

Prof. Dr. Helmut Willems
Dipl. Soz. Andreas Heinen
Dipl. Päd. Christiane Meyers

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University of Luxembourg
Integrative Research Unit on Social
and Individual Development (INSIDE)
L-7201 Walferdange
Luxembourg

**Between endangered integration and political disillusion:
The situation of young people in Europe**

Report for the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities
of the Council of Europe

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1. Introduction

The 20th anniversary of the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life 2012 and the youth protest demonstrations and youth violence in many European countries, such as in Spain, Greece, Italy, Great Britain, France, Bulgaria and Russia in 2011 and 2012 are framing this report on youth in Europe.

The report's main task is to review the state of youth participation in Europe and ask the question: what's going wrong? This scientific report is grounded on the central theoretical and analytical perspective that any interpretation and evaluation of the political interest and participation of young people has to take into account the general situation of young people in European societies. It is based on a review of statistical data, scientific research and official policy documents and describes the situation of youth in Europe (Countries of the European Union as well as of the 47 Council of Europe Member States).¹

2. The situation of European Youth in an ageing society in crisis

2.1 The social and democratic implications of an ageing society for the situation of the younger generations

The social and demographic structure of European societies is facing serious changes. Both the ageing and the impending decline of population can be observed. This goes back to the higher life-expectations and the lower fertility rate in most European countries.

The age group of young people between 15 and 29 years represents just a fifth of the today's general population of Europe with a projected share for 2050 of not more than 15%. The projections for 2050 indicate that the old age dependency ratio² will nearly double. The number of economically inactive people over 65 will then represent more than 50% of the number of 15-64 year olds (European Commission, 2009, p. 10).

This indicates that society is reshaping and that younger generations in particular will have to face the subsequent economic and social changes. Youth will be confronted with higher burdens, concerning the financial transfer to the older generations. Furthermore, when young people will become a minority in an ageing society, their influence within the democratic system will certainly decrease. Youth related subjects and needs may lose weight in political debates and the decision-making process which is oriented towards majorities. The perceived political marginalization could lead to political frustration and distrust among the young people (Sloam, 2011c) (see also article 3).

¹ We have used only comparative data to describe the situation of youth in Europe. Data were not available for all countries. We want to thank Jean-Claude Zeimet, Dieter Ferring and Joanne Hunting for their helpful comments.

² The dependency ratio is an age-population ratio of those typically not in the labour force and those typically in the labour force. The old-age dependency ratio is the ratio of the number of elderly persons at an age when they are generally economically inactive divided by the number of persons of working age.

2.2 The increasing importance of education and training

Education and training have gained importance in today's knowledge-based economy. The globalized economy requires a high-skilled working force and people which are "able to renew their skills continuously through lifelong learning so as to secure employment over time, and participate and integrate fully in a changing society." (European Commission, 2009, p. 15).

This trend is reflected by the number of young people enrolled in tertiary education or holding higher educational degrees that has risen continuously during the last years. The number of tertiary students in the European Union has increased to almost 19 million in 2006 (an increase by 25% since 1998). The number of graduates has risen considerably as well. In 2006 there were 1 million more graduates per year than in 2000 (European Commission, 2009, p. 18).

Today the share of young people with high educational qualification is as high as by no generation before. Data show that "29% of young Europeans aged between 25 and 29 have completed higher education, against 18% of the population aged between 55 and 59. The same trend exists for secondary education: slightly more than 50% of the 25-29 age group has finished secondary education compared to 42% of the 55-59 age group" (European Commission, 2009, p. 22). European youths are prepared to meet the challenges of the globalized labour markets in the 21st century and show a high readiness and willingness to invest in good education and qualification.

Nevertheless, higher qualification does not automatically lead to an easier and secure integration into the labour market. Young people are faced with a quite paradoxical situation: Although young people are on average better qualified than older employees, their chances to secure a position corresponding with their qualifications have lowered in comparison to earlier generations (Hadjar & Becker, 2006).

On the one hand this is attributable to the fact that an expansion of education leads to an inflation and devaluation of higher qualifications (Willems et al., 2011).

But on the other hand there are two more important factors to explain the endangered transition into the labour market: the recent economic crisis that causes many job losses, and the changing recruitment policy of business companies. This policy is characterized by a reduction of permanent job contracts and an increase of fixed-term contracts. These trends have exacerbated youth's transitions into a stable job dramatically; it becomes obvious by the increase of non-standard forms of work such as fixed-term contracts, temporary agency work or part-time work (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2011b, p. 12).

2.3 Changing transitions from school - to - work and higher risks

Taking up gainful employment is considered to be a crucial step in young people's personal development and identity formation, and is an important basis for securing one's livelihood, participating and positioning oneself in society. For young people in modern societies, integration into the labour market is one of the key development tasks on their way to autonomy and independence (Willems et al., 2011).

The revised European Social Charter underscores that "everyone shall have the opportunity to earn his living in an occupation freely entered upon" and that everybody has the right to work (Council of Europe - Conseil d'Europe, 1996).

Today's youth transitions to work and adult life are more difficult. Compared to former decades, it takes longer to establish independent households; many young people even in their twenties are economically reliant on their families and their social networks. Failing transitions with repeated phases of unemployment in many cases lead to a cooling out of motivations, aspirations and of hope for a better future (Bradley & Devadason, 2008).

These higher risks for young people's integration into the labour market are strongly related to structural and individual factors as well. On the one hand the situation on the labour market has changed radically. The labour market's flexibilization, job losses and the higher qualification demands for employment make a secure and permanent integration of young people more difficult (see article 2.2). On the individual level it's first and foremost the lack of educational degrees or a rather low educational level of a minority of young people that leads to difficulties. The chance to gain access to stable employment is considerably reduced for young people with low qualification or without any educational degree; but it has become difficult even for an increasing number of highly qualified young people.

2.4 A generation between unemployment and precarious jobs

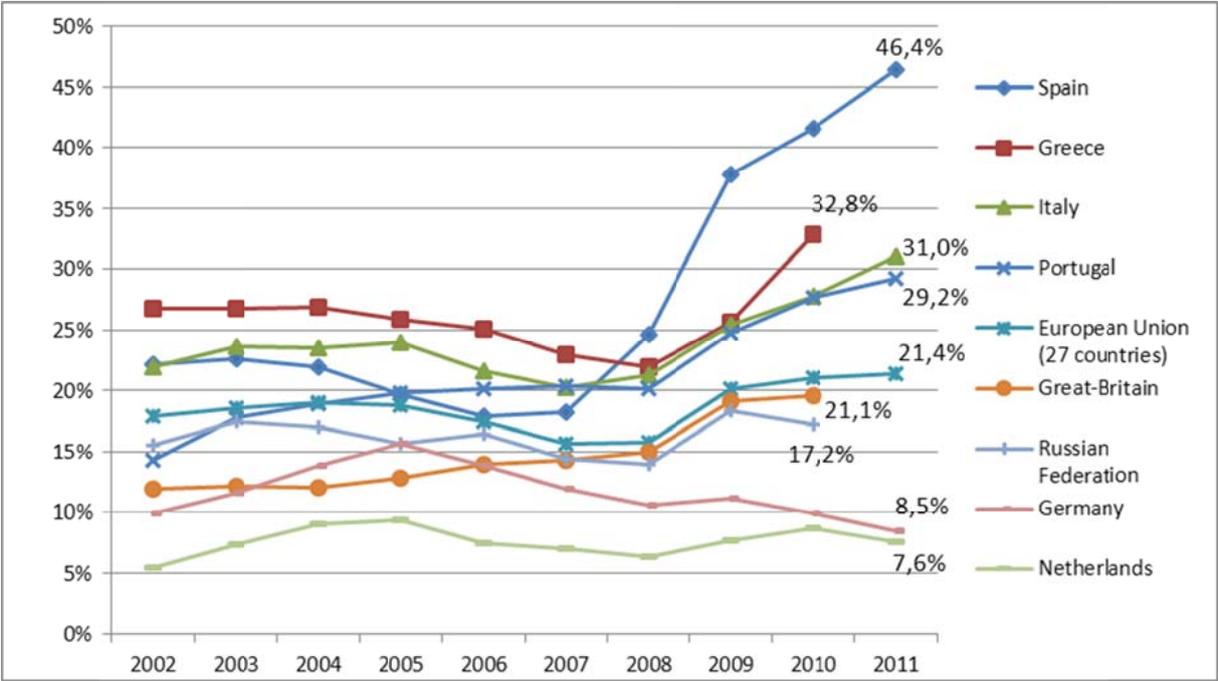
2.4.1 The increase of youth unemployment in Europe

The rate of youth unemployment is the key indicator to describe the problematic situation of young people. Figure 1 shows that until 2007 the youth unemployment rate remained quite stable or even declined for most European countries. This development can partially be explained by the creation of thousands of new jobs created in the EU between 1996 and 2006 (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2011b, p. 12).

