



# EUROPE'S YOUTH BETWEEN HOPE AND DESPAIR

CARITAS CARES REPORT ON YOUTH POVERTY WITH RECOMMENDATIONS  
TO FOLLOW UP THE EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY





*“...young people have a critical role.  
They are not the future of our peoples; they are the present.  
Even now, with their dreams and their lives they are forging the spirit of Europe.  
We cannot look to the future without offering them the real possibility to be catalysts  
of change and transformation. We cannot envision Europe without  
letting them be participants and protagonists in this dream”.*

*Pope Francis, 2016,  
when he received the Charlemagne Prize*

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**A**ccording to Eurostat, 1 out of 3 youth in Europe are suffering from the consequences of poverty. With the aim of providing a narrative to accompany existing statistical data compiled officially, the Caritas Europa network collected grass-roots information from its members that reflect the qualitative situation of young Europeans using the social services offered by European Caritas organisations in 17 countries<sup>1</sup>. The findings are alarming as they document the rising exclusion of young men and women, emerging sentiments of intergenerational injustice, and a loudening claim that the European promise for equal opportunities and the levelling out of regional disparities is broken and in need of serious attention.

The aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis has hit certain groups of young people more heavily, for instance, single-parent families, migrants and refugees, Roma youth, and young people with disabilities, among others. The extent of the impact varies from one country to the next. But youth in the Southern and Eastern peripheries of Europe tend to face greater obstacles overall. This, in turn, has affected young women and men's ability to access specific sets of social rights, such as housing, work and education.

Caritas social workers frequently observe that young people have difficulties in accessing housing. This delays an important step to adulthood. In the worst cases, this leads to youth homelessness. Caritas urges to guarantee the right to housing.

In the last decade, our social services have witnessed the European youth being deprived from the right to work and right to quality education. Although preventing school dropout has become a serious commitment, we still find that the transition from

*The time has come to promote policies which create employment, but above all there is a need to restore dignity to labour by ensuring proper working conditions. This implies, on the one hand, finding new ways of joining market flexibility with the need for stability and security on the part of workers; these are indispensable for their human development. It also implies favouring a suitable social context geared not to the exploitation of persons, but to ensuring, precisely through labour, their ability to create a family and educate their children.*

*Pope Francis,  
Speech to the European Parliament, 2014*

school to work is tedious, particularly for the children of disadvantaged families. Often, courses seem to be offered rather to sooth the statistics than to provide realistic upskilling pathways. Many school systems need to enhance permeability and second chance options.

Now, as the crisis seems to fade out, many youth are still trapped in unemployment. On the other hand, precarious work has risen, the promises of 'flexicurity' have not delivered, and increasingly more young people work, but remain poor. It is becoming particularly urgent to regulate the collaborative economy. With no place to stay and no income to spend, raising families of one's own becomes a distant dream, giving rise to a new phenome-

non, which we dubbed as "SINKies" – Single Income, No Kids. This refers to young working couples whose wages combined still barely equate the earnings equivalent to one single "decent" income.

In our social services, we see poverty-stricken families and have witnessed in the last decade that increasing numbers of people have been left behind by society. Caritas is alarmed to see that poverty is transmitted from one generation to the next with long-term negative impacts for young people. In many ways, the social status of the parents predicts the future of their children. The benefits of social mobility have been promised, but without fulfilment for many youth. This breach in promise results in weakening the



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European project, both socially and politically. The current lack of redistributive space brings the need for fairness and equity vehemently back to the agenda.

Another particular dimension of concern is indebtedness, which reduces the opportunities of young people for a lifetime. In addition, the exorbitant increase in the volumes of student loans leave a cumbersome legacy in the life plans of many young women and men. We see lasting social stigma, negatively affecting the poor, throughout European societies. Polarisation and growing inequality feed the phenomenon of blaming the most destitute families for their situation of poverty. The social climate has become rougher in the last decade.

Our findings indicate that the current situation of youth in Europe has wider and longer-term consequences for our societies, labour markets and social protection systems. As the number of single-parent families increases, social policies need to consider their specific situation and needs explicitly from the start. Better reconciliation of work and family life, and quality childcare is particularly important for mothers and fathers, also because it can foster equity from the start for all. Inclusion of migrant youth is a matter of justice and smart foresight. Promoting social investment and devising strategies to finance inclusive social protection systems, policies and programmes are vital for enabling cohesive environments and fostering migrant integration. European standards have been a beacon of

hope for people with disabilities. Still, the processes of integration have fallen victim to austerity measures. Inclusive schools and protected labour markets are typically amongst the first in the line of budget cuts. Particularly in Eastern Europe we observe that non-discrimination practice towards persons with disabilities has become stuck.

On the other hand, Europe has reacted. The Youth Guarantee is a major plan against the youth employment crisis. Caritas lauds the rapid and decisive action taken by the European Institutions. However, we detect a certain fixation on employment and employability and recommend balancing activation with protection measures. In practice, European responses, such as the Youth Guarantee and the

Youth Employment Initiative, do not always manage to reach out to highly marginalised groups. Implementation on the ground clearly lags behind the political commitments particularly in the quality of the offer. Furthermore, the focus on employability tends to oversee that in many cases previous work and investment in job-placement is necessary in terms of settling down, preparing the ground by developing certain skills and knowledge and regaining a sense of security. Furthermore, much of the Youth Gu-

In November 2017, European political leaders approved the European Pillar of Social Rights at the Gothenburg Social Summit and, thus, a new framework has been proposed to guarantee social standards. Caritas welcomes the synthesis this framework offers in order to define and measure the accomplishments of social rights across Europe. It should be strengthened by aligning policies to the existing Human Rights obligations, first and foremost the European Social Charter as the Social Constitution of Europe,

*For the first time  
since the Second World War, there is  
a real risk that today's young adults – the most  
educated generation we have ever had – may end up  
less well-off than their parents.*

*European Commission 2017<sup>2</sup>*

rantee seems to be geared towards quantity. Now that the economy again seems to be increasing its take up, it is time to correct this by guaranteeing the quality of employment and apprenticeships.

In the meantime, social services policies of Member States have an important impact on the well-being of young people. A common regulatory framework emerges in Europe on contracting social services. Whilst market forces strongly enter in the provision, with mixed results, the State is, without doubt, the duty-holder that ensures social rights. Therefore, it should never hand over the control over the services offered. Building partnerships with the third sector is essential.

and the commitments derived from the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agenda.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Data was compiled for AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EL, FI, FR, IE, IT, LU, MT, NL, PT, RO, and UK; see annex for country codes.

<sup>2</sup> EC 2017a, p.9

*I am 19 years old  
and I have been looking for a job for  
the past two years ago, to start an independent life.*

*Only this year I found a job opportunity, but  
unfortunately, this a seasonal job and, in the winter,  
I will be unemployed again. It is becoming very hard  
for young people to have a secure life on a financial  
level, due to the lack of jobs and the ones that exist,  
most of them, are precarious. Caritas is helping  
my mother and me with some essential goods,  
like food, or some household expenses.*

*19-year-old beneficiary in the Diocesan Caritas of Algarve*

# FOREWORD

**R**egretfully, this quote is not an individual sad story, but one of thousands of stories we listen to every day. We in Caritas, our social work, are in touch with people who are left behind. This report talks about homeless youth in the UK and young school dropouts in Malta or Luxembourg. We witness indebted young men and women in the Czech Republic and Portuguese graduates who juggle one internship after the other. We see Romanian youth with disabilities who face serious difficulties accessing school in equal conditions, whilst Germany is facing a syndrome of disconnected youth who are falling through all social safety nets. We observe in Bulgaria how Roma adolescents keep being excluded and discriminated against in the schooling system, whilst migrants in Finland and Belgium cannot aspire to settle down with dignity. Irish, French and Austrian youth are stuck in their childhood rooms whilst housing prices increase. Many young single mothers in Cyprus face poverty and exclusion. Italian youth are kept in a state of protracted adolescence without work-contracts, shared flats and no subsistence on which to raise a family. Dutch young men and women have to take on debts to study or are simply denied access to higher education due to the limited size of their purse. The only option for sustenance for many young Greeks is to leave their home country. Caritas member organisations report about their practices in the countries, providing evidence of the needs and testimonies of vulnerable populations they are serving and they come forward when rights are being violated or are becoming more difficult to realise.

Regretfully, the Reflection Group on the Future of Europe, composed by former heads of government and other European leaders, were right when they prophesised in 2010: “For the first time in Europe’s recent history, there is widespread fear that today’s children will be less well off than their parents’ generation.”<sup>3</sup>

The last decade has been rough particularly for youth in Europe, the so-called ‘millennials’. Overall, European societies seem to have loosened their commitment to social cohesion. What is more, Europe is divided into a “better-off centre” and a “crisis-strung periphery”. In many Eastern and Southern Member States, young people have to cope not only with difficult access to jobs, but once they succeed, they find precariousness, low pay and meagre career perspectives.

In this year’s edition of the “*Caritas Cares*” series, we undertake a stocktaking of the conditions of young people in Europe. It is our aim to follow up on the Europe 2020 Strategy and draw policy makers nearer to the final impacts of their social policies as they impact on the ground. Special thanks go to all the colleagues in the member organisations who contributed to this report and to our consultant for this report, FRESNO, the right Link.

We welcome the recent proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. However, we call for inserting the pillar in the other frameworks of acquired human rights obligations of the States, such as the European Social Charter, the Human Rights Conventions and the Sustainable Development Goals. We also consider it necessary to devise a meticulous system to monitor the social rights principles in cooperation with civil society to be accountable for yet another promise: “A Europe with a social triple-A rating”.

Our call is to listen to the young people and to give them hope and future. It is high time. Now!



Jorge Nuño Mayer  
Secretary General

## NOTES

<sup>3</sup> PROJECT EUROPE 2030 - Challenges and Opportunities. A report to the European Council by the Reflection Group on the Future of the EU 2030 - <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/30776/qc3210249enc.pdf>.

# INTRODUCTION

In this year's edition of the "Caritas Cares!" series, we undertake a stocktaking of the conditions of young people in Europe, as Caritas organisations perceive them in our social services, programmes and grassroots projects.<sup>4</sup> Caritas member organisations report about their practices in the countries, providing evidence of the needs and testimonies of the vulnerable populations they are serving and they come forward when rights are being violated or are becoming more difficult to realise. It is our aim, therefore, to draw policy makers nearer to the impacts of their social policies as they impact on the ground, affecting the lives of people.<sup>5</sup>

Young women and men, aged 16 to 29, face major challenges in their life course when they transition from childhood to adulthood. This includes their identity formation, moving out from their parents' home, transitioning from school to work, including choosing a professional career, and establishing a family of one's own. All these challenges have become even more difficult in the last decade due to the protracted economic crisis and the changes in labour markets that have hit youth the hardest, e.g. in terms of youth unemployment, wages, working conditions and access to social protection.

This situation led to newspaper headlines referring to a "lost generation" or "disconnected youth". The term NEET – Young people Not in Employment, Education or Training – took off from sociological textbooks and policy in-circles to become a common expression in the public debate. Figures on employment, poverty and the pay gap between young people and the average seem to demonstrate that whole societies had decided to disregard the younger generation. Whilst welfare levels fall, inequalities rose.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, economic developments resulted in the establishment of a centre of better-off European core countries and a jettisoned periphery. This has contributed to putting the European project in question as it falls short on its promise of upward convergence. Young people pay the chunk of the bill in these peripheral countries.

