

Youth Poverty and Social Exclusion in Europe



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INTRODUCTION – A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO YOUTH INCLUSION

The labour market situation of young people in Europe is one of today's most debated topics, with unemployment rates reaching 23.4% in 2013 (EU-28, Eurostat), and over 55% in countries such as Greece or Spain. It is a priority for both Governments, as well as the European Union, to urgently tackle this issue. Yet, a less known number is even more staggering: 29.7% of Europe's young men and women experienced poverty and social exclusion in 2012 (EU-28, Eurostat, 2012). However, the main discourse, at both national and European level, continues to pursue a narrow approach, centred mainly on employment and labour market integration. Other crucial issues, such as youth poverty and social exclusion, discrimination, the different obstacles faced by young men and young women, access to services, youth rights and empowerment, and social participation are not prioritised as much, if at all, in policy making. Europe's greatest wealth and hope for the future are young people, not just young workers.

EAPN feels that current employment-only approaches will not adequately cater for the diversity of youth, and will result in a lost generation beyond the labour market. The objective should be youth inclusion, with employment as a key element, but not the only focus. We believe that it is important to focus on a universal strategy to promote social inclusion, as well as targeted approaches to socially vulnerable youth, and to take into account aspects beyond employment. Although universal provision is important (such as, for instance, access to universal social protection and quality services, or the Youth Guarantee), specific, tailored measures are needed to make sure intervention reaches the most excluded, including those facing multiple discrimination – young women, low-skilled youth, rural youth, youth from an ethnic minority or migrant background, youth with disabilities, or facing issues of addiction, or health problems including mental health and depression, but also young and single parents. The children of today are tomorrow's youth, and it is equally important to focus on child inclusion and well-being, as well as early access to quality education and care, through supporting families, children, and youth, to lead decent lives, free of poverty and exclusion.

Not all young people are immediately employable, and many of them require tailored approaches, including counseling, to deal with the entrance into the world of work, while some young people cannot work. A radical shift in approach is needed to tackle youth issues, with an outlook based on rights, starting from structural and personal causes and designing comprehensive, integrated solutions. Such initiatives, which should be fully integrated in overarching, national and European antipoverty strategies, need to be based on inclusive frameworks, such as the Common Objectives of the Social Open Method of Coordination (access to rights, resources, and services), the Active Inclusion Recommendation (adequate income support, access to quality services, and support to inclusive labour markets) and the Investing in Children Recommendation (access to adequate resources, access to quality services, right to participate).

This position paper represents EAPN's proactive contribution to the debate about youth inclusion, drawing on national realities and our members' own experience on the ground. It is based on in-depth discussions held in EAPN's EU Inclusion Strategies Group in October 2013 February and May 2014, as well as on the responses received to a questionnaire dispatched to our National Networks and European Organisations. The Eurostat definition of youth (15-29 years old) is used. The paper reviews the main issues affecting young people in their daily lives, starting from problem statement, looking at underlying causes, and proposing solutions and good practices. It equally reviews the initiatives taken at European level, and makes concrete recommendations for a comprehensive approach to the professional and social inclusion of young women and men in Europe. This position paper is primarily aimed at EAPN members, to codify our current understanding of the obstacles and solutions around youth inclusion, to build consensus around the issue, to inform national and EU lobbying on youth policies, as well as to present our policy demands for the national and EU level.

PART I - THE NATIONAL LEVEL: ISSUES, CAUSES, SOLUTIONS

1. Poverty and social exclusion

1.1. Problem statement

Poverty, including **intergenerational poverty**, is the main obstacle identified by EAPN networks (CZ, EE, DE, IE, PL, PT, RO, UK) for young people in leading dignified, fulfilling lives, free from hardship and exclusion. EAPN's starting point is a multidimensional definition of poverty, ie. when people's income and resources are so inadequate as to preclude them from participating equally and having a standard of living considered acceptable in their society.¹ This includes issues of low or inexistent coverage of social protection (IC, IE, NL, UK), a lack of coherence between policy approaches (PL) and poor support for transitions (DE).

