

Youth Forum (UNESCO-YOUTH)

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TOPIC B. Guaranteeing youth's access to social security

I. Introduction

In 2016, the Youth Forum explained that human rights frameworks guarantee social inclusion as an inalienable and universal right of all people. This Forum also wanted to explain the following:

“Social inclusion means ensuring that all people have the opportunity to fully participate in economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy an adequate standard of living and well-being. It is the fulfillment of economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to employment (for those who can work), the right to education, the right to social protection, the right to participation, as well as the right to living a life in dignity”.¹

It is well known that today, young people are the group at highest risk of poverty and social exclusion in Europe. In 2013, 24.5% of the entire population in Europe was at risk of poverty and social exclusion, while for youth the risk was higher with 28.2%.²

¹ Youth Forum. (2016). Social Inclusion and Young People. Retrieved December 11, 2020, from <https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/Excluding-youth-a-threat-to-our-future.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2NqrHXC7Qk4DJ5Mu3pVPFC7YtnKJDjpe98sqK-JaOjJGzR9vGp9iiYwKg>

² Genhafr. (2014). Europe 2020 indicators - poverty and social exclusion. Retrieved December 11, 2020, from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Europe_2020_indicators_-_poverty_and_social_exclusion&oldid=211016

Through the years, financial and economic crisis has increased youth unemployment and has also created new forms of insecurity and exclusion. Governments around the world have reduced investment in education and social protection, while the costs of education have increased, and young people have often been hit by cuts in social protection. This approach has only served to increase income inequality and an intergenerational division.

Currently, another problem is that young people are often denied access to some social protection programs and services, due to their age or other unavoidable circumstances. The addition of requirements, based on minimum periods of work, age limits, family situations, education backgrounds, leads to direct or indirect discrimination against young people, with more and more hurdles to overcome on the path to inclusion.³

II. Concepts and definitions

- Social security: is the protection that a society provides to individuals and households to ensure access to health care and to guarantee income security, particularly in cases of old age, unemployment, sickness, invalidity, work injury, maternity or loss of a breadwinner. In some places, social security is a system where money paid in by current workers is used to pay the benefits for current retirees.
- Unemployment: Is a term referring to individuals who are employable and seeking a job but are unable to find a job.
- Precarious: Is a dangerous state because of not being safe or not being held in place firmly. A person that depends on chance circumstances, unknown conditions, or uncertain developments.
- Part-time job: a form of employment that carries fewer hours per week than a full-time job.

³ *Ibid.*

- Wages: a payment usually of money for labor or services usually according to contract and on an hourly, daily, or piecework basis.
- Blue-collar professions: is a working-class person who performs manual labor. It may involve skilled or unskilled labor.
- Mini-job: a form of marginal employment that is generally characterized as part-time with a low wage.

III. Current situation

Today, there exist several areas where young people lack security. For example, article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to education, and that it must be free, at least in the elementary stages. Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child outlines education as crucial in the “development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.”⁴

On the other hand, there exist access barriers, including hidden costs, or fees linked to each stage of education and training, stand in the way of education for all. Over the past few decades in Europe and America, austerity measures as a response to the economic and financial crisis have seen cuts to education budgets and there has been an increasing privatization of education. This has had a clear impact on the quality of education, in terms of access to education, infrastructure, human resource expenditure, among others.

Other problems can be found in the educational area. Inclusion, for example, involves changing the system and its structures to meet the needs of the person. The transition to inclusive education is a long process requiring adequate training and resources, as well as a long-term change in attitudes towards human rights, diversity, disability, and non-discrimination. Progress is slow, as more vulnerable groups are clearly still facing access barriers to education.

⁴ OHCHR. (1989). Convention on the Rights of Child. Retrieved December 11, 2020, from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

Another important area that needs to be discussed is employment. Access to employment has become increasingly challenging for young people over the past decade. For example, European statistics show that around 20% of youth are without a job. This percentage still does not tell us anything about underemployment, young people working involuntarily in part-time job, poor quality jobs among youth or young people that gave up on the job search.