Our findings indicate that the current situation of youth in Europe has wider and longer-term consequences for our societies, labour markets and social protection systems. We identified a phenomenon of what we would call *SINKies* - Single Income, No Kids: *Sinkies* are young couples both working but who, wages combined, still earn only the equivalent of one single "decent" income, because of the bad wage levels and precarious working conditions. Being a working poor also prevents people from having kids. As opposed to *DINKIES*, a term coined in the 1980s to describe the phenomenon of couples earning a double income choosing not to have kids because they wanted to enjoy life, *Sinkies* are young couples who might wish to have children but who simply can't afford it. And the term also refers to the social consequences of having a first generation in decades that is worse off than their parents, with consequences for social cohesion, social models as well as social protection systems – we run the risk of a sinking society if no action is taken now.

The publication is structured in the following way: based on information gathered by the Caritas member organisations,<sup>7</sup> Chapter 1 identifies the main challenges that youth in Europe are faced with regarding their ability to access social rights. Chapter 2 presents the main issues of concern for European youth, such as intergenerational transmission of poverty, indebtedness, stigma and self-confidence, juvenile justice and youth with addictions.

Chapter 3 looks at specific groups of young people experiencing poverty and social exclusion. Chapter 4 describes to which extent European and national policies are effective in addressing the challenges identified above, and if they target the most vulnerable groups identified in Chapter 3. Chapter 5 assesses the added value of the EU initiative to establish a European Pillar of Social Rights, and in the final Chapter 6, we draw some conclusions and formulate national and EU level policy recommendations.



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## NOTES

<sup>4</sup> Data was compiled from 17 European countries: AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EL, FI, FR, IE, IT, LU, MT, NL, PT, RO, and UK; see annex for country codes. Find the country reports, including Caritas project examples, here: [Austria](#), [Belgium](#), [Bulgaria](#), [Cyprus](#), [Czech Republic](#), [Finland](#), [France](#), [Germany](#), [Greece](#), [Ireland](#), [Italy](#), [Luxembourg](#), [Malta](#), [Portugal](#), [Romania](#) and [the United Kingdom](#).

<sup>5</sup> Caritas Europa has a heartfelt commitment to analyse and fight poverty and social exclusion. We promote true integral human development, social justice and sustainable social systems. The network advocates for and with people in need in order to transform society into a more just and inclusive civilisation. Therefore, we work and advocate for an inclusive society welcoming all, including those who suffer hardship. We promote social rights, such as the right to live a life free of poverty, the right to work, to healthcare, to equal treatment, to housing amongst others.

<sup>6</sup> OECD 2017; EC2017g.

<sup>7</sup> For the Caritas Cares! Series country reports 2017, see <http://www.caritas.eu/publications>

# LIMITED ACCESS TO RIGHTS FOR YOUNG EUROPEANS

The causes of youth poverty and social exclusion of young Europeans are as debated as the remedies. From the Caritas country surveys, a number of problems were mentioned that are often intertwined. The demand for governments to ensure adequate minimum income schemes is widely shared. This relates to both establishing (minimum) wage-levels, reducing precariousness and providing income alternatives to those without access to the labour market or who are unemployed. Based on the Caritas survey, the following gaps (displayed in table 1) were identified, indicating in which areas youth had limited access or ability to secure their rights.



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*I had been living with my boyfriend for one year. I got pregnant, and he told me I had three days to leave the apartment. The first few nights I slept rough on benches in parks. Then a friend helped me to find a cheap apartment. In the apartment, there was no heating. In October, my daughter was born and we spent the whole winter in the cold, damp apartment.*

*Then, I no longer had enough money for the rent. I was evicted. I was very afraid, that my child would be taken away from me by the youth welfare office, but there was just no affordable housing to find.*

*Caritas service user, Caritas Austria*

**TABLE 1** Rights to which young people at risk of poverty and social exclusion have more limited access than other age groups, according to the caritas' member organisations experience (17 responses, maximum 5 items)

ANSWER OPTIONS	COUNT
Right to housing	13
Right to work	8
Right to equality and non-discrimination	7
Right to education	5
Right to social protection	5
Right to healthcare	2
Other	3

## THE RIGHT TO HOUSING

Young people, aged 18 to 29, face an individual challenge to transition from adolescence to adulthood. This coincides with the societal challenge to integrate young people as citizens into society and as employees or self-employed in the work force when they transition from school to employment. Moving out from their parents' home is an important step. It marks an important milestone for these transitions, in terms of financial independence. Taking this step, however, has become more difficult, not least due to the economic crisis and related youth employment crisis. Although statistics for Europe (EU 28) show no changes in the estimated average age of young

people leaving the parental household – it is nearly constant for the last decade at around 26.2 years – there are differences between the better-off core Member States and the crisis-stricken periphery. In that regard, the age when young people move out from their parents' home fell in countries like **Germany** and **Belgium**, whilst it increased in countries like **Spain**, **Italy**, **Ireland** and **Greece**.<sup>8</sup> This is also related to affordable housing. In housing policies, the needs of young people have to be taken into account to support them in their quest for an independent and self-sustained life. The Caritas country reports<sup>9</sup> reflect the importance of this need.

According to the **Austrian** country report, young people at risk of poverty have considerable difficulties in accessing affordable housing. Young people without financial support from family networks face serious difficulties when entering the housing market. Housing costs are a significant strain on family income, and rents have increased disproportionately over the last ten years.

In **Belgium**, youth face serious challenges in emancipating themselves from parent households, as rents are remarkably high. Social housing has very long waiting lists.

In the **Czech Republic**, about 68,500 people are without shelter and about 119,000 are threatened by a loss of

housing, because they live in uncertain or inappropriate and substandard housing.

Caritas **Greece** confirms that most young people are not able anymore to afford their own housing and remain for a long time with parents or family. Furthermore, since the beginning of the economic crisis a growing number of children and young people live in very poor housing conditions, with no heating, no electricity, and humidity. Youth homelessness, consequently, has increased.

In **France**, according to *Secours Catholique-Caritas France*, young people are much more likely to be living in alternative or precarious accommodation for example with close relatives, in shelters or on the street. Young people have limited access to social housing.

Social Justice **Ireland** explains that the number of households on the social housing waiting list is high and the percentage of those on the waiting list for over seven years has more than doubled. With rising rent prices, both average wages and rent supplements are insufficient to ensure access to housing for young people.

Caritas **Luxembourg** reports the disproportionate increase of housing prices together with a shortage of social housing. This is having a very negative impact on the living conditions of young people who cannot afford a decent home. This, combined with a high rate of youth unemployment, is hindering the social and economic development of younger generations. Therefore, Caritas Luxembourg calls for urgent actions in the field of social housing with a focus on increasing the number of social housing, giving rent subsidies to vulnerable people, especially to young people and taking measures to control rent prices.

The **Portuguese** Caritas describes the difficulties for many youth when it comes to accessing a place of their own due to their precarious employment situations and the expensive housing market. A common feeling of insecurity related to their future prevents

many young people from committing to rent or purchase an apartment. The result is that they live longer with their parents or rent rooms in shared flats.

The **UK** report transmits in detail how poor young people are excluded from buying or renting a flat, whilst municipal social housing schemes are being scaled down. The housing market in the UK has priced out many young people. Limited access to housing is currently one of the most worrisome problems for this group.

Caritas **Italy** reveals how the problem of housing shortages has been aggravated by the lack of resources for public social housing and failure of various legislative measures on the rental market and social housing.

Overall, the Caritas experiences show an increasing gap in accessing housing between poor youth and their better-off peers. For many vulnerable youth, such as migrants, single mothers or youth in precarious employment, paying the rent represents an increasingly larger share of their monthly expenses. Caritas social workers have become accustomed to intervening in situations of indebtedness, mortgage payment defaults, and forced evictions, all of which are related to housing and its increasing costs. Homelessness, although a more complex issue, is directly related to housing policies and the failure of governments to offer housing alternatives promptly in times of financial and life crises.<sup>10</sup>

Caritas advocates for access to basic rights for all. Access to affordable quality housing forms an essential part of social protection systems as a solidarity mechanism ensuring the well-being of society as a whole.<sup>11</sup> A number of policies can facilitate access for young people to affordable quality housing. Amongst these are social housing, rent subsidies, rental guarantees, minimum income schemes, tax deductions, rent price control, together with broader policies of spatial planning for urban social cohesion.<sup>12</sup> The competencies for these go right

through the multi-level governance of Europe from the municipal councils up to the European institutions.

In the last decades much of the policies of social protection, including social housing policy have suffered from a lack of political will to decisively support housing as a basic right. On the contrary, although access to housing is a basic right, it was submitted to mere market criteria. At the same time, long-term social investment in social housing and housing benefits were cut back for reasons of fiscal consolidation and austerity measures. Hence, in the last decade, housing –



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intimately linked to the banking crisis – has entered into the headlines with reports on forced evictions, indebtedness of families, overcrowded substandard housing and homelessness.

Caritas therefore welcomes the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) whose 19<sup>th</sup> principle explicitly recognises the right to housing and commits to offering social housing or housing benefits to those in need and to ensure shelter and services to the homeless.<sup>13</sup> An indicator on housing is introduced in the recently proposed EU Social Scoreboard for the EPSR.<sup>14</sup> However, the measurement does not capture the

complexity of accessing housing.<sup>15</sup> Caritas will be vigilant how the principle is translated into State, regional and municipal policies. The European Semester Process might be a useful tool for monitoring its implementation, particularly if the dynamic initiative, spearheaded by the EPSR, is shifting attention from economic and monetary performance towards social goals.

Housing as a human right and fundamental condition for human dignity is also protected by article 31 of the Revised European Social Charter, that foresees to make housing accessible to those who are in need and to tackle

homelessness.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a global framework for measuring social and environmental standards. Housing comes up strongly. It is explicitly formulated in Target 11.3 of ‘Sustainable Cities’ Goal: “*by 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing (...)*”, as well as it is implicitly included in the goals of poverty reduction (1) and reducing inequalities (10).

## THE RIGHT TO WORK – AND EDUCATION

The last decade of recession has marked an entire generation of young girls and boys, passing “the best time of their lives” under the dark clouds of the crisis. As recession swept over Europe, youth unemployment rose to unprecedented levels, with an unequal distribution between the core and peripheral Member States of the Union. Moreover, wages and legal protection of the first employment forced European youth to settle in a, formerly unknown, universe of precariousness and low pay. Being young meant to be confronted with a far greater exposure to all effects of the crisis.

The Caritas country reports display a dismal picture of the suffering of youth in Europe when it comes to accessing steady, well remunerated employment. The **Portugal** report describes how job opportunities and wage levels have dropped dramatically since the crisis. Portugal still has a high level of youth unemployment, many young people emigrate and higher education is not being valued in the labour market.

According to the **UK** country report, the current generation of young people in the UK – nicknamed ‘Millennials’, aged roughly 21-30 – has not seen an increase in income to keep up with inflation over the last five years. This is the first generation to earn less than the former generation.

According to the Caritas **Greece** Country report, most young people in Greece, who manage to complete university studies are either trapped in jobs that are irrelevant to their studies and in extremely poor working conditions that remind of the situation right after World War II.

In **Romania**, wage levels for youth frequently do not lift families above the poverty threshold. Consequent-

*I am 25 years old and I've been working for 10 years in precarious jobs. I started to work with the intention to help my mother and to continue my studies for the university. Currently, I have a contract within an employment measure from a Municipality but, for me, this is almost the same as being unemployed. My wage is 419€ and I have three years of graduation studies, dozens of trainings, one year of migration in another country and 10 years of struggle.*

*Caritas Service User, Caritas Portugal*

ly, one out of two young Romanians emigrates to search for better opportunities elsewhere.

In **Austria**, one out of ten young people is considered working-poor. In contrast, the tax burden on labour is amongst the highest in Europe, while taxes on wealth are amongst the lowest in the whole OECD.