A useful framework for the analysis is the Investing in Children recommendation of the European Commission, which speaks about three mutually reinforcing pillars for inclusion: adequate resources (from work or income support), access to services, and participation. Youth inclusion and freedom from poverty should be the red line connecting together different policy initiatives targeting youth, emphasizing an integrated approach.

Poverty of young people is rising across the board, as showed in earlier statistics: almost a third of youth in the European Union (29.7% in EU 27 in 2009) are at risk of poverty and social exclusion, according to Eurostat (combining risk of poverty, material deprivation, and jobless households). This number has increased over the past years by no less than 4 percentage points, from 25.8% in 2009. Regarding risk of poverty, 19% of men are affected, compared to 21.2% of women. Lack of income support and access to services, combined with an absence of decent jobs and the rise of in-work poverty among young people are the main factors contributing to this situation.

Adequate income support thus becomes a crucial issue, as in many countries young people who have never been employed yet cannot access unemployment benefits, or minimum income, or other benefits, or are specifically excluded by age restrictions embedded in national conditionality for social assistance.

In the absence of adequate minimum income schemes, young people often need to rely on their families, creating a phenomenon of hidden youth poverty, as well as increased deprivation for their families. This enforced dependency on parents, which sometimes prolongs well into someone's 30s, disguises the lack of opportunities and the poverty faced by young people. Having to provide for one's children for longer is not only an increased financial burden on parents, but also creates obstacles to youth autonomy, undermining independence and empowerment of young people, and perpetuating a cycle of family poverty.

It is a particular problem in countries such as Spain, Italy, and Greece, which have very high youth unemployment rates, coupled with no national minimum income schemes. Also, recent austerity cuts have affected both unemployment benefits, as well as social assistance, and eligibility was tightened, often excluding young people, or reducing effectively their coverage.

¹ EAPN Explainer(2014) Poverty and Inequality in the EU.

EAPN Ireland

40% of young people aged 16-24 in Ireland are at risk of poverty, this is the highest in the EU, as highlighted by [OECD](#) data.

EAPN Romania

More than a quarter of young people are in relative poverty (28.1% in 2011), and more than a third of young people are at risk of poverty or social exclusion (40.3% in 2011, versus 24.3% in the EU-28).

EAPN Finland

Young people under 25 years are not eligible for unemployment benefits without having graduated, or without having participated in some other activities during 21 weeks.

EAPN Spain

Regarding income and employment, the economic dependence affects 75% of young people, while 25% have no income.

EAPN Italy

There is no minimum income for young people, but it is badly needed.

Exclusion is also on the rise, as discrimination continues to be widespread, and it is a factor highly identified as significantly contributing the young people's poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion.

With the number of discriminating factors multiplying (gender, socio-economic status, ethnic origin, disability), almost every young person in Europe today is discriminated on at least one ground. In a self-perpetuating vicious circle, poverty itself (the so-called socio-economic status) one of the most pervasive discriminating grounds, leading to even more poverty and exclusion for those already born in families experiencing hardship.

EAPN Ireland

Social origin of the students is a powerful obstacle to getting the right education, and to later inclusion in the labour market. There are particular issues for young people from minority groups including Travellers, Roma, and people of an immigrant background. The children of non-EU migrants who are not Irish nationals have to pay full third level fees which acts as a barrier to access for many and particularly those on low incomes. There is a growing proportion of disadvantaged youth with mental health problems, leading to an increase in suicide, particularly for young men, as well as a growth in youth crime. There have been major cuts and changes to welfare supports for lone parents.

EAPN Germany

Inequality is a big issue, different regions experience unemployment and different social groups – immigrants and kids from poor families don't get the chance of quality education or training. About 2.8 million children are growing up in families with low income and have therefore poor starting opportunities in life. These low-income families are mostly people with a migration background or single parents or also people with a disability. Studies show that in Germany there is a strong causal link between social status (parental home) and social career progression.

EAPN Portugal

Roma children have a high failure and dropout rate and face integration problems in the mainstream schools. Regarding immigrant communities, the higher vulnerability (than the national citizens) to unemployment is also reflected among the young immigrants. One example is the undocumented youth immigrants, whose labour inclusion is made through very precarious and low paid jobs, without any social protection and, in some cases, facing vulnerability to labour exploitation (traffic, slavery, payment lower than agreed or not paid at all, etc.).