However, since 2008 a substantial increase in youth unemployment can be observed in Europe. On the European Union level, the average rate is at 21.4% and the overall number of young unemployed reached an historic high of 5.5 million in 2011. Nevertheless, significant differences between countries have to be considered. Whereas the Netherlands (7.6%) and Germany (8.5%) record a youth unemployment rate below the 10% mark, many European countries are reporting a rate well above 20%. For some countries in severe economic crisis, unprecedented peaks can be observed; the highest in Spain with a share of 46.4%, followed by Greece (2011: 32.8%), Italy (31.0%) and Portugal (29.2%).

Other Eastern European countries show high youth unemployment rates as well. Whereas Turkey records a rather moderate level (19.7%) the rate in Croatia is at 35.8% (2011, Eurostat), in Serbia at 42.5% (2009): in Georgia it is at 35.5% (2008) and in Bosnia and Herzegovina at 47.3% (2008).³

Figure 1: Youth unemployment rate, in % (less than 25 years)



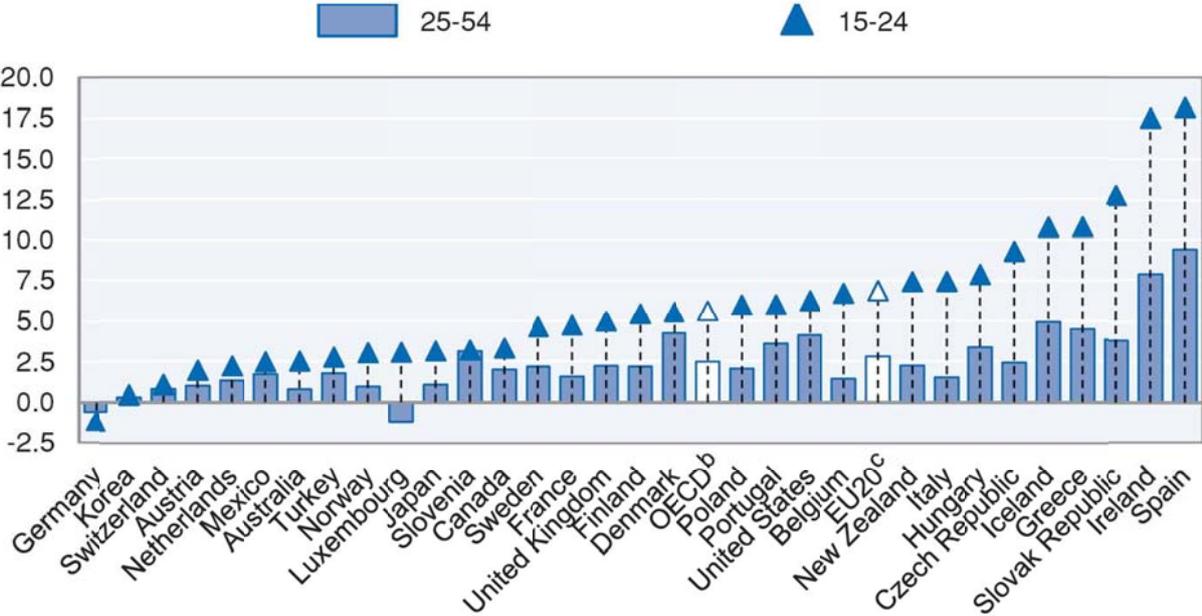
(Source: Eurostat, 2011; OECD, 2011; United Nations Statistics Division, 2011; for 2011: no data available for Greece, Great-Britain and Russian Federation; Italy: data for December 2011, seasonally adjusted)

The job losses and the decline of new jobs caused by the economic crisis hits not only the younger generations. In most countries, all age groups record a steady increase of unemployment rates since the crisis begun (European Commission, 2011). Nevertheless there is evidence, that young people are concerned by unemployment to a considerable higher degree.

Figure 2 shows the increase of unemployment rates (percentage points) between 2008 and 2010 for OECD countries. Bars represent the 25-54 age group, arrows mark the values for the 15-24 age group. The distance in between illustrates that the increase of unemployment rates is sharply higher for the 15-24 age group than for the people aged between 25 and 54. In 2011 youth unemployment is about 2.5 times higher as for the rest of the population (<25 years: 21.4%; 25-74 years: 8.3%) (Eurostat, 2011).

³ The data are the most recent data available; the youth unemployment rates for Serbia, Georgia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina are retrieved from the UN-Millennium Development Goals Database.

Figure 2: Increasing of unemployment rates (Percentage points difference from 2008-Q2 to 2010-Q2)



(Source: retrieved from OECD, 2010, p. 13)

The longer young people are unemployed, the more difficult it becomes to gain a foothold in the job market; the risk of social exclusion and poverty increases. Thus, long-term unemployment (that is permanent unemployment for at least 12 months) is another indicator to measure the extent of difficulties and problems that young people are faced with.

ILO data show that long-term unemployment has increased significantly in most European countries since 2008, and that young people are concerned to a higher degree than elder people. In most countries, the long-term unemployment rates of youth surpassed those of adults. In Italy young people are 3.5 times more likely to be unemployed for at least one year compared to adults. Similar substantial differences between youth and adults (ratio greater than 2.0) exist in Greece, Hungary, Slovakia and the United Kingdom (International Labour Organization, 2011, p. 2).

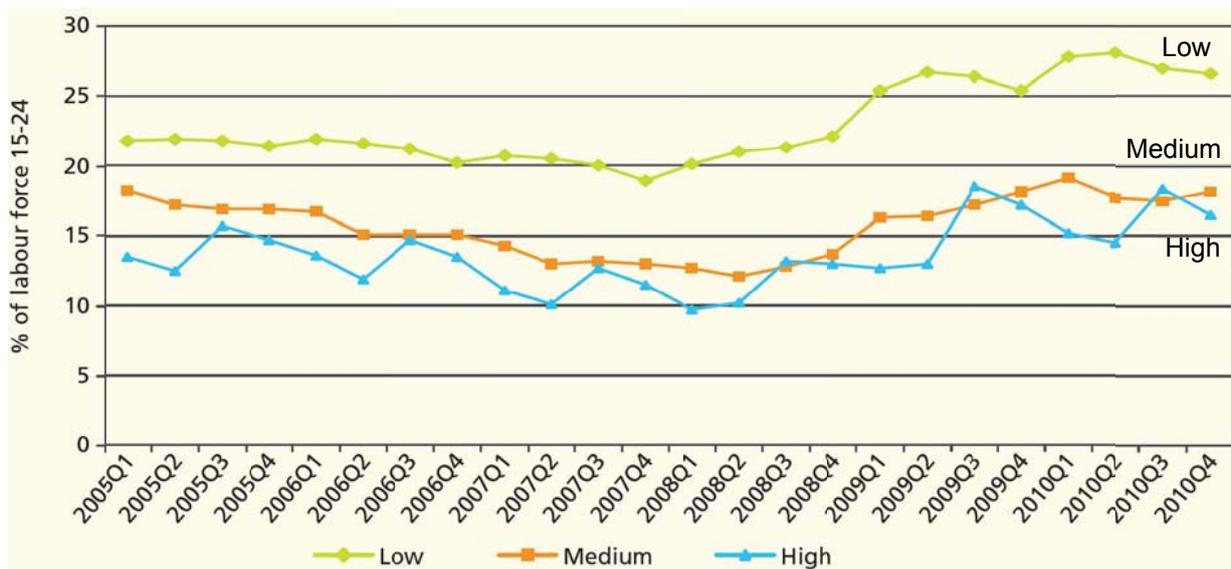
2.4.2 High risks for low qualified and new precarious transitions for highly qualified

