide between young women and young men has deepened. Not only the proportion of women who are NEET is markedly higher than that of men, but while in 2015 men and women had the same rates of poverty or social exclusion, 4 years later the rate for women was 2.2 p.p. higher than that for men.

In addition, in the course of 2020, the share of NEETs has soared because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labour market (see Chapter 3). Despite a reduction during the last 3 months of 2020, at the

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Banco de España, 2020.

⁽⁴¹⁾ Ibid.

⁽⁴²⁾ Furceri et al., 2020.

⁽⁴³⁾ Eurostat, 2021g.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ Eurofound, 2020.

end of the year the NEETs rate was still higher than that before the start of the pandemic. The increase has been mainly due to a growth of the proportion of young people who are inactive in the first part of 2020, and of those who are unemployed in the second, which can be at least partially explained by the recurring periods of lockdown. Strict restrictions on movement have hampered the possibility to seek jobs. Coupled with the halt in economic sectors where young people are most frequently employed, lockdowns have pushed many young people into forced inactivity and unemployment.

Brussels, 14.10.2021
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PART 9/10

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

The situation of young people in the European Union

Accompanying the document

**Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European
Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions**

on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2021

{COM(2021) 636 final} - {SWD(2021) 286 final}

9. Youth work

Youth work is defined as ‘activities of a social, cultural, educational, environmental and/or political nature by, with and for young people’ ⁽¹⁾. Youth work is delivered by paid and volunteer youth workers and is based on non-formal and informal learning processes focused on young people and on voluntary participation.

Youth work is an essential part of supporting young people in their transition from childhood to adulthood. Through participation in youth work activities, young people acquire key competences and skills for their personal, civic and professional growth. Because they are carried out in diverse settings, youth work activities reinforce young people’s inclusion in education, society and the labour market.

In light of its unique role in young people’s lives, youth work has been established as a distinct field within European youth policy by successive resolutions and conclusions of the Council of the European Union ⁽²⁾. In their most recent action, EU Member States adopted a resolution on the European Youth Work Agenda in the field of the Youth Work, a strategic framework for strengthening and developing the quality of, innovation in and recognition of youth work ⁽³⁾. This chapter focuses on the first two objectives.

One of the central elements of quality in youth work is its responsiveness to the needs of young people, in order to contribute fully to their personal and social development ⁽⁴⁾. Another crucial factor related to quality is the inclusiveness of youth work activities, i.e. their ability to reach out to and include all groups of young people ⁽⁵⁾. To support these objectives, establishing methods for evaluating the outcomes of activities is key. The first section of this chapter illustrates the existing modalities for ensuring the quality of youth work across European countries.

Quality in youth work goes hand in hand with innovation in its practices to respond to the evolving needs of young people ⁽⁶⁾. One of the most powerful drivers of change is the digitalisation of society. With more and more dimensions of life moving to digital settings, the way that young people experience education, civic engagement, cultural activities and the world of work is changing. Consequently, new needs are emerging that require the adaptation of the content and methods used in youth work. The second section of this chapter illustrates the measures taken by European countries to support the digitalisation of youth work.

These include public policies and programmes established in European countries and initiatives implemented by civil society actors, as long as they are recognised and (at least partially) funded by public authorities. Information was sourced from Youth Wiki, the platform reporting on national policies in the youth field ⁽⁷⁾.

⁽¹⁾ Council of the European Union, 2020b.

⁽²⁾ For an overview of the main documents, see the annex to the Council resolution referred to in footnote 1.

⁽³⁾ Council of the European Union, 2020b.

⁽⁴⁾ Council of the European Union, 2013.

⁽⁵⁾ A complete discussion of all indicators of quality in youth work can be found in European Commission 2015b.

⁽⁶⁾ Council of the European Union, 2016.

