

# Ending the permanent crisis for youth: Solutions exist!

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Young people have been the most affected by the crises of the last 15 years, both socially and economically. These crises have left deep scars on the whole society, but particularly on the young generation which risks becoming a lost generation. Society owes them. 2022 the 'European Year of Youth' has failed to propose any concrete policy measures to improve the situation of young people. IndustriAll Europe's Youth Working Group is once again ringing the alarm bells to warn against wasting the next generation of industrial workers. Tools to improve the situation exist and the urgency to act is here. We only need political will to act now!

## Uneven Recovery: Young Workers Have Been Left Behind in All Past Crises!

Young workers have been severely impacted by all three previous major crises. The 2008-09 financial crisis, which was followed by the 2012 recession (that Europe induced itself though misguided austerity measures) hit young people the most. The frugal economic policies imposed across Europe at that time led to an explosion in youth unemployment, which continues to be more than double than the overall unemployment rate in some countries even today (Eurostat, July 2022 [data](#)):

- **The EU youth unemployment average is 14% compared to the 6% overall unemployment.**
- **The countries which continue to top the list are still the ones which were hardest hit by the Troika: Greece (28,6%), Spain (26,9%), Italy (24%), Romania (22,7%).**
- **But this problem persists also in other countries: Sweden (19,9%), Slovakia (19,5%), France (17%).**

In the same time, precarious (non-standard) employment has been [reported](#) as the norm for the 'lucky' young workers who did manage to find a job:

- **47% of young workers have a temporary contract, compared to 10% of overall workers.**
- **1 in 10 young workers are in a temporary contract non-voluntarily.**
- **31% of young workers (women particularly) have a part time job in order to make ends meet.**

Long and repeated periods of unemployment, coupled with precarious working conditions, are a toxic recipe for a permanently scarred generation. Being scarred means that today's generation will be more inclined to accept low quality and low paid jobs, due to fear of not getting anything else. This will only play into the hands of precarious employers (like the growing phenomena of platform work, which mostly employs young workers) and of right-wing populist.

The COVID-19 pandemic was yet another slap to the faces of young people. Not only were they left behind in the recovery from the 2008-09 financial crisis (in a situation of unstable, low-quality employment and with inadequate help due to underfunded social services), but now they were also asked to stay at home in order to (justifiably) protect the more vulnerable older generations against COVID-19. The results clearly show that young people have been bearing the brunt of yet another crisis:

- **61% of young Europeans reported mental health concerns** (recent 2022 [study](#)).
- **Young people are the group most affected by poverty** (2021 [reported](#) EU average of persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion is **27%**, **out of which 21% are between 18 and 24 years old**).

On a more positive note, policymakers did seem to learn from some of the mistakes of the past 2008-09 financial crisis and refrained from austerity during the COVID-19 crisis. However, even though the EU's Recovery Plan was named 'NextGeneration EU', measures to support young people were to a large extent inadequately included in most National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs, in which Member States had to explain how they would spend the bulk of money available to them). IndustriAll Europe's Youth Working Group already [warned](#) about the risk of losing the next generation of industrial workers, as they have been forgotten in the drafting stage of many NRRPs. While the final versions of the NRRPs improved, a recent 2022 [CEPS study](#) highlights their shortcomings. We are concerned that investments in education are particularly focused on the early stages of education. These essential investments should take greater account of the real difficulties encountered by young workers when they enter the labour market, such as skills mismatches. Below are some examples:

- **Germany:** 5% of resources are directed towards 'policies for the next generation'. But these are directed to an Education Platform that will support the development of skills and competencies throughout individual educational pathways. Critics highlight that this is not enough in order to address the structural challenges for young workers.
- **Belgium:** 7% of resources go towards the pillar "policies for the next generation". However, these are mainly dedicated to the digitalisation of education and to prevent early school leaving.
- **Italy:** directs 10% for the next generation. However, there are concerns around the two major labour market initiatives (Employment Guarantee and the New Skills Plan), as critics consider

them vague with respect to governance, duration, and monitoring. Unfortunately, the active labour market policies are not directed towards supporting young workers.