In times of economic crisis, when the number of job offers declines and qualification requirements remain on a high level, job entry becomes more difficult especially for young people who lack general or vocational education. Although a high level of education does not protect against unemployment, it is considered a key requirement for successful labour market entry (Ha, McInerney, Tobin, & Torres, 2010). According to the EU Youth report, people with lower secondary education are nearly 3 times more at risk of unemployment than people with higher education (European Commission, 2009, p. 29).

But there is evidence, that due to the recent economic crisis, an increasing number of highly educated youths are hit by severe unemployment a well. Many of them have difficulties to find jobs that suit their qualifications, expectations and needs. Thus, the protective effect of tertiary education has decreased in all EU-Member States between 2007 and 2009 (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2011a, p. 4).

Figure 3 shows the development of unemployment rates by education level. The rates increased not just for the low educated young people but for the medium and high educated as well.

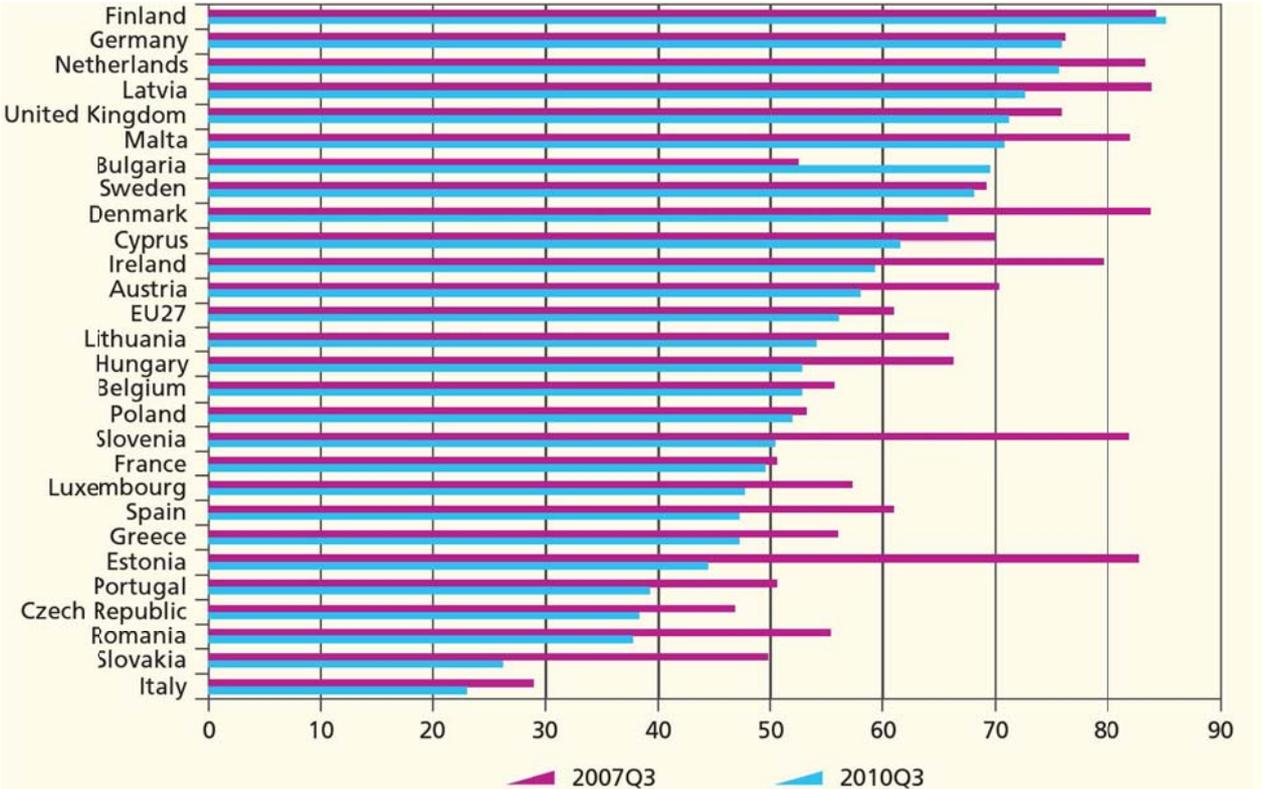
Figure 3: Trend in unemployment rate for young people, by education level attained, EU27, in %



(Source: retrieved from (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2011b, p. 8); LFS Low = ISCED 1997, levels 0-2 (primary & lower secondary), Medium = ISCED 1997 levels 3-4 (upper & post-secondary), High = ISCED 1997 levels 5-6 (tertiary))

Besides unemployment, the employment rate is another important indicator to monitor the labour market developments for young people. Data show that in most countries, employment rates of young people with a tertiary level of education have sharply decreased between 2007 and 2010 (see figure 4). This reveals the profound impact of the economic crisis on the job market and the school-to-work-transitions for the young generation.

Figure 4: Employment rates of young people with a tertiary level of education, in %



(Source: retrieved from European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2011b, p. 8)

2.4.3 Insecurity and precarious jobs

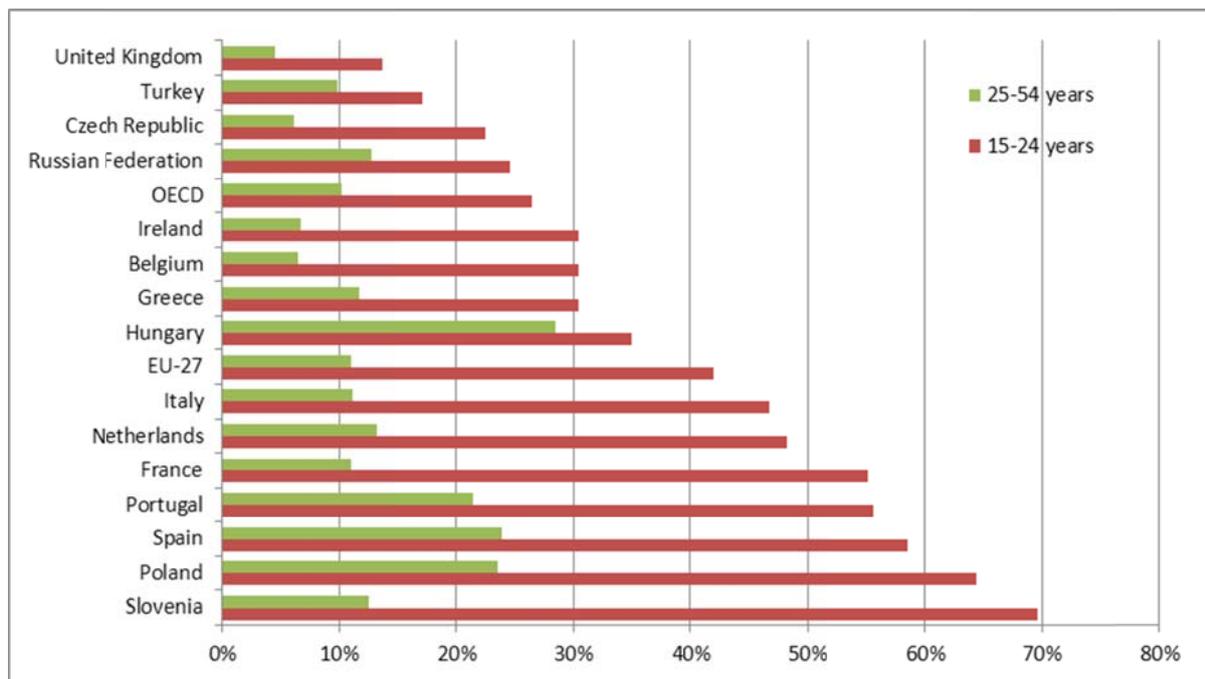
While the labour market statistics offer insight by counting the number of employed or unemployed, these data do not reveal the proportion of young people employed in insecure or precarious jobs. Working conditions such as job security and fair salary play an important role for the analysis of young people’s transitions into the labour market.