In **Italy**, young people are forced to postpone the stages that mark maturity. Because of widespread unemployment, together with precariousness and low pay, young women and men are unable to attain economic autonomy, leave their parents' home, buy their own home, and create their own family, amongst others. In many cases, even though these people are at the threshold of age thirty, they define themselves neither as “young” nor as “adults”, because they are far away from financial independence.

In **France**, young people who are unemployed or in precarious jobs encounter difficulties in getting involved in an independent living project. Two thirds of young people who have left the education system still live with their parents. The French society is

struggling to make room for its youth in the world of work. This leads to a paradox: young people in the prime of life are not able to offer their potential and energy, whilst pension and social protection schemes and social life in general would need their contribution.

In general, the Caritas country reports display a picture of excluded youth trapped in long-term unemployment, precarious and low paid jobs, often despite having attained higher degrees, and moving from one internship to the next. Most of the country reports allude to the frustration and deception of young people, who ceased believing the promise that one can succeed by making an effort, as this has proven inaccurate and unachievable for many.

Europe has answered to the youth unemployment crisis with decisive measures. Two indicators mark the headline goals to fight youth unemployment – early school leaving and the percentage of youth not in employment, education or training (NEETs). The agenda 2020 sets the target to push the rate of early school leavers below 10%. The NEET concept abounded in the nineties, was

declared as an objective in the “Youth on the move” initiative in 2010, and was set as a target in the 2013 Youth Guarantee strategy.

The promotion of youth entrepreneurship represents both opportunities and risks. There are reasons for concerns that self-employment or freelance working practices camouflage highly dependent or precarious employment situations. This is the case particularly for those occupations generated by young entrepreneurs. Whilst *flexicurity* seems to be a valid promise, a great number of young Europeans develop their professional career having never signed a permanent work contract.<sup>17</sup> This is especially the case in the so-called Collaborative Economy – defined as business with transactions facilitated horizontally through online platforms.<sup>18</sup> In many cases, the Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative have promoted this kind of pathway to employment. Labour rights and social protection need to be safeguarded and require further regulatory efforts.

The Social Model of Caritas puts inclusive labour markets at the centre stage, together with the family policy and social protection systems.<sup>19</sup> Caritas advocates for a rights-based and non-discriminatory approach to employment that is sensitive to the necessities of youth. National and/or regional authorities play a vital role in organising employment counselling services, ensuring minimum wages and job security, and devising measures to support the transition from education to the labour market. These obligations are stated in the European Social Charter and the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights. Recently, they have been reiterated in the global framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These, concretely, state in Target 8.6 “By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training” and in Target 8.5: “By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabili-



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ties, and equal pay for work of equal value”. They also urge governments in Target 4.4 to ensure that “by 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship”.

## NOTES

8 Eurostat, data set: Estimated average age of young people leaving the parental household.

9 For all Caritas CARES! series country reports, see <http://www.caritas.eu/publications>.

10 Busch-Geertsema 2016, EC2013b, FEANTSA 2017; Housing Europe / Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research 2015.

11 Caritas Europa 2016.

12 For a menu of policy-options, see the Report of the European Parliament EP2013.

13 CE2017c.

14 EC2017d, the indicator is “Severe housing deprivation rate (% of total population living in overcrowded dwellings and exhibiting housing deprivation, by tenure status) Eurostat”.

15 FEANTSA 2017b, Lörcher/Schömann 2017.

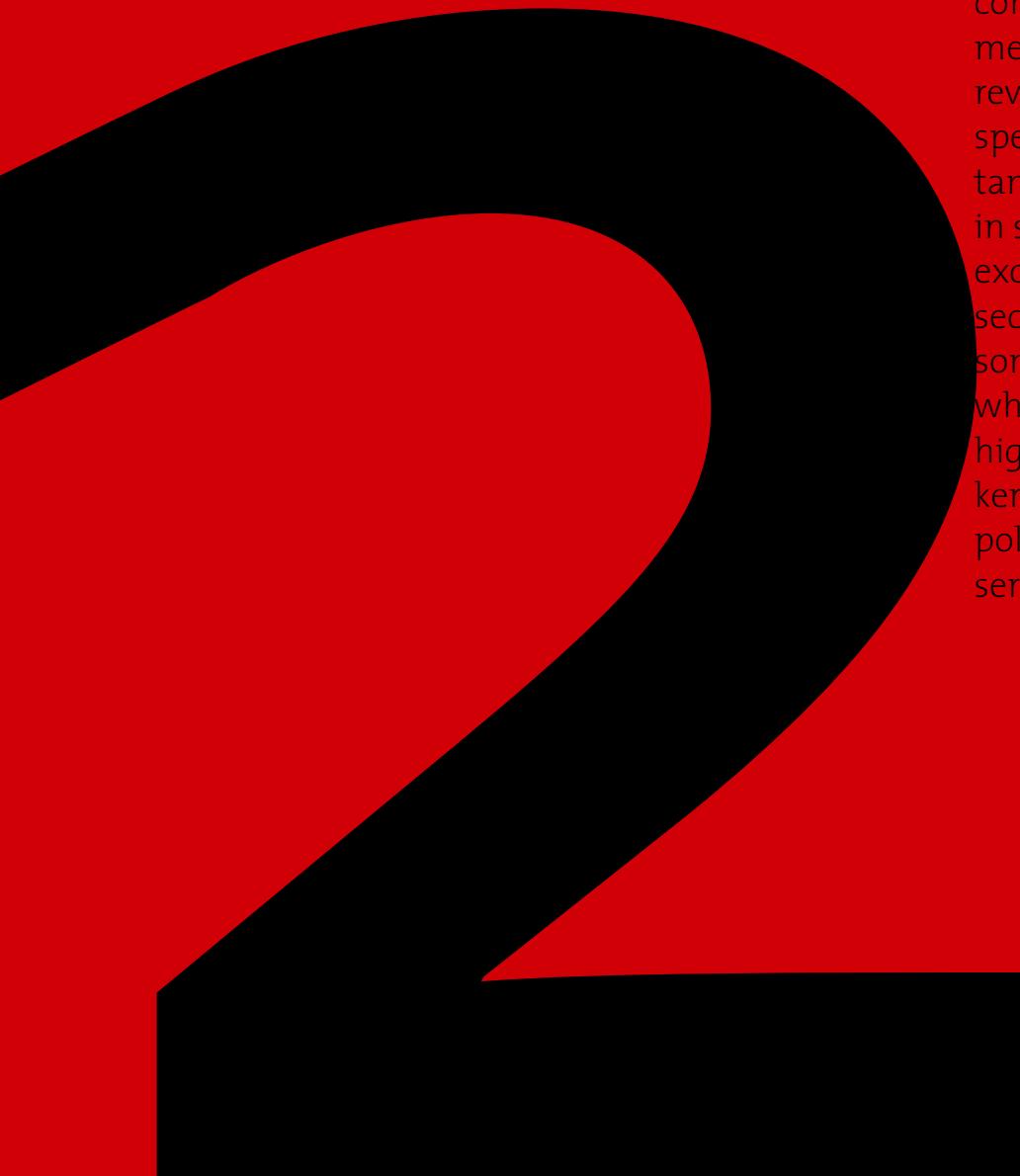
16 Council of Europe, [Revised European Social Charter](#).

17 “Flexicurity” emerges as a concept in the 1990 in Denmark, combining labour market flexibility, with social protection and active labour market policies. This concept has rapidly been taken up by the EC as of the 2000s, see EC2007. On the precariousness of youth employment, see EP 2016; Lörcher/Schömann 2017, ILO 2013, ILO 2016; Piasna / Myant 2017.

18 EC 2016e; EC2017f.

19 Caritas Europa 2016, [Social Justice and Equality in Europe is possible!](#)

# ISSUES OF CONCERN FOR EUROPEAN YOUTH



The previous sections dealt with the rights that young people have difficulties to exercise. Beyond these, the findings from the survey conducted by Caritas member organisations revealed a number of specific topics, which entangle youth in Europe in situations of social exclusion. The following section highlights some particular topics which Caritas wants to highlight to policy-makers when devising policies or offering social services.

## INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF POVERTY AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

Policies that aim to stop the intergenerational transfer of poverty and social exclusion have to start from early childhood and need a particular focus on the age of adolescence, one of the crucial moments.<sup>20</sup> The transition from school to work – including graduating from secondary school, tertiary education or training, internships, career choice, etc. – represent a prominent opportunity for public intervention to readjust social inequalities and strengthen the opportunities of disadvantaged population groups. This is especially important since the Caritas country reports suggest that there is not only a lack of equal opportunities, but also that inequalities have increased in the last decade.

The majority of young beneficiaries of Caritas social services in the **Czech Republic** already experienced poverty and social exclusion during their childhood. The chance of being poor as an adult is much bigger when one is born poor than the chance of becoming poor later in life.

In **Greece**, the report states that the rate of impoverishment is increasing and that families are unable to support their children even in accessing supposedly free-of-charge State services. Many families experience, on the one hand, that their income is shrinking continuously, when both wages and benefits are being reduced, whilst continuous increases of taxes and cost of living elevate their daily expenditures. This often obliges parents to grudgingly deprive their kids the possibility to pursue or continue their higher education.

In **Ireland**, there is a great concern over the number of children living in jobless households and the potential intergenerational transmission of poverty.

The **Bulgaria** report shows that some parents, due to their financial restraints or social beliefs, rather prefer their children to work than embarking on further training or education.

The **Austria** report depicts that poor pupils cannot afford supplementary lessons.

The **Germany** report mentions the strong connection between social background and educational achievement of a child. This translates also in lower career pathways. Pupils who leave school without a certificate of secondary education face severe problems on the labour market. Differences in their percentages on local and regional levels show that there is much what can be done to improve their situation.

In **Italy**, the report relates that a growing number of families suffer material deprivation. This inhibits children and youth from attending school in proper conditions and from participating in social and cultural life.

In **France**, pupils from disadvantaged families are three times more likely to fail at school. At the end of secondary school, 35% of pupils in the most disadvantaged schools were proficient in French, compared to 80% in the most favoured schools. The French education system faces immense challenges, derived from ethnic and social segregation. This creates mistrust between families and the school system.

The **Luxembourg** report raises alarms to the fact that younger generations of specific population groups are inheriting problems related to poverty and social exclusion from their parents, which, in the future, will have a high cost for the country as the government will have to invest in specific programmes to address these issues. In general, such responses tend to be more expensive than prevention programmes.

In **Portugal**, according to the Caritas social workers, severely deprived families are not in the position to support their kin to obtain an education, or access the labour market and housing.

The **Romania** report states that the instability of parents' workplaces with an unsteady and inadequate income, with no potential for advancement in their professional careers, influences the families' standard of living, education and the children's development. A number of descriptions in the report relate that cuts in social spending, such as early childcare or support for schooling materials, impact the most disadvantaged children. Based on these findings, Caritas surmises that opportunities, and the lack thereof respectively, is directly related to the social status of the family.