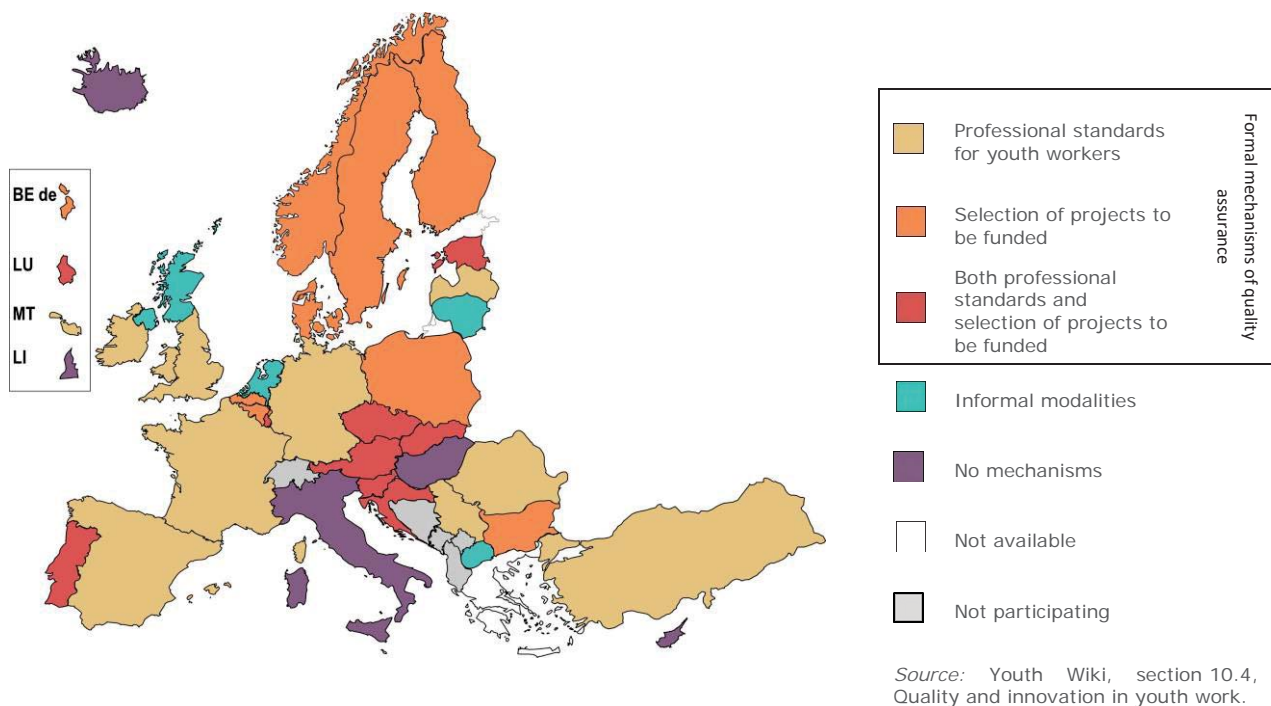
⁽⁷⁾ The Youth Wiki platform is regularly updated to include new policies and initiatives. To access the most recent developments, see its website: <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki>. [Accessed on 24.03.2021]

9.1. Quality assurance

Enhancing the quality of youth work activities requires the identification of specific objectives and standards. Criteria and indicators for measuring outcomes are agreed and the degree of adherence to quality parameters is evaluated through monitoring modalities. These modalities can be based on formal mechanisms (requirements and procedures that must be complied with) or on informal practices (which often consist of evaluations and processes of self-assessment).

Figure 9.1 shows that public authorities have established formal mechanisms of quality assurance – often in collaboration with representatives of the youth work community – in two thirds of the reporting countries. In the remaining countries, either only informal modalities are used or no specific approach to quality assurance exists.

Figure 9.1: Prevailing modalities of quality assurance, September 2020



Notes: The term 'project' covers different activities across countries, such as services and initiatives.
BE de: German-speaking Community of Belgium.

9.1.1. Formal mechanisms: professional standards and public funding requirements

Countries where formal mechanisms prevail follow two different approaches to quality assurance. In some contexts, the focus is on youth workers' professional competences. According to this approach, quality assurance mechanisms define youth workers' occupational standards and the processes for the validation of their competences.

In Estonia, the Education and Youth Board awards professional certificates to youth workers. First, youth workers perform a self-assessment and create a portfolio of their competences, according to established occupational standards. Second, they undergo an interview to determine if they have achieved the competences required to be awarded the certificate.

Youth workers in France are required to obtain a Facilitator's Certificate of Aptitude (BAFA) to supervise and work with young people. The BAFA is a non-professional qualification that enables holders to run activities in community centres for minors, and in holiday and leisure centres. As part of the assessment, youth workers must demonstrate the ability to coordinate teams of

educators, design and run socially driven activities and ensure the well-being, development and safety of children and adolescents, among other things.

The second approach to establishing formal mechanisms focuses on project characteristics. In this case, quality is measured based on predefined criteria (such as the content of activities, accountability of fund management, and outreach to young people) and endorsed by allocating public funding to projects complying with those criteria.

The 'Ordinance on government grants for child and youth organisations' is the reference document for the distribution of funding in Sweden. In order to receive a grant, youth work organisations must commit to pursuing the objectives indicated in the ordinance and respecting procedural rules in their activities. Organisations are required to report annually on how any funds received have been employed. If the two conditions are not met, organisations may need to repay the funds.