The number of non-standard forms of work has increased during the past decades. Today, young people that enter the job market often start with fixed-term contracts or temporary agency work (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2011b, p. 12). In many cases, young people with diploma start their professional career with one or several internships, rewarded little or not at all.

In France for example, the number of people holding an internship is expected to have almost doubled from 800 000 in 2006 up to 1.5 million in 2011 (Canonne, 2012). These forms of employment are discussed under the notion of precarious jobs or underemployment⁴.

Young people are concerned to a much higher degree by unstable and temporary employment. As the figure 5 shows, for many European countries, the rate of young people holding a fixed-term contract is sharply higher than for the older workforces.

Figure 5: Extent of temporary employment – younger and older workers, 2010, in %



(Source: retrieved from European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2011b, p. 13; OECD, 2011b, p. 255; Russian Federation: data for 2008)

This high offer of non-standard jobs proved to be ambivalent. On the one hand, the more flexible arrangements can facilitate the entry of young people into the labour market. On the other hand, these arrangements can lead to persistent unemployment as well as to social and financial insecurity (Ha et al., 2010, p. 9). In phases of economic recession and job losses, fixed-term contracts are reduced first. Even though the fixed-term contracts give opportunities to enter the job market, for many young people they imply a high insecurity and the risk to return into unemployment. Young employees are often the first to be fired.

The OECD-report (OECD, 2010, p. 13) mentions a high number of the so-called “poorly-integrated new entrants” on the labour market. This term describes young people that face significant barriers to find stable employment. “These young people frequently go back and forth between temporary jobs, unemployment and/or inactivity, even during periods of strong economic growth. For example, in Europe in 2005-07, on average 8% of the youth aged 15-29 who had left education and found a temporary job were not in a stable job two years afterwards.

⁴ According to the LUF (Labor Utilization Framework) underemployment includes sub-unemployment, unemployment, and economically inadequate employment. Economically inadequate employment includes low-wage employment and low-hour employment.

Thus in total, even before the crisis hit, at least one in five young people – and many more in some countries – were at risk of experiencing poor employment prospects.” (OECD, 2010, p. 13).

The fact, that non-standard jobs on average pay less than standard jobs is to be considered as a further disadvantage. According to data for the EU25 younger workers face the highest risk of in-work poverty (9%), followed by workers aged 25–54 years (8%) and older workers (7%). This can be explained by the fact that young people often start their careers with low-paid jobs (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2010, p. 6).

2.5 Coping with insecurities and risks – reactions of young people

How do young people cope with these difficulties? The experience of unemployment, job insecurity and precarious social integration can lead to demotivation, low self-esteem or “cooling out” (the downgrading of aspirations or resignation).

Prause & Dooley (2011, p. 70) refer to further effects on the level of well-being: “Underemployment often leads to significantly lower self-esteem as well as increases in psychological distress, physical health symptoms, alcohol symptoms, and criminal behaviors among youth.”

But young people show different personal reactions or coping strategies: between a) frustration and passive apathy, b) compromising adaptation and increased investment and c) active or even hostile rebellion against the formal institutions of the transition system (Du Bois-Reymonds, Plug, Stauber, Pohl, & Walther, 2006).

The way young people cope with the strained situation on the labour market is on a macro level influenced by the socio-political culture and structures of the countries, on a micro level by their educational resources and their social background. Du Bois-Reymonds et al. (2006) thus distinguish between the groups of “disadvantaged” and the so-called “trend-setters”. The first-mentioned have disengaged in the formal transition system and are de-motivated. The second-mentioned stand for the ‘winners’ of the post-fordist flexibilization of labour markets and individualisation of life courses. “They do carve out new patterns which redefine concepts of learning, working and dealing with risks and uncertainties.” (Du Bois-Reymonds et al., 2006, p. 5). In periods of high unemployment rates, the return into or the stay in the educational system may be a promising choice for young people as well. Many young graduated that appreciate their job prospects as bad, are expected to extend their educational career (e.g. to aim for a higher degree). So job seeking is shunted to a later time and the higher degree enhances future chances on the job market.

3. Social and political participation of young people

In his book “Bowling alone” (Putnam, 2000) Robert Putnam identified a general decline of social capital, political interest, civic engagement and participation in Western democracies. His analysis of the American society has been widely accepted as a valid description of the problems and challenges of European democracies as well, but has also lead to a critical reevaluation of European participation culture.

3.1 Distrust and low political engagement in established forms of politics

Traditionally the indicators used to measure political participation are voting turnout, membership in political parties, interest in politics and trust in political institutions. In most of the reviewed studies these more conventional forms of participation show a decline especially among young people.

3.1.1 Declining voter turnout in elections

A first indicator for conventional political participation is voter turnout. International and European studies show that the voting rates at national elections vary hugely across OECD and also across European countries. The OECD finds a general trend to declining voter turnout in the last generation (OECD, 2011a). An analysis of the elections since the Second World War in West European countries shows a clear downward trend in turnout for some countries (Portugal, the Netherlands, France, Austria, Finland, Italy, the United Kingdom), whereas most of the countries (except the Scandinavian ones) register ups and downs (Rose, 2004, p. 19).

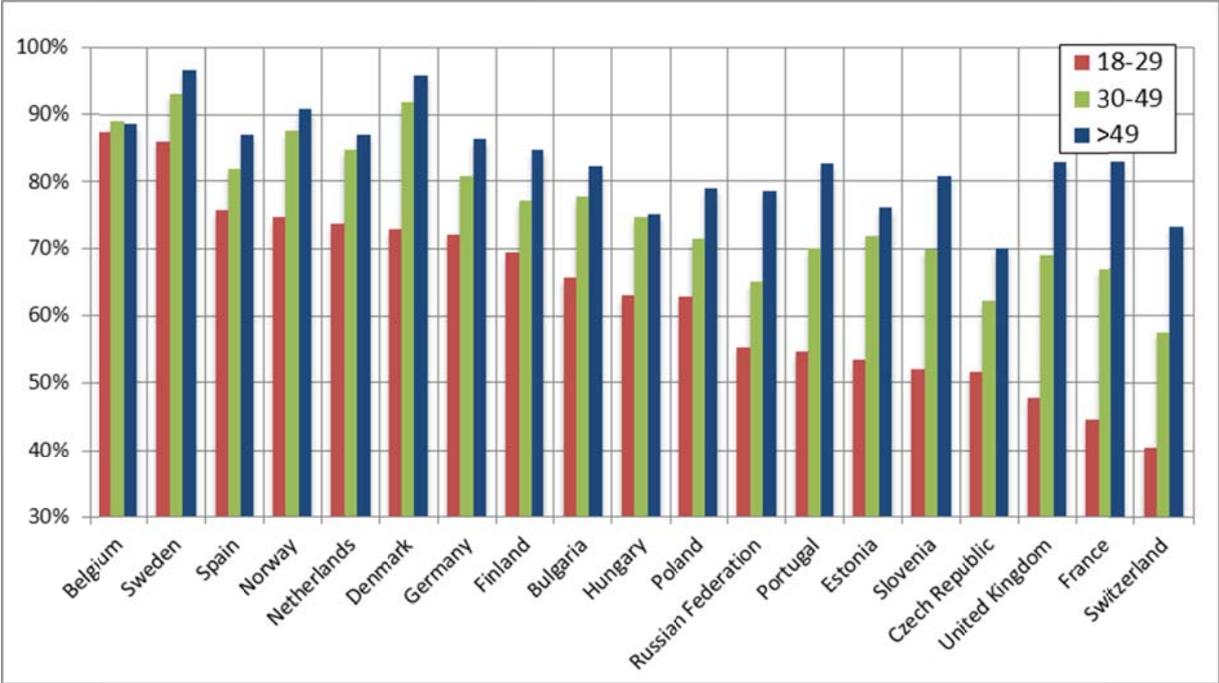
A fact that cannot be denied is the lower likelihood of younger people to vote compared to older people in nearly all the OECD countries (Fieldhouse, Tranmer, & Russell, 2007; OECD, 2011a, p. 96). A recent study on young people in the European Union shows that two out of ten young people up to the age of 30 stated in 2010 that they hadn't voted in a political election at the local, national or EU level in the past three years (The Gallup Organization, 2011).