- **Portugal:** invests 8% in the next generation. However, besides investments in education, there is not an actual reform of active labour market policies, nor reforms dedicated to graduate labour market entries to younger workers (24-34 years).
- **Slovakia:** 14% goes to the future generation. But the main reforms will be in the financing of pre-school education, whereas the measures do not seem particularly targeted to young workers. As regards the labour market policies, the measures do not address the high NEET (not in employment, nor education, nor training) rate in an adequate manner, whereas they perpetuate the low investments in active labour market policies.
- **France:** 15% for the next generation. Nevertheless, the plan is a source of concern for education, social policies, and the labour market since it lacks proposals for investments and reforms in the field of education. The main issue is that the French labour market remains segmented, with high unemployment and inequalities.

Furthermore, a recent [report](#) on employment and social trends in Europe, highlights that the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic was uneven. **People below 30-year-old still did not recover** and continue to struggle to enter the labour market or to find positions adequate for their skills. Given their vulnerable situation, young individuals are more prone to experience challenging social and financial circumstances.

The current cost-of-living and energy crises are making matters worse. As young people are the group which is mostly at risk of poverty and social exclusion, as well as in precarious, unstable and low-paid jobs, the erosion of purchasing power and the record energy and food bills are yet another blow to them.

### **Solutions Exist: Young Workers Need a Quality Job Guarantee!**

The irony is that the permanent crisis in which young people seem to be stuck for the past years is taking place in a context of massive skills shortages and a tight labour market. The twin digital and green transitions will only aggravate the skills challenge. Recent [data](#) shows that, while the number of employed people in the EU increased by 0.5% in the first quarter of 2022, the vacancy rate also continued to rise, creating a tight labour market with huge skilled labour shortages. Those statistics show that there is space to act in the labour market. To tackle skills shortages, industriAll Europe is demanding fair apprenticeship with a retention guarantee, as well as training and upskilling measure to anticipate the twin transition.

Bridging the gap between education and employment seems to be a huge challenge in many countries. The graph below shows the employment rate of recent graduates from vocational programmes across Europe in 2020. It becomes clear that in general the countries with the lowest employment rate of

recent graduates, are also the ones [reported](#) to be mostly affected by brain drain (young, qualified people leaving their home countries in search for better working conditions abroad). Türk Metal reports massive brain drain, as there are no quality jobs for young graduates in Turkey. Hence, the lack of attractive and quality job offers for young graduates is one of the main reasons for this situation.