In some cases, the use of funding is specified in contractual terms. For example, in the German-speaking Community of Belgium, youth work providers must conclude 'performance contracts' with the government and local authorities in order to receive funds. These contracts specify the modalities of implementation and the expected results of projects. Performance is monitored through regular reporting.

In some instances, monitoring can lead to financial penalties. In Slovenia, when applying for public funding, organisations must demonstrate that they operate in the public interest, based on the correspondence of their projects with the content, scope and quality of public calls. If monitoring processes discover inadequacies in the implementation of activities, the Office for Youth can withhold funds.

9.1.2. Informal modalities: evaluations and self-assessment

Some countries ensure the quality of youth work through evaluations and self-assessments. This method is widespread among countries and, in some countries, is the only method in place. These informal mechanisms can be overseen by public actors (often local administrations) in partnership with youth work organisations or by organisations alone. They are organised on a voluntary basis and represent opportunities for guidance and improvement. Exchanges of best practice between organisations, shared benchmarks and peer learning are the most common instruments used. The outcomes usually consist of non-compulsory recommendations on competence development, widening of outreach activities and application of new methods. In some cases, quality labels are attributed to organisations receiving positive assessments.

In Lithuania, quality assurance takes place in two stages. First, organisations perform a self-assessment of their projects to identify aspects that need to be improved. Assessments are conducted against (non-binding) performance indicators, such as the number of projects delivered, the level of participation and the amount of funds raised. Feedback from young people and their parents is also part of this internal review. In a second step, based on the outcomes of the self-assessment, exchanges are carried out with the municipal youth coordinator to identify objectives and strategies for improvement.

As mentioned in the introduction to the chapter, the capacity for innovation is one of the main pillars upholding the quality of youth work. Indeed, to stay relevant in supporting young people, youth work has to adapt its contents and methodologies to the transformations taking place in society ⁽⁸⁾.

The developments brought about by digitalisation – and accelerated by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic ⁽⁹⁾ – pose an unprecedented demand for innovation in the youth work sector.

⁽⁸⁾ Council of the European Union, 2016.

⁽⁹⁾ For an analysis of the effects of the pandemic on education and learning, see Chapter 6.

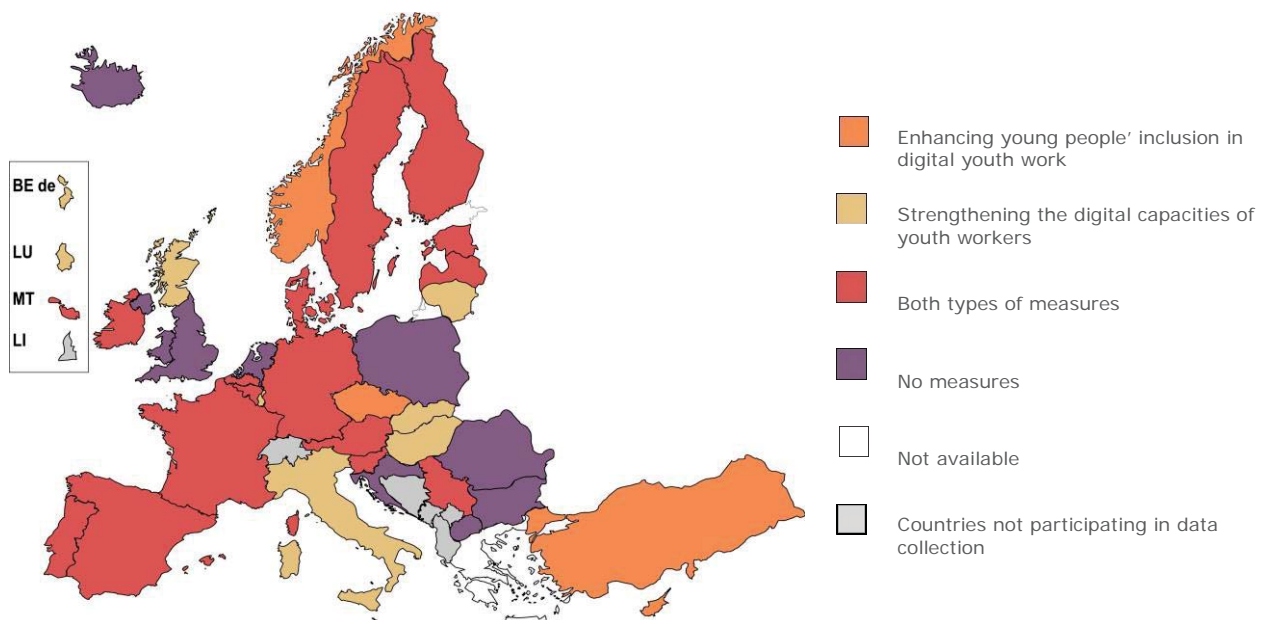
Digitalisation requires rethinking the way that projects and activities are delivered. Face-to-face activities are adapted to help young people benefit best from new modes of learning, working and participating in society ⁽¹⁰⁾. In this context, offsetting inequalities in the access to digital opportunities (the ‘digital divide’, discussed in Chapter 5, ‘Youth and the Digital World’, and in Chapter 6, ‘Education and Training’) ⁽¹¹⁾ and fighting digital exclusion ⁽¹²⁾ become the core purposes of youth work.