The data of the European Social Survey for 2010 show an overall percentage of 37% of young people who didn't vote at the last national elections. The voter turnout for the electors aged less than 30 years is significantly lower than for all the voters of which only 23% didn't vote. In every country (except for Belgium)⁵ the voting turnout of the youngest age group was below the one of the elder age groups (see figure 6).

In spite of these trends young people still think that voting is the most effective way to participate (Institute for Social Research and Analysis, 2005, p. 222). On 2nd and 3rd place they put media attention and work in NGOs, just before the work in a political party. To sign a petition and to participate in demonstrations is effective for one out of three young people. Illegal and violent protest is for the great majority of young people no effective way to participate.

⁵Belgium and Luxembourg have compulsory voting.

Figure 6: Voted last national elections for different age (in % of age groups)



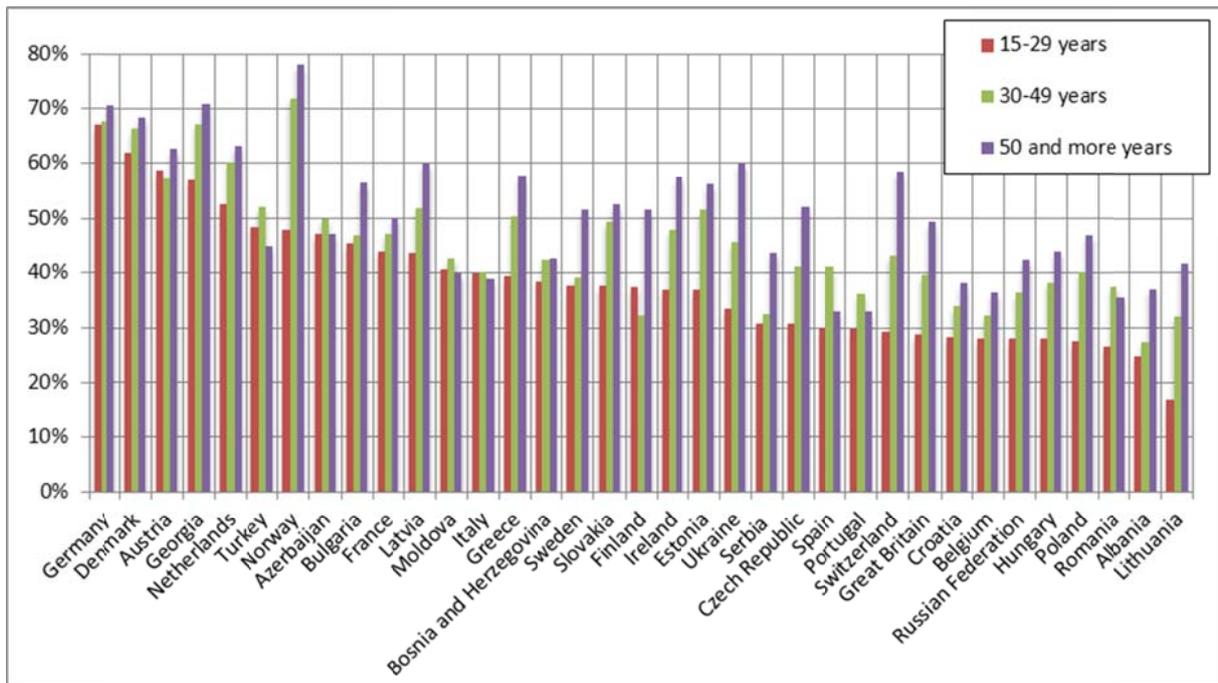
(Source: European Social Survey, 2010, sample = over 18 years old eligible to vote in last national elections)

With Hooghe (2004) we can identify different factors that have an effect on the willingness of young persons to vote: low political interest, insufficient information and knowledge on politics and institutions, and a negative perception of the political system. In the following paragraphs we will assess these indicators on interest in politics, trust in political institutions and membership in political organizations.

3.1.2 Low interest in politics

A high number of young people in European countries say, they are not interested in politics. Figure 7 clearly shows that political interest varies with age: the bar for the youngest age group stays in most countries below the bar of the older age groups. Gender does also have an influence on political interest among young people: almost 40% of young males declared their interest in politics, whereas only less than 30% of young women showed such interest. These numbers lead to the conclusion that European youth is in general apparently distant from politics (European Commission, 2009, p. 45).

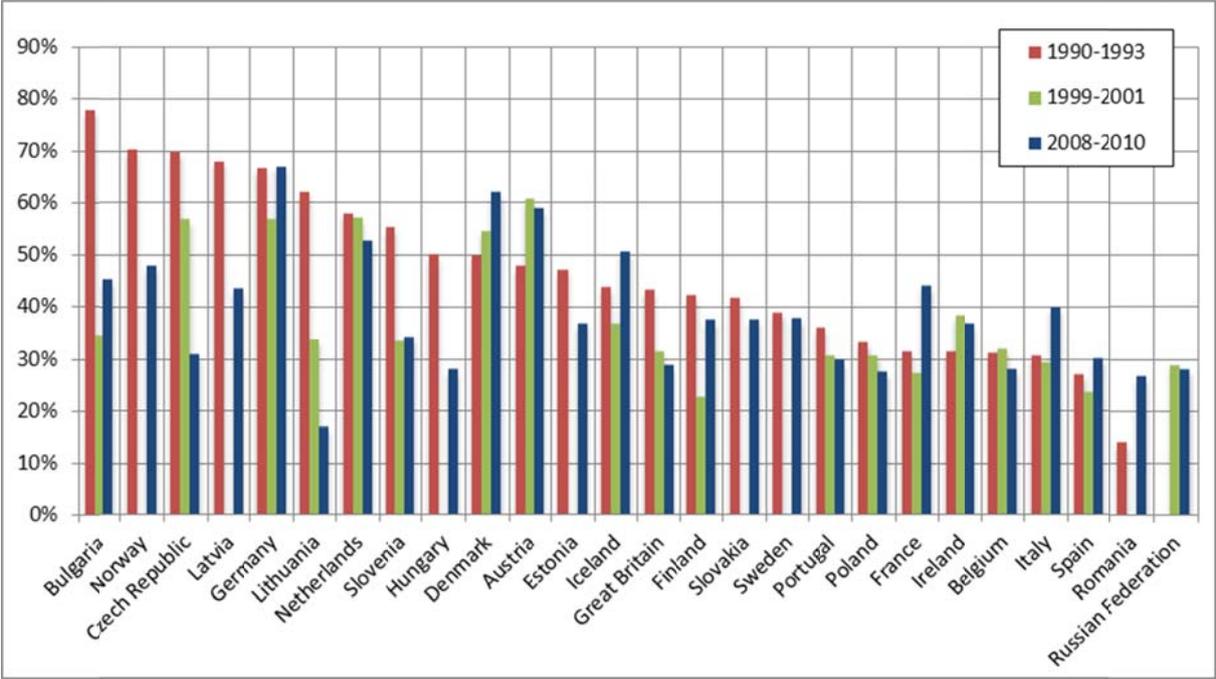
Figure 7: Interest in politics for different age groups (in % of age group)



(Source: European Values Study, 2008-2010)

How has the political interest of young people evolved in the past years? Figure 8 shows a decreasing interest in politics of young people since 1990 in a lot of European countries. Especially young people from some East European countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Hungary) and from Norway are today a lot less interested in politics as they were 20 years ago. In some Central European countries (Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Austria) the percentages of young people with an interest in politics are still at a very high level, whereas in some of the countries with a lower level of political interest the numbers seem to increase again (France, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Romania).