The literature on social mobility and intergenerational transmission of poverty is extensive.<sup>21</sup> A recent report by Eurofound sheds light on the concern that for the first time in decades younger generations will have fewer opportunities for upward social mobility than the generations before them. The "social elevator" has two dimensions: the chances that the whole generation is better off than the generation before (social mobility) and the fact that individuals have chances to move to other occupational and income classes (social fluidity).<sup>22</sup> These dimensions unfold against a background of growing inequalities. In former decades, upward social mobility and equal opportunities could be achieved because there was a general income growth for all. Nowadays, the current lack of redistributive space brings the need for fairness and equity vehemently back to the agenda.<sup>23</sup>

In this context it is worth mentioning Recommendation CM/Rec(2015)3, adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 21 January 2015<sup>24</sup>, which specifically "*recommends that the governments of the Member States develop and implement*



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*In Caritas,  
we know that when children are growing up  
in families with poverty, that they will carry  
this for the rest of their lives. Often children  
who are experiencing poverty at an early age  
are marked for life by  
this experience.*

*Caritas Belgium*

*sustainable, evidence-based public policies that take into consideration the specific situations and needs of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. These policies should aim at preventing and eradicating the poverty, discrimination, violence and exclusion faced by such young people...”*

Besides the social mobility from one generation to the other, the issue of justice between generations strongly

comes up in the debate. A recently published indicator, constructed using Eurostat data, measures intergenerational fairness. It points toward a rupture in the generation contract. The authors document a decrease in the social and economic opportunities for the younger generation whilst, at the same time, the burden for caring for the older generation increases.<sup>25</sup> These analyses reiterate the perceptions of Caritas, in its different member orga-

nisations all over Europe. The young people, we see in our services, are most often at the edge of society. For these young men and women, the promise of the intergenerational contract, that the younger shall have a better life than their parents, in many cases no longer holds true.

*Experiences of unemployment, and in particular long-term unemployment, alongside an inability to access any work, training or education, tend to leave a ‘scarring effect’ on young people. It increases the challenges associated with getting them active in the labour market at any stage in the future, and this is of concern.*

*Social Worker, Social Justice Ireland.*

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(Caritas England and Wales)

## INDEBTEDNESS

**C**ountry reports from the **Czech Republic**, the **UK** and **Austria** show that a lack of financial literacy and an omission in public policies to mitigate indebtedness locks in a number of young people into poverty. This can lead to energy poverty and arrears in paying utility bills, extending on to property seizures and forced evictions. Research has identified young people as being at a higher risk for this.<sup>26</sup> Sometimes young people get charged with the indebtedness of their parents. Policies should provide for youth to have a fresh start. In this regard, it is especially concerning how some educational policies generate immense debts for student loans.<sup>27</sup>



## STIGMA AND SELF-CONFIDENCE

The social climate has become rougher in the last decade. The **Belgium** report relates that the take-up rates of social benefits are low, which points to a negative social perception of accepting social benefits as well as to a lack of information, particularly amongst the most vulnerable. Social workers from Caritas Belgium relate about conversations with people experiencing poverty: "They tell us about their feeling that society is changing - and that, more and more, social exclusion is perceived as unavoidable, and it is being accepted."

The **Greece** report reveals that entrenched poverty and its intergenerational transmission profoundly affects a person's self-image, self-esteem and social position. Hence, the transmission of poverty continuously generates disempowerment and fatalism. Social workers tell how they witness that poverty constantly generates disempowerment and fatalism, such as a belief that suffering because of poverty is unavoidable. Or an attitude of self-blame takes on: "I do not deserve better, because I am not capable of more".

The inclination of European strategies towards employment policies as virtually the sole measure against poverty and for social inclusion actually deepens the gap between those who are able to generate an adequate income and those who are not.<sup>28</sup> On a conceptual level, it seems to reproduce the distinction between the "dangerous poor" and the "deserving poor".<sup>29</sup> It runs into the danger of reinforcing the phenomenon of blaming the most destitute families for their situation of poverty. This is often interlinked with currying negative rhetoric about and discriminatory practices against migrant youth.



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*We are afraid of  
unemployment, what  
we want to do is work,  
find a real job.*

*Young people living  
in Overseas France,  
Secours Catholique-Caritas  
France*

## JUVENILE JUSTICE AND YOUTH WITH ADDICTIONS

**S**ome of the Caritas country reports (MT, DE, FI, CZ, UK) document the work with young offenders and young men and women with addictions or mental health issues, such as depression. Young homeless people often experience a combination of these, which in some cases has been documented as a coping method to deal with their hopeless situations of poverty. Income guarantee schemes combined with personalised social casework and access to affordable housing prevent relapses.<sup>33</sup> Systems of juvenile justice and rehabilitation facilities need to be connected with integrated offers that combine social work, schooling or vocational education and training with job placement.

However, European responses such as the Youth Guarantee and the Youth Employment Initiative, do not always manage to reach out to these much marginalised groups. Their focus on

employability tends to oversee that in many cases previous work and investment is necessary in terms of settling down, preparing the ground by developing certain aptitudes and regaining a sense of security. In reality, the overall attention on work tends to disguise some of the other basic needs. This added to the generalised cuts in social services and welfare provision - some of which have been reinforced by European recommendations of fiscal consolidation – have created even further complexities and isolation for the already challenged impoverished youth.<sup>34</sup>

Early intervention with destitute or deviant youth has great potential to prevent harmful substance abuse, criminal lifestyles and violent behaviour from becoming chronic. In the much promoted set of European policies geared towards employability, these young people at the very edge of society are scarcely considered, something that ought to change.

## MARKETISATION AND COMMODIFICATION

**I**t is becoming increasingly evident that market forces erode community relations, side-line the vulnerable, increase inequity, and put a strain on the environment. However, private businesses cannot, by themselves, generate the necessary social innovation to make society a better place. As labour markets have become extremely competitive, diversity is not becoming more respected, nor are work-places being provided for the most vulnerable.

On the other hand, many young Europeans look for an economy that – beyond profit – generates well-being and social cohesion in society. Increasingly new models of economic organisation are gaining support. Social economy puts people before profits. The social economy includes organisational forms such as cooperatives, mutual, foundations and associations

as well as newer forms of social enterprises. All of them have a centre core of values to balance economic, social and environmental outcomes. By investing profit into social objectives, the social economy creates communal relations, offers opportunities for both individuals and communities, and creates spaces for participating and sharing ideas. This form of business organisation is gaining political attention. Recently, the European Council reiterated its recognition of the role of the social economy in generating employment and fostering social cohesion.<sup>35</sup> Caritas strongly supports social economy initiatives, both by collaborating at programme level and by advocating for an extension of their practices.<sup>36</sup> In annex II, a number of initiatives in the social economy, supported by Caritas, are documented, which may serve as promising practices or examples for replication.



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Caritas Czech Republic

## NOTES

20 Benda et al. 2008; Grant et al 2011.

21 See Benda et al 2008, Dauderstädt / Keltek 2017.

22 Eurofound 2017.

23 On an in-depth analysis of the dimensions of inequality and its impact on social exclusion and social cohesion see OECD 2015 and OECD 2017.

24 Council of Europe 2015: Recommendation CM/Rec(2015)3, Strasbourg <https://rm.coe.int/t/168066671c>.

25 Intergenerational Foundation 2017.

26 Alleweldt / Kara 2013; For more information see as well the European Consumer Debt Network (ECDN) <http://ecdnet.eu/>.

27 Intergenerational Foundation 2016.

28 EAPN 2014.

29 Shildrick/Rucell 2015.

30 UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty 2017.

31 European Parliament 2017: European Parliament resolution of 24 October 2017 on minimum income policies as a tool for fighting poverty, Strasbourg/Brussels.

32 This is also the recommendation of the EAPN 2014.

33 Busch-Geertsema, Volker 2016.

34 See EAPN 2014.

35 European Council 2015.

36 Caritas 2017. See <http://www.caritas.eu/functions/policy-advocacy/social-economy>.

# YOUTH AT RISK OF POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Caritas Europa has undertaken an inquiry amongst its member organisations on social exclusion and risk of poverty amongst young people. In our perspective, a number of groups require political action most urgently. Table 1 exposes the groups that have been identified as most vulnerable, and the following section describes the rationale more in detail.

**TABLE 2** Young people most at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the various countries, according to the caritas' member organisations experience  
(17 responses, maximum 5 items)<sup>37</sup>

ANSWER OPTIONS	COUNT
Young single parents	12
Young refugees/asylum seekers, victims of human trafficking, unaccompanied minors	10
Young homeless people	10
Young people on rehabilitation or with addictions	8
Young immigrants	7
Young people with disabilities	7
Young offenders	5
Young Roma	3
Other	7

*The most  
I suffer from all the  
small things that  
I can't give to my  
children or that we  
can't do together.  
You know, like going  
to a film with popcorn,  
a trip to the zoo or  
spending an afternoon  
in a swimming pool.*

*A young mother,  
Caritas Belgium*

## YOUNG SINGLE PARENTS

**Y**oung, single parents are frequently mentioned by Caritas member organisations as one of the groups most vulnerable to poverty. The vast majority of such households are single-mother households. Having children at a young age represents a major challenge in a phase where societal demands, such as consolidating educational achievements, making career choices and settling in a profession, coincide with the ever extended transition from adolescence to adulthood.

According to Caritas data in **Austria**, single-parent families are 3.4 times more likely to need material and financial assistance as compared to the total population. In **France**, one-quarter of single-parent families are poor.

The **Belgium** country report explains how children, when growing up in poor single-parent households, suffer from this situation, often with consequences that are dragged on for many years to other life stages. According to Caritas social workers, in Belgium young single parents have more difficulty accessing to social and health services, suffer from discrimination on the housing market, and often have a low income.

The **Czech Republic** report relates that the labour market is severely limited in offering part-time jobs. Caritas social workers highlight the lack of job opportunities compatible with raising small children – especially for parents with lower education and no professional experiences. Additionally, childcare services are insufficient. Kindergartens are often inaccessible

- there are not enough spots in public ones and private kindergartens or other forms of delegated childcare are expensive.

Caritas **Luxemburg** observes that single parents face very serious problems related to very limited employment opportunities, hence the higher rates of unemployment, and related to very limited access to affordable housing.

The **UK** report relays how single parent households have been the household type hardest hit by tax and benefit reforms since 2010. Single parents in the UK are more likely than the average person to be in low-paid work. Being a single parent often means that the individual works a part-time job, which is more likely to be low-paid. 68% of single parents enter the three lowest paid occupation groups.



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Recent research provides abundant evidence that being a single-parent increases income insecurity and creates a higher risk of poverty. This is particularly the case for young mothers with low educational backgrounds, thus constituting a “double disadvantage”.<sup>38</sup> The European Commission, in its report *Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2014*, pointed out that “in more than 20 Member States, the risk of poverty or social exclusion for children has risen since 2008, along with a worsening situation for their (mostly working-age) parents, with single-parent households facing the highest risks”.<sup>39</sup> In the last decade, the figures of children living in single-parent households have increased. In addition, the crisis itself seems to exacerbate the rise of lone-parenthood.<sup>40</sup>

Research shows evidence that specific welfare provisions are more successful than others in cushioning the poverty risk and ensuring social inclusion for single parents and their children. Amongst these are accessible and affordable childcare, the promotion of work-life balance, in particular part time jobs, parental leave and paid sick days, incentives to involve fathers in child-care, the promotion of late careers, and targeted income support schemes. As the number of single-parent families increases, their specific situation and needs should be considered explicitly from the start by social policies.<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, a recent analysis of Eurofound depicts a profound mismatch between childcare duties and employment. “As many as 80% of these inactive young mothers would like to work

if they could freely choose their working hours, as would 85% of young fathers. This indicates that these young mothers and fathers are not outside the labour force by choice.”<sup>42</sup> Caring duties also explain some of the NEET figures, particularly those of inactive women, when disaggregating the numbers. “(...) one-quarter of all young women who are NEET are outside of employment, education and training because of family responsibilities.”<sup>43</sup>

A particular debate pivots around home-care cash allowances, which seems to generate poverty traps according to the opinion of some experts: Provision of in-kind benefits, such as social services or childcare facilities, seem to be the better strategy for sustainable inclusion of people experiencing poverty, both parents and children, as opposed to, often insufficient,

cash-for-care schemes.<sup>44</sup> However, if labour market participation is considered an important remedy against social exclusion and child poverty, measures are urgently needed to improve work-life balance in order to support reconciliation of employment with family, as well as decent wage levels, particularly for the lower segments.