EAPN Estonia

There is a huge problem with Russian-speaking youth, a lot of them do not speak Estonian and therefore it is hard to get a job, there are also situations when employers prefer Estonians, even though Russian-speaking youngsters speak good Estonian.

EAPN Spain

It is important to stress the needs of specific groups, eg migrants, the Roma, people with a disability, otherwise policies will be targeted generically to “youth” and the excluded groups will be forgotten.

In addition, a growing number of young people, particularly young women, are **parents or lone parents**, face difficult family and housing situations, or are **struggling with addictions and mental health problems** (CY, EE, CZ, IE, MT), and face **stereotyping by the media and bullying by their peers**. A special category are **young people who grew up without their parents**, either in state institutions, or with remote family members, when parents were abroad. Social and professional exclusion of these young people is on the rise, as current policies are ill-designed and current systems ill-equipped to ensure equality and inclusion, by providing the needed support to these groups.

EAPN Poland

Special groups are primarily youth with disabilities, seen mainly in terms of low access to higher education or good enough vocational education. For some there is a problem of access to sexual education in schools, but the problem of teen mothers is not very well recognized.

EAPN Romania

A Report on the present problems among the young population of Romania (Ministry of Labour, 2013), states that annually, about 5,000 young people leaving the state care facilities are vulnerable and at risk of poverty and/or social exclusion. Socio-professional integration services and the ones that aim at sustaining the independent life skills are underdeveloped. An earlier study by the Soros Foundation (Effects of migration: Children left behind, 2008) reported that approximately 170000 children from primary schools had at least one parent working abroad. The children left behind are entrusted to the remaining parent or if both parents are missing, to a close person or a relative in the best case. Young people in this situation are more likely to drop out school and out of the normal path to adulthood.

1.2. Underlying causes

There is consensus across the board in EAPN’s members’ responses that **no access or reduced access to inadequate social protection** is one of the main causes of poverty for young people, combined with **lack of access to rights, resources, and services, including the right to decent work**. The lack of resources from early childhood throughout youth means growing up in poverty and material deprivation, not being able to access services and opportunities, having difficulties entering the labour market, and losing access to rights and participation. The effects of badly designed social assistance schemes are particularly visible in educational attainment and professional integration, where the message is clear: poverty incurred from lack of adequate income support is the main deterrent for accessing employment, education, and other services, as well as social participation. An additional factor is the current negative interplay between income support and activation policies within the Active Inclusion framework, which is very narrowly used only to make benefits conditional upon accepting any job, even low-quality ones. This vicious circle effectively condemns young people to poverty in work (if they accept poor jobs) and out of work (if they refuse poor jobs, thus incurring loss of benefits).

EAPN Czech Republic

The structure of social benefits prevents young children from entering post compulsory education in households receiving benefits. The poverty of families leads to low motivation and low opportunities to financially support children in post compulsory education.

EAPN Iceland

There is a vicious cycle of poverty. The children of poorer parents do not have the same educational opportunities as others. The income-related benefits in the social security system means that those who can work part-time often gain little from doing so as their benefits are curtailed and they are therefore unable to improve their financial position, and are thus caught in a poverty trap.

EAPN Italy

The poverty of families often leads young people to drop out of school, looking for a job to give help at home, and this is particularly in rural areas, where the poverty level is very high, and there is a lack of adequate support as minimum income, which push to early school leaving.

EAPN United Kingdom

Benefits for families have been cut, child benefit frozen, access to higher rates of disability benefit much reduced and tax credits for the working poor cut back. Despite the fact that real wages have been stagnant or falling in the UK for ten years, welfare benefits now replace a smaller proportion of income needed for a minimum income standard (MIS).

FEANTSA

The combination high levels of youth unemployment, low and/or reduced benefits and shortage of affordable public housing is a problem. Young people who have no choice but to leave the family home because of domestic violence or other problems and who do not qualify for public support to access housing are at risk of becoming homeless. The reduced rate of social welfare paid to people under 25 (e.g. Ireland and U.K.) contributes negatively to the situation. Sharp increases in youth homelessness are happening in most EU member states.