The main strategies adopted by European countries to meet this challenge are described in the following section.

9.2. Digital youth work

The application of digital technologies to youth work opens up new opportunities: new virtual environments become available; new outreach modalities are designed; and new ways of addressing risks such as isolation and exclusion come to the fore.

Figure 9.2: Measures supporting the digitalisation of youth work, September 2020



Source: Youth Wiki, section 10.4, Quality and innovation in youth work.

Notes: BE de: German-speaking Community of Belgium.

While not a new phenomenon, the application of digital technologies to youth work has accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of reduced personal contact, young people are more vulnerable to physical and emotional isolation, detachment from education and exclusion from the labour market. These challenges can be offset by participating in youth work through digital means.

⁽¹⁰⁾ European Union and Council of Europe youth partnership, 2020.

⁽¹¹⁾ The digital divide is 'the distinction between those who have internet access and are able to make use of new services offered on the World Wide Web, and those who are excluded from these services'. See Eurostat, 2019b.

⁽¹²⁾ Council of Europe and European Commission, 2020.

This digital acceleration has also had an impact on youth workers. In a survey conducted in 2020 among youth workers in different European countries, nearly half of respondents had been compelled to initiate or expand the use of digital applications ⁽¹³⁾. The same survey also reported a noteworthy increase in the proportion of youth workers needing support to develop digital competences and access better digital infrastructure (e.g. broadband internet hardware).

To support the efforts of the youth work community to incorporate the use of digital tools and develop digital competences, measures have been established in about two thirds of the European countries that participate in data collection (Figure 9.2). Several countries (mainly in eastern Europe) report the absence of measures.

9.2.1. Enhancing young people' inclusion in digital youth work

One of the most common objectives of national measures is supporting youth work providers in delivering digital activities that foster youth participation. Support can take the form of partnerships between public bodies (e.g. national agencies) and non-governmental actors, and the funding of projects organised by youth work organisations.

In Malta, social media is one of the tools used by the national youth agency [Aġenzija Żgħażaġh](#) to reach out to young people. Among other initiatives, the agency maintains the OPIN platform, which creates online opportunities for young people to exchange ideas and contribute to the political discourse.

In Serbia, [NAPOR](#) runs the project 'The first decade of recognising youth work' in cooperation with the Ministry of Youth and Sports. The project includes a series of educational activities ('Youth online work – Show and connect!') based on online platforms and digital tools for use in youth work initiatives. It manages seven digital youth clubs, which have over 100 participants. Their activities revolve around the application of digital media and tools.

The Danish [Centre for Digital Pedagogy](#) provides support through public funding. The centre receives partial or total funding for digital counselling services for young people. Young people who encounter obstacles in physically accessing counselling (e.g. because of geographical distance) can obtain support through online chats with youth workers. Training is also provided for volunteers wishing to serve as counsellors.

As mentioned above, the application of digital technologies to youth work has gained momentum during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many organisations have reinforced the use of digital technologies in their activities, with the backing of public authorities.

The [National Youth Council](#) of Ireland promotes new methodologies that make use of digital media, to adapt youth work activities to the changing reality. The document 'Youth work in an online setting during COVID-19' offers specific guidance for designing and managing online projects.

Other initiatives focus on migrating existing activities from offline to online environments. The Portuguese [Institute of Sports and Youth](#) has provided an online version of its face-to-face project Cuida-te+. The project promotes healthy behaviours among young participants. The institute has also launched a new initiative called #serjovememcasa, to ensure the continuity of youth work activities during the pandemic.

9.2.2. Strengthening the digital competences of youth workers

The application of digital technologies to youth work activities means that youth workers must acquire and strengthen their digital competences, such as digital literacy, digital communication and digital safety ⁽¹⁴⁾.

⁽¹³⁾ European Commission, 2021c.