For instance, youth unemployment in Europe imposes a negative impact of 12–15% on individual wages by the age of 42 years; this penalty is lower, at 8–10%, if individuals avoid a repeated incidence of unemployment.⁵ Despite the high costs of youth unemployment, European responses have so far been inadequate in fully addressing the issue.

From the beginning of economic and financial crisis, several countries have targeted young people without a job, with a vision of labor market integration and provision of professional skills, as the key route towards social inclusion. On the other hand, job creation efforts are largely missing and, when they do exist, they don't adequately account for recent graduates. In a context of jobs being scarce to begin with, and competitiveness and profit as the ever-guiding principles, few employers are willing to take on young, inexperienced workers and build them up, investing in their development, skills, and further training. There is also a significant lack of opportunities for young people in rural or disadvantaged areas, or for those choosing blue-collar professions, most initiatives seem to target urban, highly skilled, highly mobile youth.⁶

As seen previously, young people have always been in a more vulnerable position on the labor market than the average working age population. In many countries, a clear two-tiered labor market system is well established, with permanent workers on one hand and vulnerable temporary workers on the other.

⁵ Mascherini, M.; Ludwinek, A. (2015). Social inclusion for young people. Retrieved December 11, 2020, from <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/es/publications/report/2015/labour-market-social-policies/social-inclusion-of-young-people>

⁶ Youth Forum. (2016). Social Inclusion and Young People. Retrieved December 11, 2020, from <https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/Excluding-youth-a-threat-to-our-future.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2NqrHXC7Qk4DJ5Mu3pVPFC7YtnKJDjpe98sqK-JaOjJGzR9vGp9iiYwKg>

This means that young people are often not able to access their right to quality employment. Poor quality jobs have a particular impact on the economic rights of an individual, due to the challenge of earning an adequate income.

As described by the International Labor Organization (ILO), in various studies on decent work, another essential component of a quality job is access to workers' rights and social security. For young people today, this is not guaranteed in all employment opportunities.

Not only are precarious jobs such as mini jobs exempt from such social security provisions but self-employed workers also have little recourse to basic employment rights, such as paid sick leave, holiday and maternity leave. Self-employment rates among young people remain low in the EU, on average just over 4%.

However, self-employment is often seen as a possible exit door for jobless youth. Indeed, "there is evidence to suggest that individuals facing labor market disadvantage are more likely to become self-employed as they struggle to find an employee job."⁷ To avoid this kind of 'forced-self-employment', young people need to be better accompanied into self-employment opportunities and have access to social protection and a safety net to encourage them to take the risks of self-employment and start their own business.⁸

Other issues related to non-standard employment consist of how the nature of young peoples' employment today will impact their ability to save for their future. Through being engaged in non-standard work, young people are unable or less able to participate in contributory statutory pension systems. In some countries, even standard employment contracts do not offer access to pension plans. Pension schemes today are clearly not aligned with the current trajectory of a young person's education and employment.⁹

⁷ Hatfield, I. (2015). Self-Employment in Europe. Retrieved December 11, 2020, from https://www.ippr.org/files/publications/pdf/self-employment-Europe_Jan2015.pdf

⁸ Youth Forum. (2016). Social Inclusion and Young People. Retrieved December 11, 2020, from <https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/Excluding-youth-a-threat-to-our-future.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2NqrHXC7Qk4DJ5Mu3pVPFC7YtnKJDjpe98sqK-JaOjJGzR9vGp9iiYwKg>

⁹ *Ibid.*

The current situation has a long-term impact not only on the individual but also in terms of inequalities. By looking at changes in benefit ratio, that is, the income of pensioners in relation to the income of the working population, between now and 2060, many countries are implementing reforms to pension systems that are favoring current pensioners over future ones.

Finally, youth is not only a period of transition towards work for young people but also towards making their own way in life, becoming independent and included in society. Ensuring the social inclusion of young people is therefore not just about getting them into professional life but is also about providing them with adequate income and services to achieve this.¹⁰

IV. Initiatives taken by the international community.

European welfare systems still tend to be based on three stages in the life-course, child, working adult, and pensioner. The distinct category of ‘youth’, with its specific needs, has not been considered in reforming such systems. We need a forward-thinking approach to ensure new safety nets for young people in a changing European labor market and changing global society.¹¹

The right to education is stipulated as a target in both the European Union’s growth strategy, Europe 2020, as well as in the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is an objective at the vision of global economic and social progress towards inclusive growth and a society that leaves no one behind.