The main underlying cause for persistent and increased social exclusion and discrimination is that **European countries don't promote a fair distribution of wealth and resources, nor promote inclusive, socially cohesive societies, based on solidarity and rights, and enforcing pro-active anti-discrimination policy for all.** The structural causes of poverty need to be tackled at systemic level, reducing inequality, particularly in access to income and wealth. A person's background (socio-economic status, poverty, ethnicity, gender, disability/ability, health problem) is a crucial determinant in being discriminated and unable to access rights, resources and opportunities on an equal footing, as identified by the overwhelming majority of EAPN networks (CZ, UK, EE, DE, IC, IE, IT, PL, PT, RO). Factors contributing to these societal attitudes are **inadequate policies, which do not effectively and pro-actively fight discrimination and promote cohesion and inclusion,** as well as **misreporting and stereotyping by the media,** contributing to negative social practices of exclusion, and **perpetuating the cycle of poverty, discrimination and disadvantage.**

EAPN Ireland

A clear cause is policy discrimination against young people, e.g. reductions in social welfare for under 26 year olds without children. Young people with disabilities take a double hit: they are disadvantaged by virtue of their age and their disability. They are very likely to continue to live lives framed by structural inequality and social exclusion, unless appropriate attention and resources are focused on active inclusion.

EAPN Czech Republic

Poverty, social exclusion, Roma ethnicity, status of families – they are repeating, it's an intergenerational transfer.

1.3. What is needed

An overarching approach to reducing poverty requires an integrated strategy which rebalances the distribution of income and resources, to ensure equal access to rights, resources and services, and redistributing fairly through tax and public services. Within this approach specific routes and support mechanisms are needed for key groups, such as youth.

Increased social benefits for children and youth

Just as EAPN members unanimously identified inadequate or unavailable income support as a main cause of youth poverty, the solution also brings a consensus. Social assistance, especially minimum income support (at decent levels), housing support, and unemployment benefits, as well as family support and education and child allowances, need to be stepped up, in quality, as well as provision, to make sure that they reach those families, those children, and those young adults most in need, thus enabling them to escape intergenerational poverty and take advantage of equal opportunities in society and on the labour market.

EAPN Germany

To avoid material child poverty some NGOs suggest a guaranteed child allowance for children (Kindergrundsicherung), which would ensure a non-bureaucratic sufficient minimum subsistence level and simplify an access to cultural and social offers.

EAPN Iceland

The solution is school subsidies for those who live in poverty. The school system must be revolutionised from the very earliest levels of education and support must be provided for those children and their families who are known to be most likely to drop-out of school prematurely.

EAPN Italy

Activate an adequate minimum income scheme to support young people at risk of dropping out of school to help poor families, and young people who have left the school system, so they can become independent and engage in the search for a job without having to accept proposals in the underground economy.

Comprehensive policies to ensure equal opportunities and fight poverty and exclusion

Governments need to put in place legislation and measures that promote equal rights and opportunities, and to pro-actively combat discrimination and inequalities, including gender inequality, ensuring that young people are not punished for their background and personal characteristics, but supported to escape poverty and social exclusion and to lead decent lives.

EAPN Germany

The most important aim is to achieve equal opportunities for all children – no matter what gender they have or what their parents do or which migration background they have. All children have to get the same chances of education and support.

EAPN Estonia

Young people with disabilities must be given the opportunity to acquire education equally to people who do not have any disability.

EAPN Poland

A set of policies and resources are needed, to support transition from foster care (family or institutional) to independent living and working; to provide youth rehabilitation programmes for young people in youth correctional institutions; to support youth cultural awareness and integration; to ensure prevention and support for alcohol and drug dependency.

1.4. Examples of good practices

Portugal

Created in 2001, the Choices Programme (Programa Escolhas) seeks to promote the social inclusion of children and young people coming from more vulnerable socio-economic backgrounds, aiming for equality of opportunity and the reinforcement of social cohesion. Currently in its 5th phase, the programme supports 110 projects throughout the country, who undertake daily activities to support formal and non-formal education, orientation and referral to vocational training and employment, developing civic and community participation, promotion of “digital inclusion” and supporting empowerment and entrepreneurialism. The Choices Programme is funded by the Institute for Social Security, by the General-Direction of Innovation and Curricular Development and by the European Social Fund, through the Operational programme for Human Potential. For more information please see the site: www.programaescolhas.pt. The Programme is currently in its 5th generation, which will run until December 31, 2015.