⁽¹⁴⁾ The European Digital Competences Framework 2.0 defines digital literacy as the ability to identify and retrieve relevant digital content; digital communication as the ability to interact and collaborate through digital technologies; and digital safety as the ability to

This can be encouraged by facilitating youth workers' access to opportunities for professional training in digital technologies ⁽¹⁵⁾. Accordingly, the majority of countries participating in the 2020 survey have put in place measures to help youth workers gain and reinforce the necessary competences.

The project [Awareness Centre SAFE.SI](#) in Slovenia provides training and workshops for youth and social workers (as well as parents and teachers) to reinforce their capacity to guide children and teenagers in the safe and responsible use of digital media. Training programmes include class-based courses and supporting material. Because youth workers engage in a wide variety of activities, the training programmes usually cover multiple skills and competences and are often organised by partnerships of providers.

In France, the project [D-Clics numériques](#) is run by the French Education League, Paris Descartes University, the National Education Research Network and seven educational associations. D-Clics numériques provides training in digital technology for youth work facilitators and volunteers and its purpose is to help young people use digital technology responsibly.

Youth workers can also acquire and reinforce their digital competences through formal education. In some countries, digital and media literacy is part of the curriculum for degrees leading to the qualification of professional youth worker.

In 2018, the Ministry of Education and Science in Latvia introduced media literacy as one of the competences to be acquired by youth workers during their studies.

Similarly, youth workers in Estonia can attain competences related to smart youth work during their formal education (as well as through non-formal opportunities). Competences include skills in digital tools and their application to youth work, understanding the digital behaviour of young people, and knowledge of the trends in digital communication.

Besides education and training, many European countries promote the creation of resources supporting the use of digital technologies by youth workers. Toolboxes, collections of best practice and guidelines are among the most common instruments provided.

For example, youth workers in Slovakia can use an online tool to assess the competences needed for setting up digital projects. The tool – called 'Discover your competencies online' – has been developed by non-governmental organisations with the support of the national programme for youth.

Austria operates the virtual exchange platform [Medienkompetenz.Ja.Wien](#) dedicated to youth workers who are active in Vienna's Child and Youth Work service. It consists of a virtual space where youth workers can share knowledge, experiences and information about media work with children and adolescents.

protect personal data and physical and psychological health. Further information is available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/digcomp/digital-competence-framework>. [Accessed on 23.03.2021]

⁽¹⁵⁾ European Commission, 2020b.

Conclusions

Two crucial aspects for youth work to stay relevant to the needs of young people are the capacity to assure the quality of its projects and services, and to evolve along the transformation in society.

Data show that public authorities have established formal mechanisms of quality assurance in the vast majority of countries. The analysis illustrates that supporting and validating youth workers' professional competences, and allocating public funding to youth work projects that match pre-established criteria represent the most common mechanisms of quality assurance.

The chapter has also illustrated the measures established by European countries to reinforce the role of youth work in the context of digitalisation, which has seen an acceleration during the COVID-19 pandemic. The initiatives implemented aim, on one hand, at incorporating the use of digital tools in youth work projects, and on the other at supporting youth workers in acquiring and strengthening their digital competences.

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PART 10/10

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**Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European
Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions**

on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2021

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- 184.

Annexes

Dashboard of EU youth indicators

1.

2. Contextual indicators. Youth population

No	Indicator	Definition	Data source
1.	Number of young people in the EU countries	Total number of young people (aged 15-29), by sex and 5-years age group, in thousands.	Eurostat, demographic annual data
2.	Share of young people in the total population	Young people (age-groups 15-19, 20-24 and 25-29) as a share of the total population (by sex) in %.	Eurostat, demographic annual data
3.	Average age of young people leaving the parental household	Mean age of young people leaving home by sex.	Eurostat, LFS (annual data)
4.	Young people with migrant background	Young people by country of birth, age group and sex.	Eurostat, Youth database

3.

4. Situation Indicators

5. I. Engage

6. Youth participation in society

No	Indicator	Definition	Data source
1.	Participation of young people in different organisations (cultural, charity, sport, etc.)	Percentage of young people (aged 16-29) participating in formal voluntary activities.	Eurostat, EU-SILC, ad-hoc module (ahm) on social and cultural participation 2015, and every 6 years from 2022
2.	Participation of young people in informal voluntary activities (e.g. helping others)	Percentage of young people (16-29) participating in informal voluntary activities.	Eurostat, EU-SILC, ahm on social and cultural participation 2015, and every 6 years from 2022
3.	Formal recognition for taking part in voluntary activities and share of young people using the credentials to achieve their further goals	Share of young people (age 15-29) that declare a) having taken part in voluntary activities b) who have received a certificate, a diploma or other kind of formal recognition for their participation and c) who claim they have used the credentials in the labour market or educational setting to achieve their further goals.	Eurobarometer, Youth Monitor
4.	Youth active citizenship (participation in political parties, demonstrations, signing petitions, etc.- but without voting)	Percentage of young people (15-29) declaring active citizenship.	The European Parliament/country specific data