Figure 8: Interest in politics for the age group 15-29 from 1990 to 2010 (in % of age group 15-29)



(Source: European Values Study, 1990-2010; Norway, Latvia, Hungary, Estonia, Slovakia, Sweden, Romania: no data available for period 1999-2001; Russian Federation: no data available for period 1990-1993)

The EUYOUNG study on political participation of young people in 8 European countries (Institute for Social Research and Analysis, 2005) stresses out that the political interest is closely linked to a higher standard of living, higher parental education and the young people’s own level of education. There is an important influence of families, family traditions and parents as role models for political and social participation as well.

3.1.3 Low trust in politicians

Another set of indicators deals with questions about how much trust young people have in different societal and political institutions. Findings from the European Social Survey from 2010 suggest that young Europeans have the least trust in politicians: 53% say they don’t trust politicians. Political parties are also judged very negatively by youth: 51% think they’re not trustworthy⁶.

On the other side the majority of young people show a relatively high trust in many civic and democratic institutions (country’s parliament, the European Parliament, the legal system). The most trustworthy institutions for young people are the United Nations and the police.⁷ Findings from the ICCS study among lower-secondary students in 24 European countries (Kerr, Sturmman, Schulz, & Burge, 2010) as well as the results of the EUYOUNG study (Institute for Social Research and Analysis, 2005) seem to confirm these high levels of trust in European civic institutions followed by trust in national parliaments.⁸

⁶ The question used a scale from 0 ‘no trust at all’ to 10 ‘complete trust’. For this analysis we grouped the 4 lowest items in the scale into one item ‘no trust’ and the 4 highest items in the scale to one item ‘trust’.

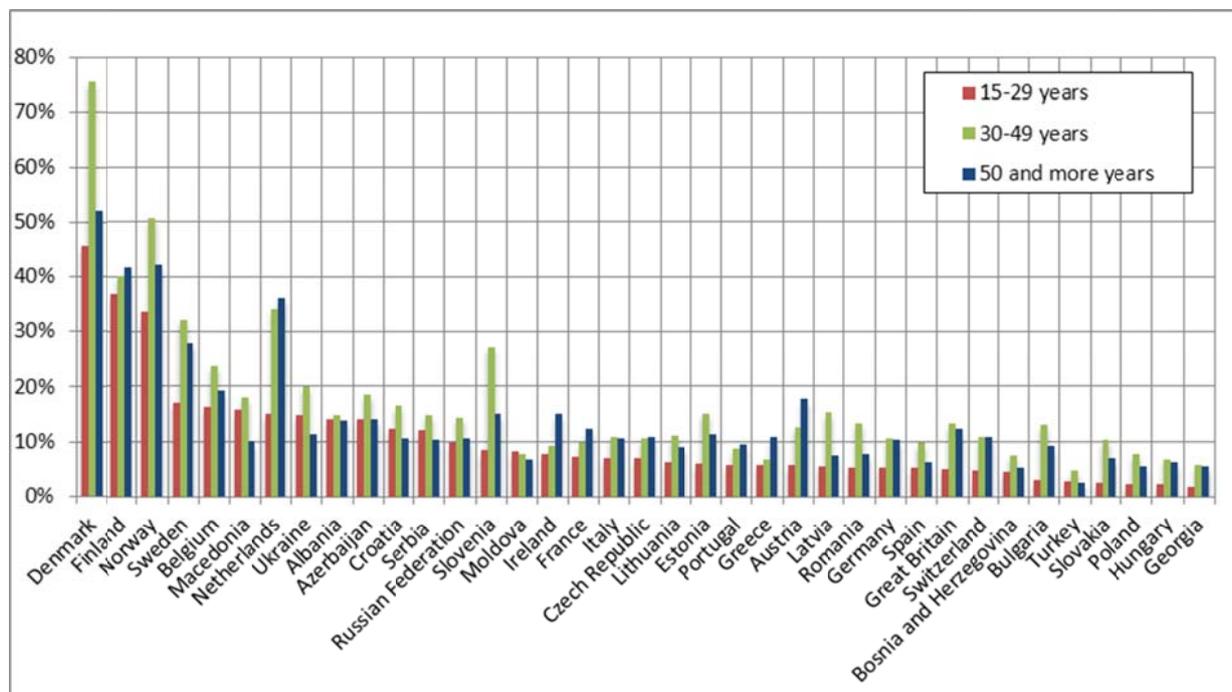
⁷ A detailed description of the findings of the European Social Survey comparing age groups and countries can be found in European Commission. (2009). *EU Youth Report*. Belgium.

⁸ Whether these findings can be confirmed for the Eastern European countries remains to be studied.

3.1.4 Declining membership in political organizations

The last indicator of conventional political participation we want to analyse is membership in a political organization (political party, trade union). Figure 9 shows that the different European countries have diverse political cultures concerning the membership in a political organization: whereas in the Scandinavian countries the percentages of members in a political organization is still very high, partly over 40%, these percentages drop to under 10% for a lot of Western and Eastern European countries. In all of the countries the bar of the youngest age group lies beneath the one of their older generation. What we observe can partly be explained by an age effect. Nevertheless analysis of time series show a loss of members in political organizations in recent decades for most of the European countries (Stolle & Hooghe, 2005), reflecting generational differences as well.

Figure 9: Belonging to a political organization by age groups (in % of age group)



(Source: EVS Wave 2008-2010)

Most of the traditional indicators show a general decline of conventional forms of political participation in European countries. By comparing the results of the younger and older age groups we can conclude that the lower political participation can clearly be seen for the new generation. What Stolle and Hooghe wrote for Europe in general is certainly true for younger Europeans: “Overall, European societies are plagued (...) by political disenchantment, increasing cynicism and political alienation.” (Stolle & Hooghe, 2005, pp. 157–158). The EUYOUPART study confirms this statement: “In general, the youth has an idealistic understanding of politics (...): Politics is seen as a way to solve international problems, social conflicts and to create a better world. On the other side cynical attitudes were visible” (Institute for Social Research and Analysis, 2005, p. 246). The prime motives to engage in politics are idealism and feeling responsible, the important obstacle to political engagement is lack of time and the lack of openness of structures and processes (Spanning, 2008, p. 83).

3.2 The changing nature of young people's political participation

Despite of their decreasing conventional political participation, young people in Europe still engage in democratic and civic behaviour and they still believe in democratic values. They have their own views on politics, society and social problems and engage in different forms of democratic activities appropriate to their own understanding of democracy and citizenship (Schneider & Willems, 2009). In this chapter we want to show that young people still identify with their society and that they are prepared to engage.

3.2.1 Cause- and lifestyle-oriented forms of political engagement of young people

A lot of authors emphasize the changing forms of citizenship emerging especially among young people. Young people are not political apathetic; recent research shows that they practice various new forms of civic citizenship and engagement. Young people practice more "engaged citizenship" (Dalton, 2008) and "cause-oriented activism" (Norris, 27-28th 2003).