In Europe, there was a recommendation to establish a Youth Guarantee. The Council adopted it in April 2013 in response to unprecedented levels of youth unemployment, which reached more than 50% in some countries.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

The European Youth Guarantee is a commitment to ensure that all young people receive a good offer of training, continued education or employment that is suited to their abilities and experience within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education. The Youth Guarantee is one of the most innovative labor market policies of recent years and has received strong social support. Indeed, it arrived at a moment when an urgent and radical response was needed to address the dangerous long-lasting consequences of long-term unemployment, such as permanent future income losses, skills erosion and the increased risk of discouragement and inactivity.¹²

Furthermore, in the Commission for Social Development current deliberations, participants had called for improving the use of science, technology and innovation, greater involvement of young people at the grassroots level, more transparent Governments, reducing the voting age and stronger efforts to prevent radicalization, among other things.¹³

They say that boosting youth participation in efforts to shape a better world for all based on 2030 Agenda principles is a recurrent theme. Many representatives and their youth delegates highlighted pressing concerns, from clean water access to quality education. Some warned of new challenges to food and water security, given that by 2030 about 60 per cent of the world's population would live in cities, and over half of those urban dwellers would be under age 18.¹⁴

¹² Escudero, V.; López, E. (2015). The youth guarantee programme in Europe: Features, implementation and challenges. Retrieved December 12, 2020, from https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---inst/documents/publication/wcms_393024.pdf

¹³ United Nations. (2018, 1 February). Full Participation of Youth in Decision-making Key to Shaping Brighter Future for All, Social Development Commission Hears as General Debate Continues. Economic and Social Council. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/soc4860.doc.htm>

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

During this debate they also pointed that the best way to imagine a world in which every person supported the vision of the 2030 Agenda because they had the knowledge and skills to do so, it is necessary to take action in three areas, guaranteeing human rights for all, establishing a youth delegate program and supporting youth organizations to provide young people with the skills they needed today to reach the Sustainable Development Goals, including preparing them for jobs that did not yet exist.¹⁵

For example, the Finnish education system is among the top in the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) area with regard to the quality of teaching and the quality of student outcomes. However, the Finnish system cannot prevent a significant share of the youth population from leaving school with poor or low education and having very poor chances in the job market.

All OECD countries have services and social benefits in place to help those young people in getting their feet on the ground and making a successful transition into employment, possibly but not necessarily including education and training later in life. This means services and supports not only have to help those young people making a plan for their life, direct them to the right place or service provider, and compensate the disadvantages they face, but in doing so they also have to overcome considerable difficulties. This extra challenge does not contradict the fact that those young people who receive benefits tend to face a considerable low-income risk.¹⁶

In this forum we want to examine the social situation of youth, assess the quality of social policies, social protection, and services available to young people. It is necessary to show that the world's must adapt to a changed social and economic context, to guarantee investment in the young generation through education, creation of quality jobs, social protection, healthcare, and housing support.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ OECD. (2019, 7 mayo). Towards integrated services and integrated benefits for young people in Finland. Investing in Youth: Finland. <https://www.oecdilibrary.org/sites/6ab636cben/index.html?itemId=/content/component/6ab636cb-en>

This must happen not only to ensure the respect of social rights of young people today, but also to safeguard the wellbeing of society, both for today and for tomorrow.

V. Guide questions

1. Why is it important for youth to have financial education?
2. Why is it urgent to involve youth in the goals set for 2030 agenda?
3. Why is important for young people to have services and social benefits?
4. What do you think about quality education problems?
5. Why is social security important for young people?
6. What is your opinion about the social security?
7. What would you do for future generations to have the opportunity to have a social security?
8. What would you do to get a better access to employment or to give youth better self-employment opportunities?

VI. Bibliography

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