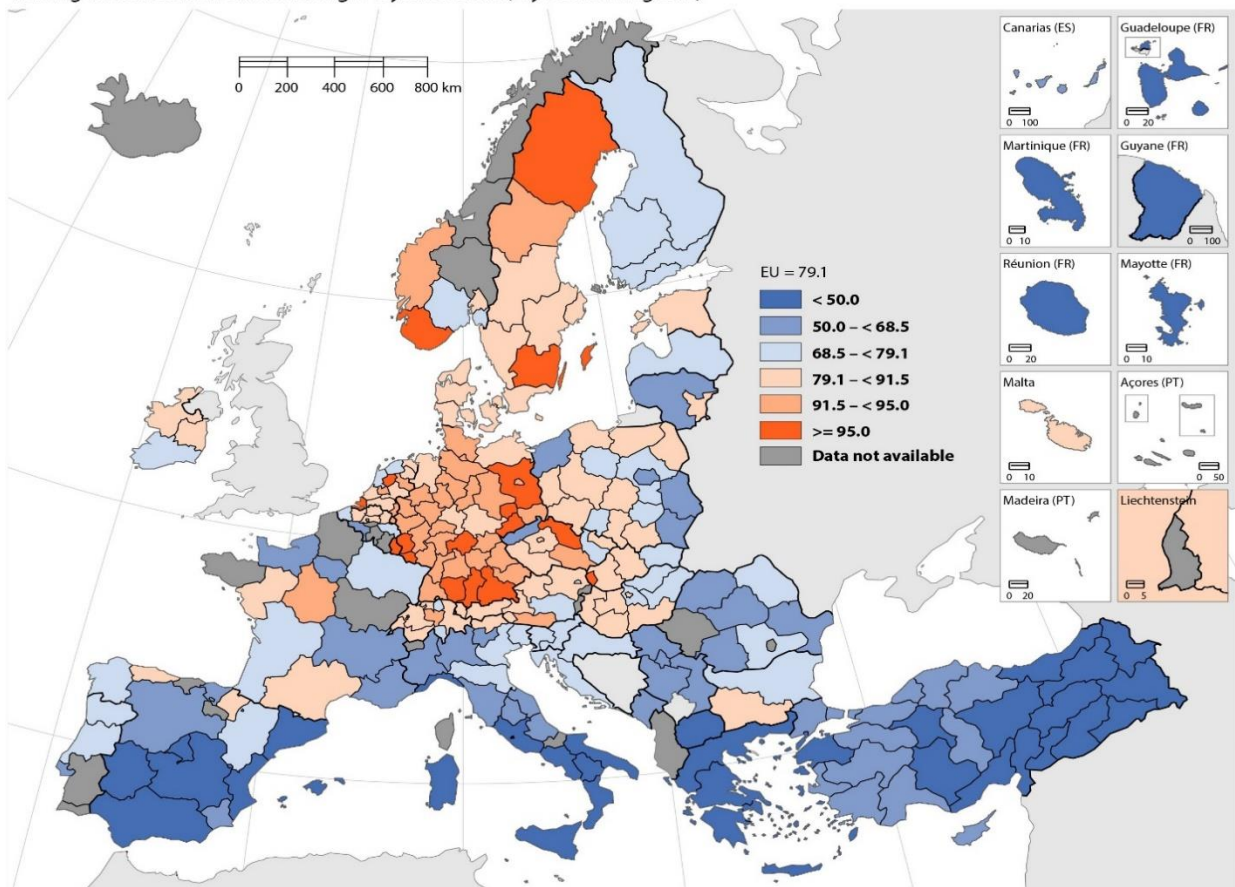
Furthermore, even though the graph shows that in some countries the employment rate of recent graduates is very high, it is important to note that the issue of labour shortages persist also there. For example, in **Germany**, half of the companies [reported](#) labour shortages in August 2022. In industry, IG Metall reported that the 20% cut in apprenticeship places during the COVID-19 crisis, has never been restored, despite massive public support for companies.

**Belgium** stands out as a good example of the added value of collective bargaining for young workers. There the trade unions have managed to solve the issue of special ‘youth wages’, which are below minimum wages, by avoiding this unfair treatment in most sectoral collective agreements. We need more examples like this across Europe, especially given the reports from VASAS that, in **Hungary**, major automotive companies try to keep wages very low particularly for young people.

Employers must also shoulder their responsibility and offer quality apprenticeships with retention possibility if they wish to have a qualified labour force. At the same time, policymakers must couple public support to companies with social conditionality in order to ensure that that the money is not spent on precarious jobs or dividend payouts to shareholders.

## Employment rate of recent graduates from vocational programmes, 2020

(% of graduates aged 20-34 years with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary vocational educational attainment having left education and training 1-3 years earlier, by NUTS 2 regions)



As covered by ISCED levels 3 and 4. Bulgaria, Greece and France: regional data are presented at NUTS 1 level. Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Iceland and Liechtenstein: single regions at this level of detail. EU aggregate and Germany: 2019 data.

There are several other regions with 2019 and 2018 data (check the article's "for more information").