These new forms are based on young people's values, identities and lifestyles. "Young people (...) have become more defined by (increasingly) diverse lifestyles, identities and values, and (...) this is reflected by repertoires of civic and political engagement that are issue-based, oriented towards issue groups and public policy" (Sloam, 2011c, p. 19). The politics young people are practicing are more personalised, individualized and informal (Hooghe, 2004; Sloam, 2011b; Sloam, 2011a; Stolle & Hooghe, 2005). Young people prefer horizontal forms of participation like the internet, issue-based participation like signing petitions or spontaneous attending of demonstrations and consumer activism like making shopping decisions based on political considerations.

Spannring concludes that the individual forms of participation are attractive for young people because "they do not demand long term commitment and do not endanger the integrity of the individual by imposing ideologies or demanding loyalty to an organisation's aims and methods" (Spannring, 2008, p. 82). Young people do know that these forms are not always effective; nevertheless they are individual statements of their political positioning that reflect their ideals, values and interests.

There is a broad discussion about the role of Internet and the new communication technologies concerning civic engagement and political participation of young people: Some see young people as "digital natives" who are the first to engage in new forms of participation by the usage of social media (Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011). Hirzalla & van Zoonen (2011) show that online and offline participation activities are linked. Others point out that the web based participation instruments are often not targeted at the politically unengaged young people: Web pages are often designed for those who are already politically engaged (Banaji & Buckingham, 2010). Milner (2009) points out that the digital technologies can have a positive influence on political knowledge and activity, if young people have the skills to use them. But they could also widen the gap between different social classes.

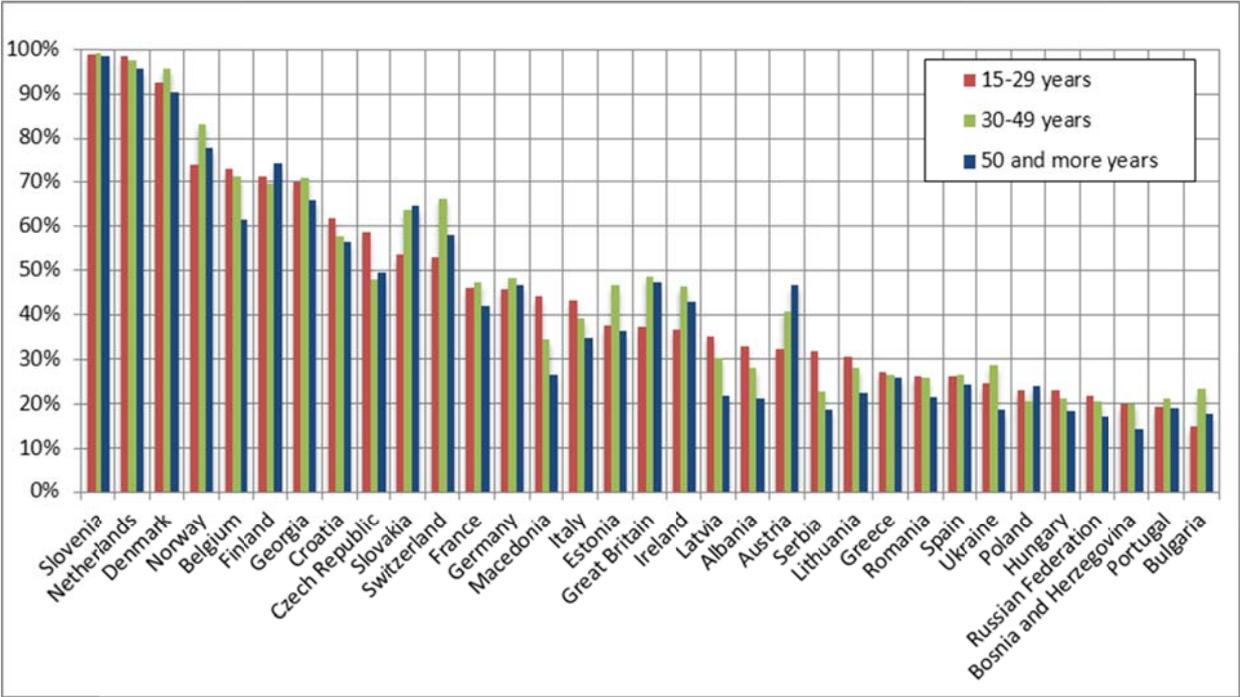
3.2.2 High social engagement and civic participation of young people

Concerning social capital of young people, recent studies (EVS/WVS⁹, ESS¹⁰, Eurobarometer) do not show a intergenerational decline of membership in non-

⁹ EVS: European Values Study ; WVS: World Values Study

political organizations and civic participation (Stolle & Hooghe, 2005). Young people are as much members in a civic organization as the group of the 30-49 years olds. Recent results of the Eurobarometer survey confirm that a quarter of young adults in the EU had been involved in an organised voluntary activity in the year prior to the survey (The Gallup Organization, 2011). However, they prefer to be members in associations where they can develop their personal interests and spend time with their peers (sports, leisure activities).

Figure 10: Belonging to any organization by age groups (in % of age group)



(Source: EVS Wave 2008-2010)

The associative participation of young people is strongly influenced by national contexts (see figure 10). People from Southern and Eastern European societies are less often active in associations and groups as in Scandinavian or Dutch societies (Roudet, 2009). “The results showed that the Nordic countries, and in particular Sweden, have the highest rate of Active Citizenship, followed by Central Europe and Anglo-Saxon countries. Mediterranean countries are next followed by Eastern European countries that close the ranking.” (Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009, p. 485).

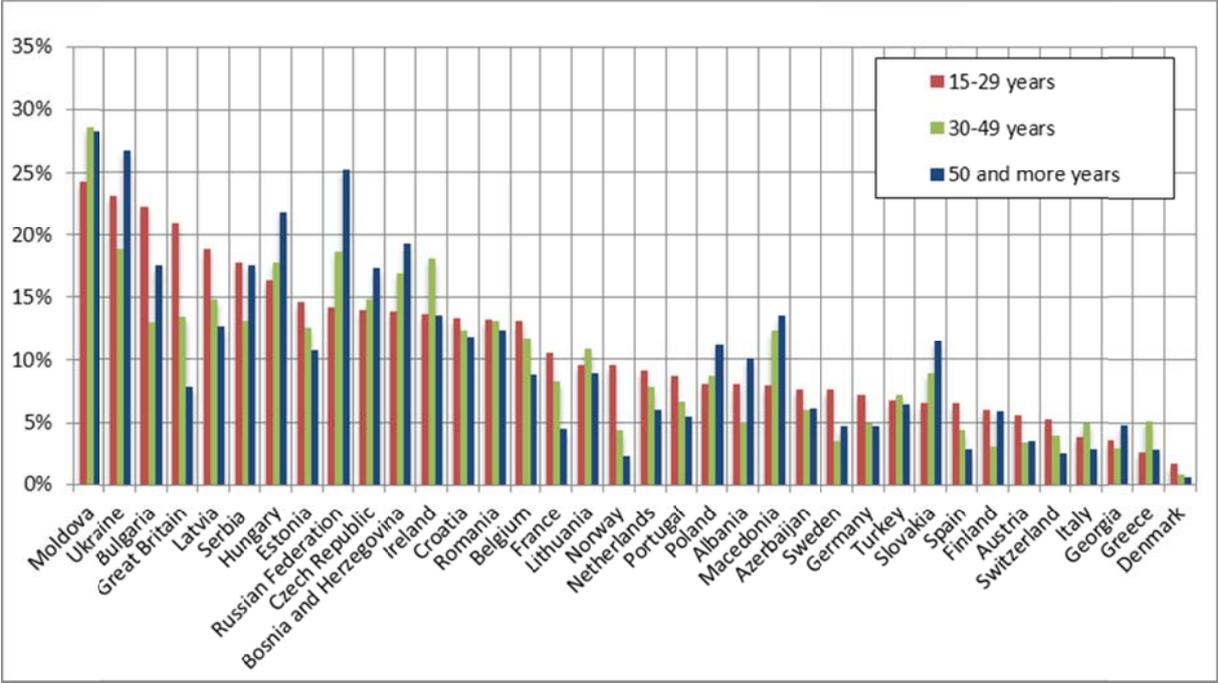
3.2.3 Strong democratic values

In most Western societies there has been a shift from materialistic values to post-materialistic values after the Second World War (Inglehart, 2008). The younger generation emphasizes more self-expression values than the elder generation. These changes in the value orientations do also have implications for other important orientations: younger people are more tolerant and more open-minded (Hooghe, 2004; Stolle & Hooghe, 2005; Welzel & Inglehart, 2008). Societies with a high percentage of self-expression values are those where people have more activist political orientations (Inglehart, 2008). Simultaneously the majority of the younger generation strongly objects all forms of external authority. Younger cohorts are deeply committed to democratic values, but tend to develop distrust in the political

¹⁰ ESS: European Social Survey

system and their institutions (Norris, 1999 cited in Hooghe, 2004). However, there are strong differences between European countries. As figure 11 shows, especially young people from some Eastern European countries seem to have a more critical attitude towards democracy.