No	Indicator	Definition	Data source
5.	Young people using internet for civic and political participation (petitions, opinions, etc.)	Percentage of young people (15-29) using internet for civic or political participation.	Eurostat ICT use survey 2015, 2017, 2019, 2021 (every 2 years)
6.	Self-reported access to quality, neutral and youth-friendly information	Share of young people reporting that they have easy access to understandable youth-friendly information that follows codes of ethics and quality standards.	Eurobarometer
7.	Participation of young people in representative structures (such as youth councils, youth parliaments), and civic-organisations, political movements, parties or unions	Share of young people (aged 15-29) participating in representative structures (such as youth councils, youth parliaments), and civic-organisations, political movements, parties or unions in the last 12 months.	Eurobarometer
8.	Young people's trust in government at local, regional, national and EU level	Percentage of respondents who agreed with the statement 'my government cares about my wants and needs'.	European Social Survey

7.

8. Employment and entrepreneurship

No	Indicator	Definition	Data source
1.	Youth unemployment		Eurostat, EU-LFS (annual data)
1.1	Youth unemployment rate (sub-indicator 1)	Share of unemployed among active population (employed and unemployed) aged 15-29.	Eurostat, EU-LFS (annual data)
1.2	Long-term youth unemployment rate (sub-indicator 2)	Share of unemployed youth aged 15-29 without a job for the last 12 months or more among active population in this age group.	Eurostat, EU-LFS (annual data)
1.3.	Youth unemployment ratio (sub-indicator 3)	Share of unemployed among the total population (employed, unemployed and inactive), aged 15-29. <i>Note: This ratio balances out differences in MS activity rates, which influences unemployment rate.</i>	Eurostat, EU-LFS (annual data)
2.	Youth self-employed	Percentage of self-employed among all employed aged 20-24 and 25-29.	Eurostat, EU-LFS (annual data)
3.	Young people not in employment and not in any education and training (NEETs)	Young people (15-29) neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET rates).	Eurostat, EU-LFS (annual data)
4.	Young employees with a temporary contract	The share of young employees with a contract of limited duration (aged 20-24 and 25-29).	Eurostat, EU-LFS (annual data)

9.

II. Connect

Youth Mobility

No	Indicator	Definition	Data source
1.	Mobility of tertiary students.	Percentage of students from abroad enrolled in tertiary education, from EU-27 countries and from outside EU-27.	Eurostat, UOE data collection (annual data)
2.	Mobility of tertiary students - participants of the Erasmus + program.	Number of mobile Erasmus + students and trainees (outgoing and incoming).	DG EAC (Erasmus+), (annual reports)
3.	Mobility of young people - participants of the Erasmus + program.	Number of young people participating in youth exchanges under the Erasmus+ programme. Cross-reference (Policy-Dashboard 4.6)	DG EAC (Erasmus+), (annual reports)
4.	Mobility of young people - participants of the European Solidarity Corps program.	Share of eligible participants (18-30) taking part in the European Solidarity Corps programme. Cross-reference (Policy-Dashboard 4.2)	DG EAC (ESC), (annual reports)

10. Youth and the digital world

No	Indicator	Definition	Data source
1.	Digital skills of young people	Percentage of young people (aged 15-29) with basic or above digital skills.	Eurostat, ICT Survey (annual data) Att.: break in series in 2021 - new indicator from 2021 and after - every 2 years
2.	Use of internet by young people for different purposes	Percentage of young people using internet for different purposes.	Eurostat, ICT Survey
2.1.	Use of internet for interacting with public authorities (sub-indicator 1)	Percentage of young people aged 15-29 using internet for interacting with public authorities.	Eurostat, ICT Survey (annual data)
2.2.	Use of internet for participating in social networks (sub-indicator 2)	Percentage of young people aged 15-29 using internet for participating in social networks.	Eurostat, ICT Survey (annual data)
2.3.	Use of internet for doing online course (sub-indicator 3)	Percentage of young people aged 15-29 using internet for doing online course.	Eurostat, ICT Survey (annual data)
2.4.	Use of internet for reading news sites, newspapers, news magazines (sub-indicator 4)	Percentage of young people aged 15-29 using internet for reading news sites, newspapers, news magazines.	Eurostat, ICT Survey 2019, 2021, 2022
3.	Media literacy and safe use of new media <i>Note: Eurostat has no indicators on media literacy. 'Digital skills' concept is used in this area.</i>	International differences in students' computer and information literacy, referring to their ability to use computers to investigate, create, and communicate in order to participate effectively at home, at school, in the workplace, and in the community.	IEA study: ICILS (2013, 2018, 2023)
		Are policy measures in place to help young people develop media literacy and digital competences, and ensure the safe use of new technologies and social media.	EACEA Youth Wiki