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Cartography: Eurostat – IMAGE, 10/2021

[ec.europa.eu/eurostat](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat) 

Meanwhile, IndustriAll-BNS from **Romania** reports that young people are trained based on outdated curricula in the public education system. This only exaggerates the mismatch of skills in industry and results in a waste of public money on outdated education, as well as frustration for both young workers and employers. EU policymakers and national governments need to do more to ensure good quality and up-to-date education and training that will automatically lead to quality jobs.

To tackle the skills challenge, the European Commission has declared **2023 as the European Year of Skills**. We deeply hope that this exercise will bear more fruit than the 2022 the European Year of Youth, which was nothing more than a communications exercise, during which a couple of EU Commissioners spoke at public events with young people without any follow up.

IndustriAll Europe is demanding job security for young people and fairer opportunities. Social dialogue and collective bargaining are the right tools to include young workers into into the decision-making

process to better target youth policies and employment conditions. The European and national policymakers, as well as employers and trade unions have the responsibility to ensure that the young generation can access quality jobs and get equal treatment. Society owes young people.

#### IndustriAll Europe Youth demands towards policymakers:

- The ban of unpaid internships
- Ensure quality apprenticeships (paid to ensure decent living, up-to-date curricula, mentoring)
- A Job Guarantee to ensure job security for young workers and fairer opportunities
- Ensure life-long learning that give access to re-skilling and up-skilling in view of the twin transitions
- Social conditionality in all public funding (to ensure that companies which receive public funding provide an adequate number of quality apprenticeships that lead to good quality jobs and access to life-long training; furthermore, supported companies must respect trade union right and engage constructively in collective bargaining at all levels in all countries).

#### IndustriAll Europe Youth demands towards employers:

- To provide adequate numbers of quality apprenticeships (paid, mentoring) with the possibility of retention
- To offer attractive and quality jobs to with access to life-long training to young workers
- Ensure the right to training for all workers, regardless of age or seniority, in order to prepare for the twin transition
- To engage in collective bargaining and social dialogue at all levels and in all countries (to ensure fair and equal treatment of young workers and apprentices)

### Trade Unions, Wake Up: Young Workers Demand More Involvement at All Levels!

Europe's most extensive youth-focused research recently [showed](#) that **the majority of young people in Europe (67%) think that the EU should involve their generation more in European public affairs.** This brings further proof to today's young generation's commitment to social and climate justice (as we have seen high youth participation in movements like 'Black Lives Matter', 'Women's March' or 'Fridays for Future'). Moreover, the same study also shows that **young peoples' current top worries are:**

- **Jobs and future employment (including concerns regarding income)**
- Poverty and inequality
- Emotional or psychological well-being

Given the precarious situation of many young people across Europe, these results are not surprising. However, industriAll Europe's Youth Working Group would like to point out the irony of the current situation: **Most young people are worried about employment, and they want to be involved, but in the same time trade unions have difficulties to get them on board in many countries.**

**With the adoption of its [Youth Action Plan](#) in May 2022, industriAll Europe and its members organisations committed to improve the situation. The Youth Working Group has been working on the implementation of this Plan at all levels. Annex I shows the current state-of-play of the 12 National Youth Action Plans developed by the young members of industriAll Europe at the Seminar dedicated to this topic in June 2022 in Cluj, Romania. The next steps will be taken at the follow-up workshop in December 2022 in Madrid, Spain.**

Unfortunately, **some of the young unionists find it hard to be heard back home**, as they did not receive support for their plans. This is very disappointing, and we hope that a change of mind will occur soon. Trade unions need to make space for young unionists and their ideas. A fresh and modern approach is urgently needed, especially when taking into account the reports from our young members that in many countries (like France, Romania, Turkey, Hungary, Poland etc.) young people find it difficult to trust trade unions. **For the trade union movement to rejuvenate, it is necessary to take our young members' ideas on board**, because they understand their own generation better. **Trade unions that are already doing this have experienced positive results which need to be replicated.**

