

Youth employment: the EU measures to make it work



Young people working in a coworking space. Photo by CoWomen on Unsplash

Youth unemployment remains a key concern in Europe. Find out what measures the EU has put in place to help.

Employment and youth policies are the responsibility of member states. However, the EU has launched a number of initiatives complementing national policies as part of its measures to create a more [social Europe](#).

This support focuses on funding youth employment programmes, improving the quality of apprenticeships and traineeships, offering international education and job opportunities and making it easier for young people to take part in volunteering projects.

Youth unemployment in numbers

The unsuccessful search for work and training opportunities creates feelings of isolation, dependence and uselessness in young people. Apart from this, there are negative effects on the economy and on an [ageing society](#).

Young people were amongst the hardest hit by the 2008 economic and financial crisis with the [unemployment rate of people under 25](#) in the EU peaking at almost 25% in early 2013 and levels of more than 50% in Greece and Spain. That had dropped to a record low of around 14% in 2019, but the [coronavirus pandemic](#) pushed it up to 19.1% in 2020. However, recently there were signs of improvement, with [youth unemployment down to 14.4% in April 2024](#).

Funding youth employment programmes

Part of the broader [Youth Employment Support Package](#), the reinforced [Youth Guarantee](#) is an EU initiative to give everyone under 30 a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.

The [Youth Employment Initiative](#) is the EU's main tool to help finance measures and programmes put in place by EU countries to carry out Youth Guarantee schemes, such as training and assistance for the young to find their first job, along with incentives for employers. The initiative especially supports regions in the EU that have a youth unemployment rate above 25%.

The Youth Employment Initiative was [integrated into the European Social Fund Plus \(ESF+\)](#), for the 2021-2027 period. EU countries with a rate of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) above the EU average should devote at least 12.5% of their ESF+ resources to young people.

Quality apprenticeships and traineeships

The [European Alliance for Apprenticeships](#) platform was launched to support the Youth Guarantee and improve the quality of apprenticeships in Europe.

In March 2024, the Commission proposed [new rules to avoid the exploitation of trainees across the EU](#). Earlier, in June 2023, Parliament had called for [legislation ensuring quality traineeships across the EU](#).

International opportunities

In the EU, member states are responsible for [higher education policies](#) and training systems. The EU can help by coordinating between them and support their efforts through funding or [policy cooperation](#).

Initiated in 1999, the intergovernmental [Bologna Process](#) has facilitated the mutual recognition of diplomas in higher education across 48 countries. Today, there is a European process of **non-binding mutual recognition** of bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees.

In 2018, to promote the recognition process further, EU countries adopted a [recommendation](#) on promoting the mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education diplomas across borders. Member states are encouraged to take steps to introduce the **automatic recognition** of diplomas **by 2025**.

Different tools that can help to support recognition of qualifications and facilitate cross-border validation of training and lifelong learning certificates already exist in the EU. These include:

- The [European Qualifications Framework](#) is a non-legally binding tool that helps to compare qualifications systems in Europe
- [Europass](#) is a set of key documents, including a Europe-wide standardised CV template and language passport, that makes it easier to compare your education and work experience internationally
- The [European Credit System for Vocation Education and Training](#) was established to facilitate validation and recognition of work-related skills and knowledge acquired in different systems and countries

The EU aims to build a [European Education Area](#) to enable all young people to receive quality education and training and find jobs across the continent.

The EU's programme in the fields of education, training, youth and sport is called [Erasmus+](#), focusing on mobility and transnational cooperation. Started as a student exchange programme in 1987, it has become an umbrella programme covering school and higher education, vocational education and training, adult learning, youth non-formal and informal learning, and sports.

Erasmus+ enables students to study abroad, provides teaching and training opportunities for staff working in the education sector, supports traineeships and youth exchanges. Organisations, such as schools, universities, youth organisations, can also receive funding to create strategic partnerships and alliances with organisations from other countries.

The new [Erasmus+ programme for 2021-2027](#) was adopted by Parliament 18 May 2021. MEPs secured an additional €1.7 billion in funding during negotiations with the Council, which brings the total budget to more than **€28 billion**. This is nearly double the funding for the previous programme. It focuses on social inclusion, the green and digital transitions and enabling more disadvantaged people to participate.



Next Erasmus+ programme

https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/new-erasmus-budget-to-boost-mobility-and-opportunities-for-youth_N01-PUB-190225-ERAS_ev

Volunteering opportunities

Officially launched at the end of 2016, the **European Solidarity Corps** finances volunteering activities, traineeships and jobs for young people in projects benefitting communities and people around Europe until the end 2020. By September 2019, more than 161,000 young people had already registered to take part.

In May 2021 MEPs approved the **new programme for 2021-2027**. It now includes humanitarian aid and will be a stand-alone volunteering programme with its own budget for the first time.

Find out more about EU social policies

- [How the EU improves workers' rights and working conditions](#)
- [Reducing unemployment: what does the EU do?](#)
- [Improving public health: EU measures explained](#)
- [The Parliament's fight for gender equality](#)

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[Fact sheet: EU youth policy](#)

[European Youth Portal](#)

[Study: youth employment initiative](#)

[At a glance: education and young people in post-Covid19 Europe](#)