The family is protected by a set of human rights frameworks, amongst which are the Revised European Social Charter (ESC 1996) of the Council of Europe and the European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights (CFR 2000). The ESC enacts, amongst others, the right of employed women to maternity protection, the right of the family to social, legal and economic protection, and the right of workers with family responsibilities to equal opportunities and equal treatment.<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, the UN adopted the Sustainable Development Goals as a common framework for inclusive, just, and sustainable global governance. In its fifth goal, caring duties and their relation to the formal labour market are explicitly mentioned: “*Recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate*”.<sup>46</sup>

Caritas works at country and European level on measuring the fulfilment of these obligations that States have committed to by ratifying these Social Covenants. Caritas organisations also provide new ways of tackling emerging social challenges by constantly innovating their programmes targeting the most vulnerable.



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Caritas Belgium

*My parents are from Albania, but I was born in Greece: My parents have lived in Greece for many years until the crisis spread and they decided that we had to go back to Albania: I didn't like that choice, since I feel Greece is my country. I took a plane and came back to live here. Now I'm paying an inexplicable curse. My master degree and my post specialisation do not help me at all in finding a job, and nobody wants to hire me.*

*Young user of Caritas Counselling Service, Athens, Caritas Greece*

## YOUNG MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

*I have been living in Italy for 4 years. I came to Rome to study, sent by my family and relatives, in order to get a degree in nursing. At University, it was not so easy because my Italian was quite poor at that time.*

*Because of the war and poverty in my country, my family could not support me anymore and they stopped sending me money. After some period, I had to choose whether to go back home or to stay in Italy. I decided to stay, but I had no money for university.*

*Abdulaih, 26 years, from Afghanistan, Caritas Italy*

**E**urope faces major challenges related to providing social services to all, including migrants or asylum seekers. Some European countries have only begun to be countries of destination in the last decades and are still adapting to their duties to ensure the full social integration and the respect for the diversity of all people, including those with a migrant background. Discrimination, also regarding access to services, has to be rejected. Both State and society have to provide a level playing field that allows all young people to pursue their aspirations. States also have to support the most vulnerable, including the newly arrived, in catching up with the others. In addition, asylum is a basic human right and Europe has to live up to its international obligations to be a welcoming society for refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection.

Non-discrimination and asylum are key principles in a number of human rights conventions. Besides they're being an obligation, we witness in Caritas how successful integration can enrich communities, in all dimensions of the word. However, the Caritas Cares! country reports display a desperate picture of social exclusion, disadvantages and discrimination of migrants and refugees.

Caritas **Finland** relates the difficulties for migrants entering into the labour market whilst being confronted with language barriers, and every so often with issues of mental health due to the journey from war zones or regions deserted by utter poverty.

Caritas **Cyprus** describes that refugees are excluded from the housing market.

The **Greece** report stresses the political dimension and insists that the so-called refugee 'crisis' is being abused by right-wing populist to confront poverty-stricken Greeks with people fleeing from wars in the Middle East or Central Asia.

Caritas social workers in **Belgium** report widespread practices of discrimination. Youth with migrant backgrounds, face a number of social and cultural challenges at school, at educational and vocational training, in the housing and labour markets. For example, regarding the housing market, there is significant discrimination based on racial grounds. A male with Turkish or Moroccan roots will in 14% of the cases not even get an appointment to look at a house on the private rental market.

The **UK** report describes that the meagre weekly income support to young refugees does not allow them

enough to participate in society and makes them fall into destitution and rely on the charitable sector to survive.

The **Netherlands** publication reports how young immigrants suffer discrimination on the labour market.

In most of the country reports, offering opportunities for migrants and welcoming refugees has been highlighted as a priority. In general, the survey findings from the Caritas member organisations show that the right to equality and non-discrimination is one of the three rights identified as those most difficult to realise for young men and women with a migration background, together with the right to housing and the right to work.

**Young migrants:** In most European countries, the proportion of youth with a migrant background is reaching the figures of one out of three or one out of two young residents.<sup>47</sup> Both the figures of early school-leavers and people not in employment, education or training are higher for young migrants than for other youth. From 2007 to 2013, the proportion of young people neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET EU-28) increased significantly. On average, the increase in the NEET rate in these seven years was 4.8 percentage points. However, there is a significant difference in NEET rates between the immigrant population of young people and the non-immigrant population: young migrants born in a non-EU country recorded an even higher increase (5.6 percentage points) than non-migrants (2.6 percentage points). Seen from another perspective, this same issue, the gap between young people by country of birth, increased over time: The difference in NEET rates between migrant and non-migrant young people was 7.4 percentage points in 2007, but in 2013 it had reached 10 percentage points.

## ROMA YOUTH

Roma youth face further problems when it comes to social inclusion. They are often discriminated against and their backgrounds - often from poor families and low educational levels – suppose further difficulties in accomplishing education and finding employment. The Czech, Romanian, Belgian, French, Bulgarian and Italian country reports relate this situation. In general, the Roma population suffers strongly from discrimination. It is very difficult for most of the Roma youth to access quality education; often they are concentrated in specific schools. In general, school dropouts are high. This, together with social exclusion, translates into a general lack of opportunities.

Roma girls and young women face particular challenges. Often the marriage age is low, as is the age of first-time pregnancy. This makes a strategy for higher education and labour market initiatives more difficult for them to complete. Figures of school dropout are particularly high for this group. Likewise, unemployment is high. Caritas, in cooperation with the authorities, is working towards non-discrimination and adapted services for social inclusion.<sup>55</sup>

The same applies to figures of early school leavers, defined as leaving school after reaching lower secondary education: 22.6% of the population with a migrant background as compared to 11% of the native-born population. Likewise, comparing figures of employment rates between young people born in an EU country and young people born outside the EU shows a difference of nearly 5 percentage points for boys and more than 10 percentage points for girls.<sup>48</sup> In sum, whilst equal opportunities were a challenge before the crisis, the last decade has further accentuated inequalities between migrants and non-migrants in all measurable aspects. On top of issues of social exclusion, the dimension of discrimination is an additional obstacle. Combined, this makes for a dangerous mix. In this regard, the European Economic and Social Committee has criticised in a recent opinion on the European Pillar of Social Rights that the scope of construction of the new Social Pillar does not include migrants and asylum seekers. This is a matter of concern, especially considering the difficult situation of migrant and refugee youth.<sup>49</sup>

## VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

A number of member organisations reported on the rights violation persons that are illegally transported from one country to another, typically for the purposes of forced labour or commercial sexual exploitation. Most of these victims of human trafficking are youth and suffer shocking abuses. Apart from the victims of sexual exploitation, Caritas Germany calls the attention towards forced labour and other exploitative schemes, such as coercion to begging or stealing. These latter forms are less observed and more difficult to detect. Sometimes they are hidden under refugee contexts. Caritas calls upon the European authorities to strengthen vigilance, reinforce the implementation of the EU Strategy towards the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings and devise integrated approaches between social services, civil society actors and law enforcement agencies. Mutual learning at European level is paramount for an effective response.<sup>56</sup>

**Young refugees:** in the last years the increased arrival of refugees has generated intense political debate. The number of first time asylum applicants per year rose steadily in the last decade, and multiplied by more than six, from below 200.000 to over 1.3 million in the peak of 2015. The most numerous group amongst refugees are youth, followed by children. Both age groups make up well more than 75% of all refugees in most of the European countries.<sup>50</sup> This means that societies have to offer perspectives for education, training and labour market integration. Holding these young people in a limbo of forced idleness, separation from their non-migrant peers and exclusion from public services of employment, education and health will not only destroy their potential and create deception but will waste human capital for both Europe and the countries of origin.



In its daily interactions with migrants, Caritas observes, throughout Europe, the hardships migrants face in their struggle with their integration and social inclusion processes. Migrants are often victims of hostile and discriminatory treatment, as they are commonly “blamed” for Europe’s economic problems and perceived as a threat to the receiving society. Caritas considers this tension between the economic interests of migrants and those of the vulnerable residents to be the result of economic failure and competition for limited government support. Hence, promoting social investment and devising strategies to finance inclusive social protection systems, policies and programmes are vital for enabling cohesive environments that foster migrant integration.<sup>51</sup> The targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy on poverty, employment, and education can only be reached when an inclusive approach in education and employment services is developed that responds to the particular needs of all service users, including migrants.<sup>52</sup>

Likewise, the European Fundamental Rights Agency has outlined the dangers of excluding certain groups of migrants from accessing basic services, such as health services. It argues that fully integrating migrants, regardless of the administrative status, into systems of primary healthcare, prevention and treatment not only is more cost-effective, but also ensures the right to health of migrants, together with resident populations.<sup>53</sup>

With the aim of fostering independent and fulfilling lives, Caritas cooperates with migrant and refugee youth, most of whom are in severe situations of social exclusion and poverty. The Caritas Social Model has as its second pillar the promotion of inclusive labour markets for work as a source of well-being. As part of this strategy, Caritas advocates that: “Antidiscrimination policies increase opportunities for labour market participation of marginalised groups, such as Roma or migrants, as well as the equal participation of women and men.”<sup>54</sup>

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a global framework for a sustainable and just future. This framework defines certain rights for migrants as well. Amongst these are: Target 8.8: *“Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment”*. Target 10.3: *“Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard.”*, and Target 10.7: *“Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.”*

## YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

**O**ur member organisations report that young people with disabilities have severe difficulties in accessing equal opportunities in terms of education, employment and housing. **Austria** reports that youth with disabilities or chronic illnesses, both mentally and physically, have significant challenges to enter into employment. Whilst an increasing number of residents, including many young people with disabilities, is not in the position to compete in the first labour market, a protected labour market would prevent these people from slipping in patterns of complete dependency.

The **Portugal** report notes that, frequently, schools are not prepared to include pupils with disabilities. It further explains how the disability benefits system contradicts with the objective of active labour market integration, setting conflicting incentives of either opting for these benefits or integrating into the labour market.

The **Greece** report explains that young people with disabilities were hit directly by the economic crisis and by government imposed cuts due to austerity measures.

The **Ireland** report lays out that people with disabilities have the highest risk of poverty, deprivation and consistent poverty rates.

Caritas **Bulgaria** suggests that limited access to educational institutions of young persons with disabilities severely restricts their opportunities to participate in society and enter the labour market in equal conditions. The government still has to devise an effective strategy of integration and social protection of people with disabilities.

The **Romania** report exposes a complete failure of an integration policy that starts at the school level. Schools are not accessible. Neither are they prepared to cater for young pupils with special needs. This extends to

*Jason,  
a young person with Asperger syndrome,  
attended a specialist training-centre for approximately  
3 years. The supports there were unstructured, and  
without timeframes. He says he was 'basically left  
watching documentaries all day'. Two different  
education-based programmes followed this. He had  
mixed experiences in placements: it worked when staff  
took the time to support and explain things to him,  
but he also had poor experiences ranging from being  
misunderstood to being ignored right through to being  
bullied. In one workplace, Jason reports that staff  
ignored him when he requested help. 'They were a bit  
rude when I would ask them things – they wouldn't  
show me. They would walk on past... not answer me.  
It was kind of stressful'.*

*Jason, Social Justice Ireland*

employment services and measures to assist employers to increase job opportunities for persons with disabilities as well. Despite having ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2010, the National Education Law of Romania, approved in 2011, does not include any reference to inclusive education. Meanwhile, boys and girls with a disability still suffer intense social exclusion, as manifested in discrimination, social isolation, bullying, intimidation or harassment by students without disabilities.