2. Access to services

2.1. Problem statement

Access to quality public services for all is a fundamental right and crucial pre-requisite for creating equal societies. It is particularly important for disadvantaged young people, first in foremost in what concerns affordable housing (IC, IE, PL, UK, FI), but also health and social services, including wrap-around counselling and support. Young people, especially young women, are also parents, sometimes single parents, sometimes teen parents, and sometimes both, which is an important concern, demanding tailored services such as affordable childcare, as well as personalised counselling and support in order to support participation and employment.

Youth suffering a disability, or a health-related issue (including mental health), or are struggling with a substance abuse problem are in need of particular support and facilities. Lack of access to affordable, quality services significantly hinders access to education, to the labour market, but also to social participation, social inclusion, and wellbeing.

Access to affordable housing has been highlighted by most EAPN members as the most needed service that young people do not have access to. Very high rental and purchase prices on the market, the banks’ increased reluctance to provide loans, and young people’s precarious income and employment situations lead to the fact that many young men and women can’t afford their own accommodation till much later in life, even after the age of 30. As most rely on their families for shelter, this leads to over crowdedness and unsuitable living conditions, an additional financial burden on the parents, and the progressive loss of youth autonomy.

Additionally, certain categories of young people, such as those leaving institutional care, are particularly vulnerable to becoming homeless – and the reduced access to social welfare for young people in many countries is a contributing factor. Young women who are victims of domestic violence also have a higher propensity to homelessness.

EAPN Iceland

It is very difficult for young people to buy apartments or to enter into the rental market. Moreover, there is little availability of accessible housing for the disabled.

EAPN Poland – We have programs of mortgage allowances called Flat for Young, but mortgage is not a solution for young families in poverty or near poverty, and social housing is underdeveloped.

EAPN United Kingdom

Waiting lists for local authority housing are several years' long. The government's definition of "affordable" rents has risen to 80% of market rents. Access to home ownership, social housing and private rented accommodation is declining for young people. Under-25s are disadvantaged in the benefits system and this further restricts their access to housing –the rate is very low relative to rents. The shared accommodation rate has now been extended from those below age 25 to those aged up to 35. Homelessness is rising, including for young people, and half of homeless young people are under 20 years old.

Comprehensive and affordable social services, including health services and counselling, are also missing, leaving those young people already in need of support even more unable to deal with obstacles and fend for themselves. Young people need personalised support and services to be able to access training opportunities, as well as to be helped into quality, sustainable jobs. The crucial importance of affordable, accessible, quality child care and other support services for young mothers, especially lone parents, is undeniable. Last but not least, quality youth work is a very important dimension, and specific youth services play a crucial role in the successful social and professional integration of young people.

Macedonian EAPN

There is a lack of youth centres and services for young people, supported by the government.

EAPN Finland

A big problem is the access of young people to the mental health services. The waiting time can be long, while the problems get worse. It is also difficult to get family counselling services, and child protection services lack resources. There are not enough social workers, psychologists or nurses at schools.

EAPN Malta

There is a lack of support in schools, in formal and non-formal set-ups, including counsellors and social workers.

2.2. Underlying causes

The most important cause for inadequate access to services by young people is that, simply, the services do not exist most of the time, either because they never did, or because their funding and/or backing was cut in recent years, as a result of the crisis and of massive cuts imposed by the austerity agenda. In the case of housing and health, the lack of affordable services has been exacerbated by an over-reliance on market-led solutions.

The worrying absence particularly of comprehensive social support services for vulnerable youth is pointed out by many EAPN members (CY, CZ, DE, IE, IT, MK, RO) as a deterrent to decent lives for these groups. In addition, services that do exist, such as housing, care, health and education, fail to take into account the specific situation of young people, especially those already facing difficulties. There are also particular access issues due to the discrimination of young women, young people from minority groups, or youth groups with a particular identity of background.