III. Empower

11. Quality youth work

No	Indicator	Definition	Data source
1.	Quality assurance	Existence of system of quality assurance and application to youth work in the country.	Youth Wiki 10.4 Quality and innovation in youth work
1.1.	Are the main criteria/indicators/standards developed/used to assess the quality of youth work projects/programmes (sub-indicator 1)	Existence of the main quality assurance criteria/indicators/standards used to assess the quality of youth work projects/programmes (e.g. competences of youth workers; inclusiveness of youth work projects; expected outreach of youth work projects; pre-defined learning objectives for participants).	
1.2.	Are the main mechanisms in place to evaluate the quality of youth work projects/programmes (sub-indicator 2)	Existence of the main mechanisms for evaluation of the quality of youth work projects/programmes (e.g. participants' feedback; regular evaluation of youth work providers organising the projects/ programmes; quantitative measurement of participation in projects/programmes).	
1.3.	What are the main outcomes of quality assurance processes (sub-indicator 3)	Whether youth work providers receive feedback and recommendations; whether public funding can be withheld if projects/programmes do not meet the established quality criteria.	
2.	Research and evidence supporting youth work	Whether national authorities support better knowledge and understanding of youth work to ensure that it is relevant and responsive to the needs of young people.	Youth Wiki 10.4 Quality and innovation in youth work
2.1.	Are there any (open source and/or academic) research reports/studies on youth work available in the country (sub-indicator 1)	Whether examples of research either directly conducted or funded by national authorities exist (e.g. collection and dissemination of best practices; seminars/conferences organised to discuss youth work outcomes; research projects in cooperation with academic institutions).	
2.2.	Is there any budget or funds allocated to support research on youth work in the country (sub-indicator 2)	Existence of a specific top-level budget or funds for supporting research on youth work.	
2.3.	Is there any evaluation of youth work policies and regulations that is based on evidence (sub-indicator 3)	Whether and how youth work policies and regulations have been evaluated on the basis of evidence from research.	
3.	Participative youth work	Whether and how national authorities foster the participation of young people in the design of youth work programmes and initiatives.	Youth Wiki 10.4 Quality and innovation in youth work
3.1.	Have young people been consulted (and how) in development of youth work policies and regulations in the country (sub-indicator 1)	Whether top-level youth work policies and regulations have been developed with the consultation and contribution of young people (e.g. through youth councils, youth advisory bodies, youth parliaments).	
3.2.	Have young people been involved (and how) in the design, implementation and evaluation of youth work projects of youth organisations (sub-indicator 2)	Whether top-level youth work policies and regulations require or invite organisations to involve young people in the design, implementation and evaluation of their youth work	

		projects.	
4.	Smart youth work: youth work in the digital world	Whether top-level policies and measures are in place aiming to enable and foster the application of digital technologies to youth work (such as using social media for reaching out to young people, providing online youth counselling, supporting young people's digital literacy, and enabling youth participation in youth work with digital tools).	Youth Wiki 10.4 Quality and innovation in youth work
4.1.	Trainings to equip both youth workers and young people with digital and media literacy skills to be used in youth work projects (sub-indicator 1)	Whether -either directly organised or funded by public authorities- trainings are in place to equip both youth workers and young people with digital and media literacy skills to be used in youth work projects (e.g. assessing the relevance and reliability of digital content; protecting content, personal data and privacy in digital environments; online safety).	
4.2.	Initiatives and measures to make digital infrastructure available to youth work projects and programmes (sub-indicator 2)	Whether top-level initiatives and measures are in place/implemented to make digital infrastructure available to youth work projects and programmes (e.g. funding digitalisation of youth work projects, making software and hardware available to youth work providers).	
5.	Cooperation and partnerships between youth work providers and actors in other fields aiming to transfer knowledge and practice	Whether top-level initiatives are in place aiming at facilitating cooperation and partnerships between youth work providers and actors in the fields of education, innovation, research and development, and business, in order to support the transmission of (digital) practices (and technology) to youth work.	Youth Wiki 10.4 Quality and innovation in youth work