Eurostat figures on disability and integration indicate that the crisis has exacerbated social exclusion for people with disabilities. The rate of NEET amongst young people with

disabilities in 2011 was twice as high (at 30%) as compared to their peers. The rate of integration - and exclusion respectively – has a great variation between European Member States, the East and South-East European countries being at the end of the line.<sup>57</sup>

Caritas advocates for making the society inclusive for everyone, particularly the most vulnerable. In terms of disabilities, the three pillars of Caritas Social Model – family, labour markets and social protection – have to be coordinated and mutually reinforce themselves.<sup>58</sup>

As the global framework for a sustainable and just future, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide



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Caritas Czech Republic

clear guidance on how to integrate people with disabilities in various dimensions. Amongst these are: Target 4.5 “*By 2030, (...) ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities (...).*”, Target 8.5 “*By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value.*”, and Target 10.2: “*By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status*”. The SDG framework – together with other legal conventions such as the European Social Charter, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, and the Convention of Rights of People

with Disabilities (CRPD 2006) – provides for an effective entry point to debate on how States fulfil their obligations. Within Europe, it is worth mentioning that quite a few countries still have to do a lot of catching up in terms of integrating persons with disability, particularly youth, fully in society. Failing to do so, contributes to their higher poverty rate. That governments provide for inclusive environments does not depend on the available financial means, but on the political will to do so.

## NOTES

37 The data reflects the perceptions grounded in Caritas' social work. It cannot, however, be extrapolated to having statistical significance. See the section on methodology for more details.

38 Ruggeri/Bird 2014, Oláh et al 2017.

39 EC2015d.

40 Bontout et al. 2015; Carson et al. 2017; Oláh et al 2017.

41 EC 2013c; Ruggeri/Bird 2014; Bontout et al. 2015; Carson et al. 2017; Oláh et al 2017.

42 Eurofound 2013, 1; See also EC 2013c; Ruggeri/Bird 2014; Bontout et al. 2015; Carson et al. 2017; Oláh et al 2017.

43 Eurofound 2016a, 37.

44 Eurofound 2013, EC 2013c; Ruggeri/Bird 2014; Bontout et al. 2015; On the debate between basic income support for mothering tasks vs. labour market activation combined with childcare offers, see Carson et al. 2017; Oláh et al 2017.

45 CoE 1996, paragraphs 8, 16 and 27 respectively; for CFR see EU 2000.

46 United Nations 2015.

47 Establishing accurate numbers is a difficult task due to citizenship regulation as well as the presence of undocumented migrants. On measuring indicators on immigration integration, see ESN/MPG 2014.

48 EUROSTAT Data Set Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex, age and country of birth (NEET rates); See Eurostat 2014: Statistics Explained Young People - Migration and Socioeconomic Situation; Brussels.

49 EESC 2017, 3.

50 EUROSTAT Data set Asylum applicants by citizenship; See Eurostat Statistics Explained Asylum Statistics, 2017.

51 For more information on Caritas Europa proposals and practices see [http://www.caritas.eu/sites/default/files/welcome\\_2016.pdf](http://www.caritas.eu/sites/default/files/welcome_2016.pdf).

52 Picum 2014, Picum 2015.

53 FRA 2015.

54 Caritas Europa 2016, 20.

55 EC2016j, see [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma/index_en.htm).

56 For more information on Caritas Europa's work on human trafficking, see <http://www.caritas.eu/document/trafficking-invisibles-en>.

57 Eurostat NEET statistics, see also Eurostat Statistics explained – Disability Statistics.

58 Caritas 2016.

# HOW EFFECTIVE ARE CURRENT POLICIES DIRECTED TOWARDS YOUNG EUROPEANS?



This chapter observes the European Youth Strategy and the extent to which it achieved to put the focus on the particular needs and demands of the European Youth. It then gets closer to where these policies are implemented at the EU Member State level.

## EUROPEAN YOUTH STRATEGY

**S**ince 2010, Europe has a proper youth policy, building up on former developments.<sup>59</sup> The current European Youth Strategy is valid from 2010 to 2018 and has a 3-year programming cycle.<sup>60</sup> EU legal competence on the issue is limited within the current legal framework, which has an impact on EU level instruments to encourage implementation of the Youth Strategy by the Member States. The Strategy is divided into two angles: proper programmes (“specific initiatives”) and cooperating with existing sectors on youth specific issues (“mainstreaming initiatives”). Its main instruments are fostering mutual learning, generation of evidence, knowledge exchange and European-wide consultations. A flagship report – the European Youth Report – is published every three years. The priorities of the programming cycles have been on youth employment (2010-12), employability, inclusion and participation (2013-15), and equal education, job and participatory opportunities in inclusive communities (2016-18).

The Youth Strategy manages to get some attention on the specific needs and demands of youth as such. However, the policy agenda is still set within the established division of competencies, what would be “line-ministries” in a national context, namely education, employment, health, culture, and so on. The priorities, described above, indicate that the youth agenda rather follows the employment agenda, as opposed to developing a particular *integrated* strategy for the young people.

This is reflected in the fact that “youth” as such, and “youth policy” barely comes up in the European Semester process and does not form part of the evaluative grid.<sup>61</sup> One main achievement is to put forward specific indicators for youth within the Eurostat reporting, and some of these, namely the NEET figures, have been integrated in the Semester Process and monitoring of the implementation of the European

Pillar of Social Rights.<sup>62</sup> However, Caritas believes that youth should be in greater focus in the Semester Process.

In 2013, the Commission launched the Youth Guarantee and the related funding mechanism the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI). Member State governments have rapidly taken up the Youth Guarantee, being pushed by the European Semester process and significant funding in both YEI and European Social Fund (ESF). It represents one of the most speedily implemented European initiatives.<sup>63</sup> However, despite the efforts, the actual implementation of the Youth Guarantee has not yet unfolded its full potential, and remains particularly weak in reaching out to the most marginalised. Thus, a recent report by the European Court of Auditors states, “none of the Member States had yet ensured that all NEETs had the opportunity to take up an offer within four months which would help them to integrate into the labour market in a sustainable way.” Furthermore, it calls the national governments to attention that “more effort is needed to support those young people who are most detached from the labour market”.<sup>64</sup>

The Youth Guarantee owes its name recognition to the mixture of the urgency of the youth unemployment crisis, the simplicity of the goal and targets, and the rapidly allocated funds. A recent report on NEETs by Eurofound celebrates the impact of the NEET concept in raising public awareness and mobilising policy action and public resources. It also calls on the necessity to disentangle the concept, to analyse its heterogeneity and to discover the realities that lie beneath. The report thus claims that the concept has been able to raise specific attention on certain sub-groups, such as young mothers or young people with disabilities.<sup>65</sup>

Without doubt, the youth employment crisis and the reaction by the European Institutions to establish a Youth Guarantee has shaken up both

the education and public employment services’ (PES) sector.<sup>66</sup> As seen from the ground in our operations, Caritas welcomes the initiatives but notes that both education systems and employment services still have a long way to go to offer effective and integrated support to youth to facilitate their inclusion in the labour market. Caritas is particularly concerned about the risk that populations that are hard to reach will fall behind even more. Beyond education and employment services, targeted social measures and social counselling work should therefore complement the activation programmes in order to work for inclusive and cohesive societies.



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*For the first time since the end of World War II, the perspective for achieving a better life than their parents begins to vanish for young Italians.*

*Caritas Italy*

The first evaluations about the performance of the Youth Guarantee and its funding mechanisms are coming out.<sup>67</sup> Figures on employment and placements in youth traineeships and internships seem to be improving. However, the quality of jobs and wage levels remain of great concern. Much of the Youth Guarantee seems to be geared towards quantity. This means programmes focus merely on the number of people placed, notwithstanding alarms about the low-skills level, the precarious working conditions and the limited pay that often does not allow for a decent living. This is even exacerbated when applying a territorial perspective: huge differences

exist in the offer of opportunities for quality employment or traineeship between core European States and the periphery. This counteracts the promise of *upwards convergence*, expressed in the foundations of Europe and set out in its two basic Treaties.

The Youth Employment Initiative creates concerns around the precariousness of employment and the possible substitution of regular staff. Likewise, some of its actions have been singled out to target the “low hanging fruit”, which means an approach to include those young people with better educational achievements and better skills sets in the programmes, and

thus even aggravates the gap between the socially excluded and those who can make use of the opportunities offered by the Youth Guarantee.<sup>68</sup>

## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF NATIONAL POLICIES

In 2016, the Council of the European Union called upon the European Institutions and its Member States to pursue an integrated approach towards combatting poverty and fostering social inclusion.<sup>69</sup> An overall and integrated approach to combating poverty and social exclusion is also – together with the allocation of adequate funding - a crucial element in the conclusions of the European Committee of Social Rights of the Council of Europe when assessing if Member States respect article 30 of the Revised European Social Charter: the right to be protected against poverty and social exclusion. Such an integrated approach would consider each specific situation at the household level from a holistic perspective. It would recognise the obligation of *all* public policies – such as employment, health and long-term care, reconciliation of work and family life, education and housing – to address the very particular risks of poverty for women and men throughout the life cycle. This calls upon to reconfigure the often siloed approaches and, particularly for those of youth age, to integrate the public policies of income support, education, social services, employment services and youth work into a personalised package.

Whilst Caritas shares the general idea to offer tailor-made solutions, experience from our member organisations demonstrates that a huge margin for improvement still exists and that the most vulnerable are particularly at risk of falling through the safety net of services and social transfers. Failing to reach out in a comprehensive manner is particularly damaging when the transition from child to adult has to be mastered and the course is set for the future.

The Caritas country reports reinforce the need for such an integrated approach. The **Austria** report points to the scarce opportunities for disabled or chronically ill. Youth who are disabled and chronically ill, both mentally and

physically, have significant challenges entering into employment. The **Belgium** report relates that differences in poverty risk between the educational levels have increased sharply between 2005 and 2014. Caritas social workers highlight in the **Czech Republic** report, the lack of opportunities for jobs compatible with raising small children – especially for parents with lower educational levels and no professional experiences. This is heightened when combined with difficulties accessing childcare due to the lack of service offers. The **Germany** report presents the syndrome of “Disconnected Youth”, a group of young people that has been identified and characterised by a complexity of social problems whilst having lost the connection to social security and social assistance systems. They live in precarious living circumstances and housing conditions and often have addiction and/or mental health problems. The **Malta** report argues that the current school system is rigid and does not facilitate employability. In general, the reports clearly lay out how the focus on young women and men is often not person-centred but partitioned in different systems that are not able or willing to cooperate. This generates loopholes through which many youth fall.

Education, employment services and social work have to offer solutions to youth at neighbourhood level. A key question is how this kind of social policy innovation can be realised within the current structures. New contractual relationships have emerged since the late eighties in all European countries. Private, for profit service providers have gained great market power. However, lately, new organisations promoting social economy and beneficiary-driven providers have entered the market as well. Beyond ideological blueprints, these modes of provision need to be considered in terms of cost-effectiveness, capacity to innovate and responsiveness in the realisation of rights, particularly for the most vulnerable. Labour standards should be an

additional criterion. Whilst market forces strongly enter in the provision, with mixed results, the State is, without doubt, the duty-holder that ensures social rights. Therefore, it should never hand over the control over the services offered.<sup>70</sup> Building partnerships is essential.

Caritas organisations are well positioned to contribute towards the necessary changes that facilitate the transition to person-centred assistance. Our proximity to the target groups,



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our international network, and our value-driven volunteering structures situate Caritas in a prominent place to be part of both policy formulation and the actual service provision and work with the people.

In this sense, Caritas appreciates, at European level, the spaces offered for consultation and the effort to base policies on evidence and make them measurable by initiatives such as the scoreboard. However, in some Member States civil dialogue can be

improved, in terms of opening the administration to take on new modes of provision, listening to first-hand experiences while devising new policies, and entrusting civil society actors with implementation.

