

***A youth
perspective on
the European
Pillar of Social
Rights***



European welfare systems are currently not able to guarantee the social rights of young people with clear gaps in our systems in protecting youth.

Young people need to be better supported when the 'traditional' route to autonomy – finishing education, finding a job, moving out – is not achievable. This means better coverage and quality of both services and income support, including education, employment support, healthcare, care services and housing.

Equal access to education is not a reality across Europe today despite the right to education that is enshrined in many human rights frameworks.

Reduction in public spending on education at all stages, and in a formal and non-formal environment, has particularly affected young people in more vulnerable situations, such as young migrants, young women and girls, young people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and young people from a lower socioeconomic background.

Young people are experiencing a longer and more complex period of transition, with longer periods before finding a job, non-standard forms of employment, and lack of social protection in between jobs.

Young people are also expected to be more flexible in terms of mobility and new forms of work such as the platform economy. But this increase in flexibility has not been accompanied by any new guarantees in terms of security and protection of young people.

Non-standard employment has an impact on young people's access to social protection.

The contributory nature of our social protection systems is no longer compatible with the reality young people face when accessing the labour market. Across most EU countries, to receive unemployment benefits workers have to have contributed via employment for a minimum period of 12 months. This one-year period is extremely difficult to achieve for young people – who are likely to be either unemployed, or, employed in non-standard work. On top of this, Minimum Income Schemes tend to be inaccessible for those under a certain age.

Young people's rights to housing are equally under threat.

Most Member States' housing policies have been based on pushing young people to 'stay at home', instead of encouraging autonomy through supporting them to move out of family homes and make their own path. The age of leaving home is increasing, particularly in crisis-hit countries.

Health services are too far from young people's needs and everyday reality.

Certain groups face barriers, particularly young women and girls and LGBTIQ youth who are often victims of multiple-discrimination, particularly in accessing information and healthcare services related to sexual and reproductive health. Access to mental health services is also crucial, given that Intentional self-harm is the second most frequent cause of death among young people aged 15 –29.

Our vision

1. The Pillar should be ambitious in developing new safety nets for all young people. “Business as usual” is not protecting social rights nor tackling increasing inequalities that are detrimental to economic growth but even more to social harmony. The Pillar must be forward-thinking and transformative in setting up a coherent EU social strategy.

2. The Pillar should address the social rights of all Europeans. A more equal Europe has to happen with all Europeans. The European Youth Forum calls for the Pillar to apply to migrants who are in a particularly vulnerable situation when it comes to accessing their rights. Furthermore, the Pillar should be extended to all EU countries and not just the Eurozone: Social rights are under threat not only across the Eurozone but also across the EU as whole. A two-tier Europe should not be promoted.

3. The Pillar should be based on civil dialogue, through the involvement of civil society organisations, as key actors and partners at every stage of the policy process.

4. The Pillar must have a holistic approach to social inclusion – meaning not just employment. Social inclusion and social rights are not just about securing a quality job but about ensuring the full and active inclusion and participation of all throughout the life cycle.

5. The Pillar must link to existing EU processes and policy frameworks. The Pillar should integrate and use already existing instruments, such as the European Social Charter, and already existing benchmarks and policy frameworks, such as the ones highlighted in the EU2020 strategy.

6. The Pillar should be based on social investment. The need for investment in preventative measures, including investment in education and health, should be highlighted and linked, for instance, to the European Fund for Strategic Investment.

Our proposals

Equal opportunities and access to the labour market

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The Pillar of Social Rights must address the fact that equal access to education – a key social right – is not guaranteed across Europe. Through the European Semester, the EU must ensure Member States invest in education, on all levels and in all settings. This includes *investing in individualised, targeted support for more vulnerable groups* of young people as well as better recognising non-formal education (NFE) and NFE providers such as youth organisations as crucial actors in providing innovative and flexible education among people at risk of social exclusion. The Pillar must also link to existing legislation on this, namely, *the Equal Treatment Directive*, ensuring equal treatment outside employment, including in the area of education.

QUALITY INTERNSHIPS AND APPRENTICESHIPS

The Pillar should include a *framework on quality standards for internships and apprenticeships* – the European Quality Charter for Internships and Apprenticeships of the European Youth Forum can be used as a basis for this. A more systematic and efficient *monitoring of internships and apprenticeship national regulations* should be ensured at the European level.

THE YOUTH GUARANTEE

The Youth Guarantee recognises the right of all young people to a quality transition from education to work. Through the European Semester and through specific council recommendations, Member States should be encouraged to better reach out all young people, to guarantee the quality of offers under the Youth Guarantee and to *engage with youth organisations* to improve the scheme. Member States could also improve the implementation of the Youth Guarantee through the creation of *youth contact points*. These one-stop-shops should connect public and private institutions, and civil society organisations. They should deliver a wide range of services to offer comprehensive support through financial guidance, information about educational and employment opportunities. This would make the Youth Guarantee more be accessible to all.

YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Young people who are self employed or engaging in entrepreneurial activities must have *access to social and health protection* with no excessive administrative procedures or cost. Information on this must be readily available to young entrepreneurs.