12. Education and training

No	Indicator	Definition	Data source
1.	Educational attainment level of young people	Percentage of young people having completed given educational level, by sex.	Eurostat, EU-LFS (annual data)
1.1.	Young people (20-24 years) having completed upper secondary education (sub-indicator 1).	Percentage of the population 20-24 having completed at least upper secondary education, by sex.	Eurostat, EU-LFS (annual data)
1.2.	Young people having completed tertiary education (sub-indicator 2)	Share of population aged 30-34 with tertiary education attainment, by sex.	Eurostat, EU-LFS (annual data)
1.3.	Early leavers from education and training (sub-indicator 3)	Percentage of young people aged 18-24 with at most lower secondary education not involved in any education or training.	Eurostat, EU-LFS (annual data)
2.	Low achievers in reading, mathematics and science (15-years-old)	Share of 15-year olds who get a score of 1 or below (on a scale from 1 to 5) in PISA tests in reading, mathematics and science.	OECD-PISA (every 3 years)
3.	Young people learning in secondary school at least two foreign languages	Percentage of pupils of secondary education learning at least two foreign languages, by orientation (general,	Eurostat, UOE data collection (annual data)

		vocational).	
4.	Participation of young people in non-formal education or training	Percentage of young people participating (in last 4 weeks) in non-formal education or training.	Eurostat, EU-LFS (annual data)

13. Health and well-being

No	Indicator	Definition	Data source
1.	Quality of life		Eurostat, SILC
1.1.	Overall life satisfaction	Average rating of overall life satisfaction by young people aged 16-29.	Eurostat EU-SILC 2013, 2018, from 2021 - annual data
1.2.	Trust in others	Average rating of trust in others by young people aged 16-29.	Eurostat EU-SILC 2013, 2018, from 2021 - annual data
1.3.	Job satisfaction	Average rating of job satisfaction by young people aged 16-29.	Eurostat EU-SILC, 2013, 2018, from 2023 - every 3 years
1.4.	Satisfaction with accommodation	Average rating of satisfaction with accommodation by young people aged 16-29.	Eurostat EU-SILC, 2013, from 2023 - every 3 years
1.5.	Satisfaction with living area	Average rating of satisfaction with living area by young people aged 16-29.	Eurostat EU-SILC, 2013, from 2023 - every 3 years
2.	Health status		Eurostat, EU-SILC.
2.1.	Self-perceived general health	Percentage of young people aged 16-29 declaring their general health as very good or good.	Eurostat, EU-SILC (annual data)
2.2.	Persons having a long-standing illness or health problem	Percentage of young people aged 16-29 declaring having a long-standing illness or health problem.	Eurostat, EU-SILC (annual data)
3.	Health determinants		Eurostat, SILC
3.1.	Regular smokers	Share of daily cigarette (including electronic) smokers in the population aged 16-29.	Eurostat, EU-SILC 2017, from 2022 - every 3 years.
3.2.	Alcohol use	Percentage of young people aged 16-29 drinking alcohol every week.	Eurostat, EU-SILC 2017, from 2022 - every 3 years
3.3.	Eating fruits and vegetables	Percentage of young people aged 16-29 declaring eating fruits and vegetables at least once a day.	Eurostat, EU-SILC 2017, from 2022 - every 3 years
3.4.	Physical activity	Percentage of young people aged 16-29 without physical activity (outside working) in a typical week.	Eurostat, EU-SILC 2017, from 2022 - every 3 years
4.	Causes of death		Eurostat, database 'Causes of death' (annual data)

4.1.	Suicide as a cause of death	Deaths caused by suicide per 100 000 inhabitants aged 15-24.	Eurostat, database 'Causes of death' (annual data)
4.2.	Transport accident as a cause of death	Deaths caused by transport accident per 100 000 inhabitants aged 15-24.	Eurostat, database 'Causes of death' (annual data)

14. Social inclusion

No	Indicator	Definition	Data source
1.	At-risk-of-poverty or exclusion rate	Share of young people (16-29) who are at risk of poverty and/or severely materially deprived and/or living in a household with very low work intensity (by sex and country of birth).	Eurostat, SILC (annual data)
		The gap between young people (1-29) and total population (in %) who are at risk of poverty and/or severely materially deprived and/or living in a household with very low work	Eurostat, SILC (annual data)
2.	Housing conditions		
2.1.	Severe housing deprivation rate among young people	Percentage of young people aged 16-29, suffering from severe housing deprivation.	Eurostat, SILC
2.2.	Overcrowding rate	Percentage of young people aged 16-29, living in an overcrowded household.	Eurostat, SILC