## NOTES

59 European Council 2009. The successive key documents on European Youth Policy are EC2012c, EC2012d, EC2015a. The EU Youth Strategy built on the policies developed around the European Youth Portal launched in 1991 and a respective European Commission White Paper of 2002: *A new impetus for European Youth*. See the further work by the commission, EC2009, EC2010c. On European Youth Policy and its critics, see Paolini 2013, EAPN 2014, Equinet 2017, European Youth Forum 2015, Youth Policy Labs (no date).

60 EC2012c, EC2012d, EC2015a, EC2015c.

61 See on the policies that are assessed in the Semester Process the table “Policies covered in the 2017 country-specific recommendations”, CE 2017g.

62 EC 2017d.

63 See for the Europe 2020 Agenda: CE 2010a. The Youth on the Move Strategy: EC2010c, The Youth Guarantee: EC2012a, 2012b, 2015c, 2016a; European Council 2013 For a discussion on the Youth Guarantee see Bussi/Geyer 2013. The Youth Guarantee was preceded by the Youth Opportunities Initiative (YOI) (EC2011a) and the Commission’s Youth Employment Package (EC2012).

64 ECA 2017, p.71 and p.72.

65 Eurofond 2016a.

66 Leigh Doyle 2015, Luminita 2016.

67 Ecorys / PPMI 2015, EC2016a, EC2016i.

68 See EC2016a, EC2016i; Ecorys / PPMI 2015; ECA 2017.

69 Council of European Union 2016: Combating poverty and social exclusion: An integrated approach, 26 May 2016, [9273/16](#).

70 The European Public Procurement Directive of 2014 (European Union 2014) introduces the concept of “good quality price” and leaves the administration the choice to opt out of the general framework, as social services are considered to be essential public goods.





Youth poverty and exclusion have been a major European concern in the last decade. Persistent youth unemployment is a scandal that puts a whole generation at risk. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, Caritas witnesses great stress on young people, particularly those in situations of vulnerability and social exclusion. The situation for young men and women in the last decade has worsened in many areas, such as when accessing employment, exposure to precariousness and previously unobserved low wage-levels, rising housing prices, welfare cuts, vanishing social service offers and family indebtedness, amongst others. Apart from the sheer numbers, the territorial pattern – dividing Europe in a well-off centre versus a distressed periphery – puts into question the promise of convergence, one of the founding principles of the European governance.

Not being up to the task to fulfil the promises of the European Social Model has contributed to disenchantment with the European project amongst young Europeans, as austerity clauses

and fiscal consolidation measures are weighted far higher than those that would protect basic social rights. It is a shared responsibility to avoid that “Europe” is being perceived as a threat as opposed to a guarantee and advocate of social rights at Member State level. In a single market, social challenges can no longer be addressed by individual States alone.

In 2008, in light of the outburst of the Great Recession, the European Commission called for policies of adequate income support, inclusive labour markets and access to quality services. This package, dubbed “Active Inclusion”, should have balanced the economic policies in the age of fiscal consolidation with a social policy component.<sup>71</sup> Again, in 2013 when approving the “Social Investment Package for Europe”, the European Parliament called upon European Institutions to ensure that “the establishment of European economic governance is complemented by improved social governance”.<sup>72</sup> Today, this series of social initiatives of the last decades is being

summarised and reshuffled in the “European Pillar of Social Rights”.<sup>73</sup> Now they are framed as:

- | Equal opportunities and access to the labour market;
- | Fair working conditions;
- | Social protection and inclusion.

There has been intense debate on the legal nature of the European Pillar of Social Rights, whether the Pillar is actually about “rights” and if it can generate obligations on the Union and the Member States that can be measured and claimed. Experts have pointed out that it is actually not about “rights”, but – far softer – “principles”. The European Pillar of Social Rights and its twenty principles are a roadmap, non-binding recommendations to the Member States, particularly to those within the Euro zone. However, when examined within the European Semester process and supported by peer learning within the Open Method of Coordination these principles might, over time, generate a general frame of reference for State parties and of engaging civil society.

*People experiencing poverty  
have less 'mays' and more 'need tos' than other people.  
They need to go to meetings, they need to be on time,  
they need to eat healthy... On the other hand,  
people with money may be too late, may go where they  
want and may eat  
what they like.*

*Anonymous Caritas service user, Caritas Belgium*

The linkage to human rights frameworks and other internationally acquired obligations is not clearly established. All European Member States are parties to a number of Covenants and Treaties. Amongst these are, at international level, the Covenants on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESR 1966), and the Conventions on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW 1979), on the Rights of the Child (CRC 1989), and on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD 2006). At European level, there are the Revised European Social Charter (ESC 1996) of the Council of Europe and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (CFR 2000). To these, at global level an international consensus has recently agreed upon the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 2015), with distinct commitments on social protection, labour standards and equality. All these instruments have their respective reporting, monitoring and complaints procedures and bodies. Accomplishing social rights is measurable, in terms of policies, systems, outcomes, fiscal and budgetary allocations. This makes States account-

able to their obligations towards social rights. It allows the civil society to oversee their performance. How the Social Pillar and its principles will relate to these frameworks and translate into measurable and enforceable social guarantees is still to be defined.<sup>74</sup>

and national level on basis of timely indicators and involving all stakeholders. Benchmarks and minimum standards can help to attain upwards convergence. Minimum standards should monitor the principles on fair working conditions and the provision on minimum income.

Caritas Europa acknowledges the potential added value of the European Pillar of Social Rights. The initiative can be a contribution to promoting a more social market economy, linking the instruments of a market economy with the principle of solidarity and the common good. Implementation of the principles will be the key challenge. The EU should fully exercise its competencies and focus on adopting more CSRs in the field of social policy. Moreover, an *adequate minimum income scheme* directive should set minimum standards ensuring that everybody can participate in society. EU labour law needs to be updated and strengthened with regard to new forms of employment and the reconciliation of family and work life. But most of all, successful implementation of the Pillar will depend on Member States' action, which will need to be monitored at EU

## NOTES

71 On the Commission's Active Inclusion Communication see: EC 2008.

72 On the Social Investment Package see: EC2013a, EC2013b, EC2013c, European Parliament 2013.

73 On the European Social Pillar see: EC2016f, EC2017a; EC2017b, European Council 2016; ILO 2016, EAPN 2016, EAPN 2017.

74 On the legal debate of the EPSR, see EESC 2017, Lörcher/Schömann 2016. On the International Human Rights Conventions and its bodies, see the webpage of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/Pages/HumanRightsBodies.aspx>. On the Revised European Social Charter, see CoE 1996; EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, see EU 2000. On measurability of Social Rights, see OHCHR2015, CESR 2015, CESR 2016.

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



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In the last decade, the pressure put on young people has increased significantly. This generation is likely to be the first worse off than their parents. Making them pay the bill for the crisis appears to be an act of intergenerational injustice. In consequence, a number of rights have become more difficult for youth to access. Amongst these are housing, work and education. These patterns are even more acute in Central and South Eastern Europe.

Young, single mothers, particularly when having a lower educational attainment are particularly at risk of social exclusion. The inclusion of young people with a migrant background and the welcoming of refugees is a task that not only ensures non-discri-

mination and equality of opportunities, but also will sustain, in the long run, European societies as plural, inclusive and fair. Over the last decade, the promise of the European project to establish cohesion within societies and upwards convergence in the economic as well as social performance of Member States has been severely hampered as inequality rises, extreme poverty has returned and social mobility between generations has slowed down.

The European Youth Policy has been helpful to visualise the age bracket of 16-29 to the general public and the policy communities. However, it has not yet been able to put an integrated perspective on the aspirations and rights of young women and men in the centre of European programming

priorities. The European Pilar of Social Rights is a promise against rising disenchantment across Europe. This is, without doubt, the right approach. It should be strengthened by aligning policies to the existing Human Rights obligations and the commitments derived from the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agenda. It is to be determined if politicians, both in Member States and European institutions, will walk the talk and deliver programmes that enable youth to fulfil their potential.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## TO THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS AND MEMBER STATES

Caritas Europa calls upon the European Union and Member States to effectively address the challenges faced by young people as described in this report: access to education, employment, housing, and to fight discrimination, including targeted measures for the most affected groups of youth: young single parents, young migrants and refugees, and young people with disabilities.

In order to **address the identified challenges**, a coherent youth policy should include the following building blocks:

### 1. Ensure access to housing:

- | Establish a European system to monitor housing policies and develop indicators for an observatory for rent and access to housing.
- | Ensure timely means-tested access to quality, appropriate and affordable social housing.
- | Forbid evictions, in particular of families with children, when there is no alternative but homelessness.

### 2. Ensure access to education:

- | Ensure free primary and secondary education for all and free tertiary education at least for the most disadvantaged students.
- | Enable the re-entry of school dropouts by increasing the prestige of vocational education and training (VET).
  - a. Invest in dual learning to reduce early school leaving and foster the transition between education and the labour market.

### 3. Ensure decent jobs and fair wages for young people:

- | Create employment considering the decency of work: focus on quality of jobs created by the Youth Guarantee by considering wage levels and preventing precariousness; apply the principle of non-discrimination and ensure equal opportunities.

- | Establish adequate minimum wage levels, ensure decent working conditions, and extend social protection to all workers, including those in atypical employment relationships and with short-term contracts.

- | Recognise skills and qualifications of migrant and refugee youth acquired in their country of origin or transit.

- | Use the potential of social economy initiatives for the creation of jobs adapted to the most vulnerable youth.

- | Implement the EU principles for a Quality Framework for Traineeships.

### 4. Ensure inclusive and holistic social service provision:

- | Integrate social services, employment services and education to make social work targeting youth more effective, and contribute to an inclusive approach.

- | Promote a mix of integrated, adequately funded services, together with public and private provisions to foster social inclusion.

- | Offer one-stop shops for young people. This includes the implementation of national integration strategies for migrant and refugee youth.

- | Address structural discrimination by abolishing specific thresholds (e.g. minimum income) or particular means-testing on young people (e.g. on access to social benefits), as currently practiced in some Member States.

### 5. Improve family support for vulnerable young families and in particular single parents:

- | Ensure access to affordable and quality childcare and education.

- | Provide a monthly child allowance, with an increased amount for families on a low income.

- | Provide accessible family counselling services, parenting support services and family centres.

- | Facilitate work – family life balance.

- | Ensure the legal right to maternity leave of at least 15 weeks, as well as parental leave of at least 6 months.

- | Allow a number of days per year of special paid leave for care work in the family.

- | Ensure a minimum income during longer periods of leave for care work.

- | Make the time spent on care work eligible for the calculation of pension rights.

### 6. Implement targeted preventive and crisis intervention policies:

- | Apply decisive early interventions for vulnerable youth, in particular, young offenders, youth facing addictions, and young people with mental health issues.



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In order to **be effective**, design, develop, monitor and implement policy, in consultation with young people and civil society organisations representing their interests. Build on existing policy instruments, namely, the EU Semester Process to ensure that the County Specific Recommendations (CSRs) respect and promote implementation of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, in order to guide Member States in developing a comprehensive strategy.

In order to **maximise its impact**, ensure adequate funding to implement a coherent youth policy:

- | Continue the Youth Guarantee and maintain at least the same amount of funding for the European Social Fund (ESF) in the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework.
- | At least 30% of the ESF should be earmarked for the fight against poverty.

| Use the flexibility clause of the stability and growth pact to allow Member States to exempt prioritised social investment, on the basis of CSRs, from the calculation of national budgetary expenditure.<sup>75</sup>

| Make the best use, in an efficient way, of the Youth Guarantee and of complementarity with other EU instruments and measures, including a Child Guarantee.