EAPN Italy

The reasons are the absence of an adequate system of national and regional guidance, at school, at university level, and at level of employment services, as well as of services to help young people cope with the world of work.

5.3. What is needed

Access for all youth to key services and resources, and specialised youth services for vulnerable groups

Young people have complex needs, and their full development and participation can only be ensured by a comprehensive range of programmes, initiatives, and activities, backed by adequate funding. Educational activities are at the top of the list, but, equally, access to healthcare, particularly for those most in need (with a disability, suffering from depression or addiction), counselling, care, as well as opportunities for engagement and participation, to foster a positive image of oneself. This view is supported by most EAPN members (CZ, EE, IC, PL, EE, IE, UK).

Czech Republic

Invest in self-perception, personality and self-esteem programmes from primary schools, active project work for communities already from primary, secondary schools.

EAPN Estonia

Implement youth information systems the on the „young people to young people“ method, and take these information services closer to people, using interactive methods that they respond to.

EAPN Finland

Develop outreach youth work, to help those under 29 who are outside education or labour market, and who need support to reach public sector services, and who are at risk of social exclusion. This includes street work, detached youth work, mobile youth work or outreach youth work. The Finnish Youth Act has laid down provisions on outreach youth work and multi-disciplinary cooperation at local level since 2011.

EAPN Iceland

It is important that all young people should have the opportunity to engage in sports or other leisure activities regardless of financial position.

EAPN Malta

What is needed is more support to NGOs and institutions working with young people, support of non-formal groups, and broader access to community learning centres.

EAPN Romania

The healthcare and the educational and social security systems need to be reformed, so that they become more inclusive and adjusted to the new national realities.

Access to adequate, affordable accommodation

The issue of housing for young people is another priority that needs urgent solving. A number of solutions are proposed, including changing national legislation to codify the right to decent housing as a fundamental human right. Social housing provision needs to be stepped up and target those most in need, while it should also respect quality standards, not least with a view to avoiding fuel and energy poverty. Our members report that, while most European cities have a growing number of unoccupied accommodations, more and more people sleep rough or in unsustainable housing conditions, and squatting is on the rise.

EAPN United Kingdom

Building adequate, affordable housing would reduce house prices and rents, with most advantage to young people.

FEANTSA

We need policies to maximise the housing option for young homeless. Better use of vacant housing, more and better targeted social housing, socialization of the private rental sector, promotion of cheap construction methods, transforming empty office space in housing, etc.

2.4. Examples of good practices

Finland (via FEANTSA)

The Vamos work model developed by FEANTSA member Helsinki Deaconess Institute during the previous homelessness program has presented a new effective way to work with young homeless people in most challenging life situations. The work was started in 2008 as a project based on the needs discovered in outreach work. Several gaps had been found in the scattered service system and the target was to develop a comprehensive service to fill these gaps in cooperation with local authorities and other NGOs. The Vamos low-threshold service is aimed at young people aged 16-29 years who have no place to study or work and can't find the services they need. The target in the work is to strengthen young persons' own resources by individually tailored coaching and eventually find a pathway to education or work. The Vamos youth centre integrates all essential services into one place including city social and health services. Occupational group work offers opportunities to improve one's skills and self-esteem. Key elements in coaching are trust, voluntariness and meeting young people as active partners. Housing is arranged in cooperation with youth housing providers. Also city youth workshops, Helsinki Diakonia College etc. are part of the network. Vamos was developed in Helsinki and now the work model is applied in the city of Espoo, too. The service has helped many of young people and the results are rewarding: nearly 70 % of people coming to Vamos are back on their own feet (back to school or work) within one year.

3. Access to education and training

3.1. Problem statement

Education and training are highlighted by a majority of members (CZ, DE, IE, IT, NL, PL, PT, RO, UK) as another key area where young people face significant obstacles nowadays, including unequal access, segregation, lack of programmes, low completion rate, drop-out, lack of skills, and mismatches. While education is understood as providing children and young people with broad knowledge of the world, as well as life skills and social competences, beyond labour market needs, training is taken to mean specific courses related to employment and professional integration.