The results of the **study carried out on behalf of industriAll Europe by ETUI's Senior Researcher Kurt Vandaele** brings evidence to these claims and sets the compass for further action. The research analyses union strategies towards recruiting, organising, and representing young workers among the affiliates of IndustriAll Europe. Its focus is put upon the possibilities and internal structures for the participation and integration of young union members within those affiliates. The report is based on an extensive survey of members of the Executive Committee and the Youth Working Group. The key outcomes show that:

- the share of young members is on average smaller than the share of members older than 54 years
- in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, the share of young workers is low and declining, whereas the share of members older than 54 years is high and increasing
- on average, unions in Nordic countries have the highest share of young members, while youth membership and members older than 54 years seem to be both stable
- the Covid-19 pandemic has negatively affected youth membership, especially in Central Europe, whereas membership of those older than 54 years is stable
- about 90% of the respondents report that one or more youth-only bodies are in place in their trade union. There is a widespread view among them that their union should prioritise the strengthening of the representation of young workers. **This looks highly necessary as the**

**current internal capacity of the youth-only structures is perceived as relatively weak, especially regarding their level of autonomy, their budget and the number of staff.**

- **a youth-only structure with a weak internal capacity is less likely to identify the interests and needs of the young workers, and this holds especially true for unions in CEE-countries.**
- youth committees at the national level and formal networks are very common, yet both are perceived as only *relatively* effective; whereas separate departments or sections for young members with full-time officer(s) for youth have the highest effectiveness score, but only about half of the respondents report that they are present in their union.
- **the interests and needs of young workers are barely mainstreamed within union decision-making structures.** A prerequisite for exercising influence is the internal capacity of the youth-only structure: the stronger this capacity, the stronger the influence on decision-making. **Structures marked by a weak internal capacity are solely ‘cosmetic devices’, this is being formally present but unable to have an impact.**
- **the internal capacity of youth-only structures interacts with the status of the youth representation within the executive committee or council.** Weak youth-only structures have often no such representation, whereas intermediate strong structures have a representation though without voting rights, and robust youth-only structures have voting rights. **The power of youth-only structures can be ‘boosted’ if young workers have seats in the executive committee with voting rights; having a non-voting representation is less impactful.**
- unions are organising more activities if youth-only structures are strong or robust and perceived as more influential on union-decision-making, and if there is youth representation in the executive committee, especially with voting rights.
- **while it is crucial to incentivise unionisation at an early stage with dedicated special arrangements for students and young workers, only a few respondents report that their trade unions has such a special arrangement in place** (for the unemployed, students or young workers). **Such arrangements are far less in place in Southern Europe and CEE-countries.**
- most respondents report that their union has a dedicated plan or strategy for increasing membership, with recruitment campaigns mostly targeting companies and industries, and less so specific groups of workers. **Dedicated recruitment campaigns targeting young workers have been launched by about half of the unions in the survey sample in the last five years, with unions from CEE-countries being less likely to organise such campaigns.**
- about one in four respondents reports that their union is never or only yearly discussing recruitment and organising issues at the executive committee or council.

**Based on the results of this study, the Youth Working Group is putting forward a series of demands to the Executive Committee.**

IndustriAll Europe Youth Working Group demands towards trade unions:

- **Implement industriAll Europe’s Youth Action Plan ([DE](#) [EN](#) [FR](#))**



- **Support your young members in the implementation of their National Youth Action Plans**
- **Encourage regular participation of the Chair (and potentially other 2-3 representatives) of the Youth Working Group at industriAll Europe's Executive Committee**
- **Consider giving voting rights to the youth representative in industriAll Europe's Executive Committee at the next Congress in 2025**

**The work has only started. Together we can rejuvenate the trade union movement for a strong and bright future for workers and their unions. We count on the Executive Committee's support for the youth work!**