Fair working conditions

MINIMUM WAGES

The European Youth Forum calls for equal pay for work of equal value and to end age-based discrimination in access to minimum wages by abolishing ‘youth minimum wages’ which are in place in several Member States (eg: The Netherlands, the UK). A European policy based on [Recommendations on Adequate Minimum Wages](#) could ensure the respect of the principle of non-discrimination here.

SECURE LABOUR CONTRACTS

The Pillar should put forward a [Directive on fair working conditions](#). This will ensure a set of enforceable rights for all workers, including equal treatment, social protection, including the ability to contribute to statutory pension schemes, protection in case of dismissal, health and safety protection, provisions on working time and rest time, freedom of association and representation, collective bargaining, collective action, access to training, and adequate information and consultation rights. Member States should also implement measures to [increase rights-awareness of young people](#) and their knowledge on relevant procedures to claim rights or seek redress on rights violations in the workplace.

In the specific case of the platform economy, the type of employment relationship must be fully recognised so that employers respect minimum standards. The EU could support [the development of a platform at the European level](#) that would involve all stakeholders and would be an intermediary between the different actors of the platform economy (job providers and job searchers), guaranteeing more transparency on working conditions and contractual arrangements and supporting Member States to develop legislation to protect workers in these new forms of work based on peer-to-peer learning and social dialogue.

Adequate and sustainable social protection

MINIMUM INCOME

Young people often have to rely on ‘restricted’ unemployment benefits’ or ‘Minimum income schemes’, with some restrictions based on age in some countries: ie: in France minimum income is only available to those over 25. A EU [Framework Directive on Adequate Minimum Income Schemes](#) would help to ensure equal access to minimum income schemes (no discrimination based on age). We call for a definition of adequacy at the European level, which ensures that the amount of income support received is actually enough to live a decent life.

UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

[Reform of contributory unemployment benefits](#) is necessary to ensure benefits are accessible to all young people. The system needs to be adapted to job-starters’ reality and to the proliferation of non-standard forms of employment through: decreasing the minimum period of contributions needed to access unemployment benefits; Internship and apprenticeship contracts that give the opportunity to the young person to start contributing to the unemployment benefit system.

PENSIONS

Through being engaged in non-standard work young people are unable or less able to participate in contributory statutory pension systems. Precariousness and lower wages for youth also stop young people from being able to save in private pension plans. We call for the introduction of [legislation that makes it easier for temporary workers to bank enough working time to reach adequate incomes at retirement](#). Internships and apprenticeships, as well as temporary work should be able to count as working time giving rise to pension entitlements. Pension systems based on intergenerational solidarity that ensure the well-being of the elderly without overburdening the young, must be put in place, so that it is not only one generation that must take the burden when reforms are necessary. The constructive participation of young people in decision-making on pension systems must start occurring.

PORTABILITY OF RIGHTS

Income-support, pension contributions and other welfare benefits must not be lost when moving to work in another country or when moving back to the country of origin. We call for the regulation on [coordination of European Social Security systems](#) to be better implemented.

HOUSING

The EU should encourage Member States to recognise and address the difficulties that young people have in making their transition to independent living. Young people should be supported through rent deposit schemes that can help them to access rental accommodation or through appropriate rental regulation to ensure rent is affordable. Furthermore, through the European Semester, Member States should be encouraged to invest in [national youth housing strategies with a focus on prevention and an independence-supporting approach](#) to support, not discourage, young people to move into independent living when they want to. This should include [non-conditional access to housing allowances](#) for all young people. Youth homelessness should be addressed through a 'Housing First' policy. If a young person does become homeless, they should benefit from a [comprehensive range of services](#) aimed at re-integrating them into their community as quickly as possible.

DISABILITY

Young Europeans with disabilities should be supported to live independently through Personal Assistance allocations, provided on an individual needs assessment, and supported jobs to ease their access to the labour market. In order to fight stereotypes and to ensure that the reality of young disabled people is well apprehended in all policies - beyond welfare, [people with disabilities should be better included in policy making at the European level.](#)

HEALTH

European Member States should be encouraged to guarantee **individual preventative care services to be accessible early on**, including regular mandatory medical inspections in early childhood. **Youth responsive health systems** should be designed with young people, they should guarantee easy access to information and consultation from health-care providers based on the principles of confidentiality and tolerance, especially when related to sexuality and mental health.

GENDER EQUALITY AND WORK LIFE BALANCE

The EU must encourage investment in **universal, free care services for children as well as the elderly** as a key way of dealing with gender inequality, work-life balance as well as the ageing demographic. **Parental leave** that is fully paid, or equal to at least 80-90 per-cent of the parent's salary should be put forward on the EU level with the Commission's package on work-life balance. Specific measures should target single-parent families that are at higher risk of poverty, including: increased support in (re)accessing employment; tax credits to support low income single-parent households; tailored advice on positive parenting for first time parents. There must also be a better **enforcement of EU legislation protecting all people from discrimination** in employment and occupation including in recruitment conditions and selection criteria and on the grounds of pregnancy or applying for maternity, paternity or parental leave.