Figure 11: Percentage of age group that disagrees with “Democracy may have problems but is better” (in % of age group)



(Source: EVS Wave 2008-2010)

The higher self-expression values of young people have also effects on their participative behaviour. As higher educated young people are more likely to develop post-materialistic and self-expression values (which are the basis for more ‘engaged’ citizens (Dalton, 2008)), educational inequalities and probably also socio-economic inequalities will have an important influence on young people’s forms of political participation (Sloam, 2011b). Roudet (2009) even states that young people with a low level of education will more easily adopt anti-democratic attitudes, like for example authoritarian leadership styles. They are double disadvantaged concerning the development of democratic behaviour as they are less educated and less socially integrated.

3.3 Low political influence for young people in an ageing society

In most European countries the older generation has full political citizenship without age limits, while children and young people under 18 do not have full political citizenship and do not have the right to vote. This leads to the underrepresentation of the group of children and young people in parliamentary democracies (Furlong & Cartmel, 2011, p. 26). While most countries undertake efforts to raise the representation of women and ethnic minorities in democratic institutions, they don’t want to give children and young people or their representatives the right to vote. This leads to the marginalization of young people in the political process (Furlong & Cartmel, 2011, p. 26; Jensen, 2009). Young people are treated as ‘political apprentices’ rather than ‘political agents’ (Marsh, O’Toole, & Jones, 2007 cited in Furlong & Cartmel, 2011). Often the political system offers young people possibilities

of participation where participation is limited and defined by the establishment (Zentner, 2011, p. 47). Critical voices of the younger generations regard many participatory opportunities as instruments to control children and young people and not to give them full political power. If young people don't feel to be an active part of the political process, they will find other ways to make their voices heard (Furlong & Cartmel, 2011, p. 26; Sloam, 2011a, pp. 4–5). Some authors explain the recent demonstrations, protests or riots of young people in many European and Council of Europe countries as their answer to a political system that doesn't really give them their share of power and full citizenship.

4. Fostering integration, sharing power, offering responsibilities - towards a greater political participation of the young generation

As the UN Charta on children rights declares we acknowledge that all children and youths are born with civil, political, social and economic rights. Their entitlement to act as citizens, to participate and to be involved in democratic decision making does not depend on their future contributions to society. They are seen as competent social actors, able to make important contributions to family, school, neighborhood, local community and society.

Although a lot is being done already, the reality of youth participation within representative democracies is not promising. The young people's voting turnout, political interest and trust in politicians is decreasing dramatically. While low interest and frustration of young people with politics is mainly focused on conventional forms of political participation, alternative forms of social and political engagement are mobilizing more and more young people.

This civic participation and engagement of young people takes place in many areas of society. In recent years, new forms of societal participation for children and young people have been developed at the municipal level in particular, but there are also various participation opportunities in schools, youth organizations and youth work (Willems et al., 2011).

Educational institutions, first and foremost the schools play a predominant role for the development of democratic identities and participatory activities. They provide learning environments where young people not only learn premises and characteristics of politics. To establish and strengthen a culture of democratic participation in all areas of life, citizenship education has to be a central aspect of education in schools and universities, but also in youth clubs and civic local organizations. This is where young people get to know what participation in democracy means: through electing class representatives, meeting with local politicians and engaged local citizens, working in community oriented service projects or setting up a youth parliament in the local community.

"Youth deserve our full commitment – full access to education, adequate healthcare, employment opportunities, financial services and full participation in public life." What Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General, says about the desired role of youth in modern societies can be taken as a starting point for the definition of new measures and new strategies of social and political integration of young people.

Young people want to make their voices heard and want to play a real role in decision-making in their societies. The best way to achieve this is to strengthen the social integration of young people by sharing economic, social and political power with them and giving them full citizenship and full access to jobs.

No young people should be left alone with the challenge to integrate into the labour market and to find a decent job. Especially local authorities and communities should regard this as a moral and social obligation and should do more to support business companies to offer jobs, training-on-the-jobs and other training courses to support young people with difficulties.

Society and politics must offer more opportunities to young people to gain experience in social and political participation as well. Against the backdrop that young people's participation is more cause-oriented, informal and personalised, offers should focus on activities and projects that are close to young people's local life and environment.

It is crucial that perspectives and ideas of young people are taken seriously, that decision-making-processes are transparent and comprehensible. This presupposes a sustainable participation structure, initiated and accompanied by professionals from local authorities.

5. Recommendations

5.1 Recommendations for local and regional authorities

1. Supporting the local business companies to offer jobs, training-on-the-jobs and other training courses to improve the employability of young people (with a special focus on disadvantaged youth).
2. Fostering the cooperation and competences of local services dealing with education and transition issues (job centers, careers services, schools, youth work) to enable them to offer supporting measures that fit best to individual needs.
3. Supporting young people's own job initiatives, business ideas and innovative projects through adequate funding conditions and cooperation with local business partners.
4. Encouraging the dialogue between young people and local authorities.
5. Encouraging young people to participate in voluntary organizations on the local and regional level and encouraging organizations to open up for youths.
6. Offering opportunities for young people to participate in politics at the local or regional level (e.g. youth council, project-based participation).

5.2 Recommendations for national governments

1. Fostering collaborative education and training with a focus on disadvantaged young people (low qualified, early-school leavers, minorities).
2. Promoting the recognition of competences made in non-formal educational settings and venues (e.g. youth work, volunteering).
3. Strengthening the intergenerational dialogue and partnerships in political, cultural and economic institutions to raise the receptiveness to youth ideas and opinions.

4. Improving citizenship education in schools and youth organizations and create opportunities to learn democratic skills and participatory activities in other life-domains (such as youth organizations, the voluntary sector, political parties or sport clubs).
5. Strengthening the political influence and participation of young people through offering more citizenship rights.

6. Summary

European societies are reshaping and young generations in particular face the subsequent economic and social changes. The recent economic crisis and the changing recruitment policy of globalized companies have exacerbated youth's transitions into a stable job. High unemployment, job insecurity and in-work poverty often have negative impacts for the life situation and life opportunities of young people. They aggravate youth poverty and produce social exclusion, and threaten the overall integration and participation of young people.

Conventional forms of participation (voting, party membership) show a decline especially among young people. Nevertheless, young people in Europe still engage in democratic and civic behaviour and they still believe in democratic values. Thus, a changed citizenship rather than a general political apathy of young people can be observed. Young people in Europe show high engagement in social, cultural and civil activities. They have their own views on politics, society and social problems and engage in different forms of democratic activities according to their own understandings of democracy and citizenship.

To strengthen youth participation and integration in society it is crucial that perspectives, interests and ideas of young people are taken seriously. No young people should be left alone with the challenge to integrate into the labour market and to find a decent job. Societies should offer more opportunities for young people to participate in decision-making and to share political power. This would be a great step toward full political citizenship for the young generation.

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