In order to **be sustainable**, such a youth policy should be coordinated with a strategy to fight child and family poverty on the basis of the 2013 EC Recommendation on Investing in Children, on the principles enshrined in the European Pillar of Social Rights, and toolled up with an effective measuring framework, such as the social scoreboard, while also being part of a broader anti-poverty strategy, aiming at realising the Sustainable Development Goals.

The EU and Member States' should confirm their commitments to the principles enshrined in the European Pillar of Social Rights by encouraging Member States to ratify and implement the Revised European Social Charter as the social constitution of Europe and to accept the Collective Complaints Mechanism.

#### NOTES

<sup>75</sup> Exemption should be conditioned by requiring Member States to present a strategy that meets the conditions described under points 1 to 4 above. The priorities should be selected from the building blocks listed below.

## ANNEX I

# METHODOLOGY OF THE REPORT



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The starting point for all Caritas action is the observation, listening and encounter with concrete people in need, in poverty. In order to act with and accompany people and communities in the best possible way, listening, observing and discerning of the surrounding reality is at the core of Caritas' style of doing.<sup>76</sup> The methodology used to compile this publication was a joint exercise between the Caritas Europa secretariat and the Caritas member

organisations. Specialised consultants on social policy and social inclusion assisted the research process.<sup>77</sup> A research seminar was held in March 2017 with policy officers from all participating Caritas member organisations in order to harmonise concepts and streamline priorities. As a principal tool, a questionnaire was sent to Caritas Europa member organisations. The questionnaire, filled in in April and May 2017, contained 17 blocks of questions, including detailed sub-questions of the following types: multiple-choice, ranking

and open response. The questionnaire also aimed to decipher member organisations assessments regarding a set of policy documents (European Commission Recommendations, European Semester documents, etc.) and the implementation of these in the respective countries.

The replies of the 17 member organisations to the questionnaire have been elaborated into country reports and serve as a basis for the arguments presented in this publication. They reflect the grassroots experiences of the

17 member organisations involved. In order to compare Caritas' key observations with state of the art research, a series of secondary literature and official statistics were consulted, allowing for a structuring of the observations into a systematic framework, leading to concrete policy recommendations.

Hence, the main data is derived from an inquiry to Caritas' member organisations undertaken in April/May 2017. It is based on the ongoing analysis of recent literature on poverty and social exclusion within the respective countries undertaken by the technical staff and, most notably, the lived experiences of the interventions of Caritas and the permanent contact with beneficiaries. It therefore reflects the perceptions grounded in Caritas' social work. It cannot, however, be extrapolated to having statistical significance.

Caritas has developed a European Social Model that aims to effectively reduce inequalities and eradicate poverty. A particular focus is on preventing and diminishing the transmission

of poverty from one generation to the next.<sup>78</sup> The Caritas Model is based on three pillars:

- | The family as a vital cell of society and primary safety net;
- | Inclusive labour markets, recognising the value of work and people's contribution to society; and
- | The social protection system as an essential solidarity mechanism ensuring the well-being of society as a whole.

The findings of the country reports are assessed against this conceptual matrix.

The publication intends to describe the situation of youth on the background of the recent crisis. We refer to "youth" as young women and men aged 16 to 25. In some cases or countries, this age bracket is extended up to 29. We refer to "crisis" as to the protracted financial and economic crisis that started in 2008 and led to broader issues of societal participation, the effectiveness of social protection and the legitimacy of political systems.

## NOTES

<sup>76</sup> For more information on the approach, see [http://www.caritas.eu/sites/default/files/caritas\\_cpo\\_handbook\\_en\\_final\\_0.pdf](http://www.caritas.eu/sites/default/files/caritas_cpo_handbook_en_final_0.pdf).

<sup>77</sup> Fresno, the right link [fresnoconsulting.es].

<sup>78</sup> Caritas 2016.

## ANNEX II

# SOCIAL ECONOMY INITIATIVES SUPPORTED BY CARITAS

### GARAGE SOLIDAR'AUTO

LEAD MEMBER ORGANISATION

CARITAS FRANCE  
(SECOURS CATHOLIQUE)

Total beneficiaries

3700

Location France

Website:

<http://www.solidarauto38.fr/garage-solidaire/>

The aim of the project is to be accessible for people with financial difficulties to either repair their cars or to help them buy a used car. SolidarAuto's main objective is to combat social isolation and unemployment by increasing the mobility of people facing social or economic difficulties.

The garage provides repair services and used cars at discounted prices for low-income families. The repairs are carried out by professional car mechanics. People are also encouraged to donate used cars to the SolidarAuto.

The SolidarAuto network is formed around a charter and a governance model that leaves autonomy for individual companies that are member of the network.

### MAGDAS ESSEN (LIKE THAT FOOD)

LEAD MEMBER ORGANISATION

CARITAS AUSTRIA

Total beneficiaries

38

Website:

<http://www.magdas.at/essen/>

**Objective:** *magdas* ESSEN (*like that food*) caters for residents and guests of Caritas care houses as well as kindergartens and other Caritas facilities. *magdas* ESSEN's objective is to provide high quality, yet homemade food with finest ingredients, while creating jobs for people with limited job opportunities.

**Expected results:** Currently, *magdas* ESSEN provides food for approx. 1,500 persons per day, while being aware of the responsibility of catering for people who are not or no longer able to cook for themselves and contributing to keeping their quality of life as high as possible.

**Main activities:** Operating a modern catering kitchen with highest production standards, while providing jobs for people with limited opportunities and creating high quality, homemade and delicious dishes.

**Results achieved:** Establishing a catering kitchen creating jobs for people with otherwise limited job opportunities.

As part of the *magdas* Social Business group, *magdas* ESSEN's goal is to be self-financing, while providing jobs for people with limited access or opportunities to enter the first labour market. At *magdas*, we prove that economic and social matters can be combined and create a meaningful business model. Many of the dishes are homemade and cooked following traditional and tasty recipes – using natural ingredients without using artificial additives. We believe that regional, seasonal and organic ingredients are the foundation for savoury dishes.

## CORTIJO COVAROCA

CARITAS DIOCESANA  
DE ALBACETE

### LEAD MEMBER ORGANISATION

CARITAS SPAIN

Partner organisation – European  
National Caritas Caritas Spain

Total beneficiaries

11

Web:

<http://www.cortijocovaroca.com/>

A hostel and a camp dedicated to environmental education and rural tourism located in Nerpio Cultural Park, in the heart of the Natural Reserve of the Sierra de las Cabras.

The main goal is to bring ecotourism to groups of all ages so that people enjoy an unforgettable coexistence in an eco-lodge that allows them to learn about the rural world and its traditions, as well as surprising environment, environmental and landscape of this municipality. Cortijo Covaroca also cares about people, as a company of employers promoted by the Fundación El Sembrador.

The benefits obtained are reinvested in the attainment of jobs for people in situations of or are at risk of social exclusion.

## SOCIAL FARMING

### LEAD MEMBER ORGANISATION

CARITAS ITALY

Location Italy

Total beneficiaries

1,640

Total amount of services:  
82 (48 dioceses).

weblink

Social farming includes a plurality of experiences and practices, which combine the use of agricultural resources with social activities. The experiences in Italy can be summarised in five major areas of activity:

- | Funding and/or promotion of agriculture companies, with the aim of giving employment to disadvantaged groups, such as former-prisoners, drug users, migrants, refugees, etc.;
- | Rehabilitation and care in the agricultural sector for people with disabilities with a mainly socio-therapeutic purpose;
- | Recreation and quality of life (aimed at people with mild special, with social and recreational purposes, including special forms of rural social experiences of social peri-urban vegetable gardens for the elderly);
- | Education (aimed at educating young people on environmental and other issues);
- | Services for everyday life (e.g. agri-kindergarten or day care services for the elderly)

Alongside the five objectives outlined above, social agriculture projects promoted by Caritas in Italy add another social element: farming products can be used to support Caritas food service (canteens, food distribution, etc.).

Local communities and people excluded from the labour market (social gardens, support responsible tourism, recovery of land and production capacities, use of organic farming, production of food and use of funds for Caritas activities, activities and workshops for children and students).

## COOPERATIEF ONDERNEMEN IN NEDERLAND - COIN

### LEAD MEMBER ORGANISATION

CARITAS NETHERLANDS  
(CORDAID)

### Other partner organisations

SMHO

### Total beneficiaries

250

### weblink

A cooperative part-time entrepreneurship within cooperative business incubators is an innovative concept, launched in 2013 by the Tientjes Academy supported by Cordaid.

Cordaid Netherlands encourages cooperative entrepreneurship of people with low incomes. Together with partners from industry and the (local) community, Cordaid supports initiatives for cooperative entrepreneurship with knowledge and coaching, and access to expertise, networks and, if necessary, funding.

People, who may also be young, start working part-time. The members focus on their strengths and talents, the cooperative assists them with things like administration, training, supplies and housing. The entrepreneurs save a part of their turnover and declare their expenses; their spending power improves. They establish new social networks useful for their business and personal relations. The members can stay on welfare whilst making a turnover. Part of their turnover is paid out to the local authority to repay their welfare benefits.

It is a sustainable business model, which empowers people and is beneficial for the municipalities and the community. It promotes social participation and independence and reduction in public costs. Cooperative entrepreneurship offers people work and income perspectives and promotes social cohesion. By developing small enterprises they can leave poverty behind, participate more fully in society and contribute to the quality of life in their own neighbourhood or city.

The original project, launched in Breda with local funding and 13 people from very different professional backgrounds has now turned into a best practice example for the rest of Netherlands (and is now expanded to 25 different cooperatives in 4 different regions of the country).



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Caritas Europa

# LIST OF ACRONYMS

## ACRONYMS

<b>CESR</b>	Centre for Economic and Social Rights	<b>EP</b>	European Parliament	<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>CFR</b>	EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (2000)	<b>EPSR</b>	European Pillar of Social Rights	<b>OHCHR</b>	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
<b>CoE</b>	Council of Europe	<b>ESC</b>	Revised European Social Charter (1996) of the Council of Europe	<b>PES</b>	Public Employment Service
<b>CRPD</b>	Convention of Rights of People with Disabilities (2006)	<b>EU</b>	European Union	<b>SIP</b>	Social Investment Package
<b>CSR</b>	Country Specific Recommendations in the European Semester Process	<b>FRA</b>	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights	<b>UNCRC</b>	United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child
<b>EAPN</b>	European Anti-Poverty Network	<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organisation	<b>VET</b>	Vocational education and training
<b>EC</b>	European Commission	<b>ISCED</b>	International Standard Classification of Education	<b>YEI</b>	Youth Employment Initiative
<b>EESC</b>	European Economic and Social Committee	<b>NEET</b>	Not in Employment, Education or Training	<b>YG</b>	Youth Guarantee

## COUNTRY CODES

<b>AT</b>	Austria	<b>EL</b>	Greece	<b>MT</b>	Malta
<b>BE</b>	Belgium	<b>FI</b>	Finland	<b>NL</b>	The Netherlands
<b>BG</b>	Bulgaria	<b>FR</b>	France	<b>PT</b>	Portugal
<b>CY</b>	Cyprus	<b>IE</b>	Ireland	<b>RO</b>	Romania
<b>CZ</b>	Czech Republic	<b>IT</b>	Italy	<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>DE</b>	Germany	<b>LU</b>	Luxembourg		

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*"I dream of a Europe that is young, still capable of being a mother:  
a mother who has life because she respects life and offers hope for life..."*

*"I dream of a Europe where young people breathe the pure air of honesty,  
where they love the beauty of a culture and a simple life undefiled by the insatiable  
needs of consumerism, where getting married and having children is a responsibility  
and a great joy, not a problem due to the lack  
of stable employment."*

*Pope Francis, 2016,  
when he received the Charlemagne Prize*



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