## Annex I: National Youth Action Plans

Country – Union – <i>National Youth Action Plan</i>	Action Plan	State-of-Play of Implementation
Belgium - ACV-CSC METEA  <i>'Dual learning youth committee'</i>	The Action Plan includes different steps. A first part consists of research on young people and dual learning. The second part aims at inviting those target groups to future events, in order to bring together the dual-learning students in our sector for an educational day and to unionise them.	The National Action Plan is well structured, and the implementation is in progress.
Bosnia and Herzegovina - SMFBiH ?  <i>'Linked together for better future'</i>	The Action Plan is structure to reach different goals: 1. Meeting with every new employee; 2. Make online presentations (websites, intranet portals and accounts on social media) and make & send newsletters; 3. Make questioners; 4. Looking for common points with youth movements; 5. Organizing team events or excursions;	An intranet portal was created, as well as newsletters for the branch union Bosnalijek jsc.
France – FGMM CFTD  <i>'Take the Power! Prends le pouvoir!'</i>	The Action Plan on youth involves two levels: regional and national. At regional level: frequent meetings to address current problem. At national level: meetings twice a year to implement and developed the youth agenda of the trade union.	The structure is well defined, and the project will start as soon as possible.
France – CFE CGC Energy  <i>'eBullescence Seminar'</i>	Seminar to attract young members: The idea was to inform young people about the importance of trade unions and turn them into activists.	To organise the seminar, the trade union held different preparatory weekly meetings. The seminar was a success. It lasted 3 days in September 2022 in Paris and brought

	Training for potential talents will be provided.	together around 150 young members below 35 years old.
Hungary – VDSZ <i>‘érdeked! érdekel? Érdekel az Érdeked?’</i>	The plan is to participate in job fairs or university expos, where young people can be informed about the work of trade unions and the benefits of joining one.	The trade union participated successfully at the Budapest university fair in September 2022. This needs to be follow-ed up.
Hungary – Vasas <i>‘Campus22’</i>	To attract more people, the union decided to have a stand in one of the biggest festivals in Hungary and to do a survey. Activities planned: 1. Flyers 2. Competitions 3. Sweepstakes, Photowall, table football, stunts on stilts 4. Discussions about trade union work, labour law 5. Free consultancy	The festival stand was successful with a lot of participation by student and among them, 143 took part in the questionnaire. This needs to be followed-up. All people who gave their details must be contacted to become members.
Poland – Solidarność <i>‘Networked relationships , network of relationships’</i>	The idea would be to have in every factory a young unionist. In order to do so, they propose to go to schools to promote and provide more information regarding trade union events and activities.	The Action plan is well structured and the implementation is in progress.
Romania – FSLI PEROL ENERGIE <i>‘Innovative ideas. Get involved!’</i>	Communicating with young members via the trade union mobile app in order to activate them.	The implementation is in progress.
Romania – MetaRom <i>‘ACTIVITATI PENTRU ATRAGEREA TINERILOR IN ORGANIZATIA NOASTRA SINDICALA’</i>	The Action Plan proposes: 1. Activities to attract young people (sports, cultural, outdoor, etc.); 2. Popularize these activities through flyers, facebook page, meetings with young people in the factory; 3. The activities will take place outside working hours and during the weekly rest;	The implementation is in progress.
Slovakia – OZ KOVO	The Action Plan related aims to use social media in order to	The implementation is in progress.

<i>'Ready for fight in media battleground!'</i>	reach young people. The organisation of workshops and courses are planned, including with the collaboration of foreign unions to inspire each other.	
Turkey - Hak-Is OZ IPLIK-IS	The first step of the Youth Action Plan was to find out the actual number of young members present in the union. Following that, the idea was to notify the branches and appoint/elect representatives according to the majority of young members in the companies.	The result of the questionnaire was that 25.8% of 44,000 members are young members. Follow-up must be developed.