Education at primary and secondary school level is largely provided free of tuition charges, yet it is a myth that there are no costs involved, and that everyone has an **equal chance to access quality education and training opportunities**. Equal schooling is a right, yet many children and young people are faced with a multitude of difficulties, deriving either from intergenerational poverty and socio-economic status, or from discrimination based on other grounds, such as gender, race, ethnicity, disability etc., as well as changes in the accessibility and fairness of school systems. Inequalities at school are a growing reality across Europe, mirroring overall inequalities in our societies.

EAPN Ireland

Progression to higher education is still a major issue for children from disadvantaged communities. Half the number of children from school in disadvantaged areas (24%) go on to third level, compared to their counterparts in other publically funded schools (49%). Census 2006 showed that 63.2% of Traveller children under the age of 15 had left school as compared to 13.3% for the general population. However, in Budget 2011, all the extra resources to support young Travellers to remain in mainstream education were cut.

EAPN Czech Republic

Privatisation of schools has led to segregation between public and private schools, which is now a real factor. Private schools manipulate the results to get more students, as they get paid for each student. Inequalities in education are growing, there are VIP schools, while Roma children are placed in special or segregated primary schools, without the possibility to successfully finish secondary school.

EAPN Poland

We have some critiques of educational inequalities, but PISA results are taken broadly, without any consideration to intergenerational inequalities.

EAPN Romania

Young people face obstacles in accessing education, healthcare and quality public services, and the situation is worse for the ones living in the rural areas – while Romania has the largest percentage of population living in rural areas in the EU.

Access to, as well as permanence in, education and training opportunities are both hindered by a number of obstacles, leading to **low educational attainment, low completion rates, and high early school leaving**. Inherent costs (clothes, books, transport etc), difficult family circumstances (inadequate housing, young parenthood, material deprivation, even hunger) and discrimination (including bullying) turn many children and young people away from completing their education and training. Equally, finding further training opportunities for the young unemployed, especially lone parents, without providing them with adequate income support, is an incomplete solution.

EAPN Italy

The graduates aged between 30 and 34 years are 21.7 %, while the EU28 average rate is 35.7%. The rate of young people who leave school early to 2012 was 17.6%.

EAPN Portugal

Portugal has the third highest rate of early school leaving in the EU, and, in, 2011, the completion rate of higher education between 30-34 years was 26.1%, compared with an EU average of 34.6 %.

EAPN Germany

The dependence between the educational success and the social origin is still not resolved. These disadvantaged children have nearly no chance to escape the trap of educational poverty. 2010 the rate of young people (19-29 year-olds) without any diploma of formal education or training was 14.1%.

Another pertinent question relating to education and training is **whether the educational programmes are of sufficient quality and provide young people with life skills to ensure their active social participation**, and **whether training opportunities adequately prepare young people for the labour market**. What we see on the ground is declining funding for non-formal education, a lack of investment in vocational training, and several education systems being described as ineffective. Equally, up-skilling is not a magic bullet, as a large number of highly educated youth are still unable to find quality jobs.

EAPN Bulgaria

Higher education is not very good, so employers want to hire people who are educated abroad.

EAPN Estonia

There is bad cooperation between companies and schools and universities, particularly when developing internships and job shadowing.

EAPN Iceland

Educational policies are too focused on graduating students from academic university studies. Vocational and technical training programs need to be strengthened along with an increase in the number of shorter courses of study that provide professional qualifications.

3.2. Underlying causes

There are several factors leading to poor, unequal educational systems. A core issue is the **step back** we have seen in recent years, **from the commitment to provide universal, comprehensive, public education for all**, ensuring free and equal access. Members also refer to **rigid and unreformed education systems**, as being to blame for a non-inclusive educational environment in many countries.

Undermining comprehensive public school education systems, as well as discrimination at school, including bullying and segregation, and the failure to adequately address these, marginalise pupils from key groups, including those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

Not enough is being done to compensate for different starting points, such as more free meals, personalized coaching and tuition, transport vouchers, anti-discrimination classes for pupils and teachers alike, additional resources to support participation of marginalised groups in mainstream education.

Recent cuts in public spending for education policy and reform will only worsen the situation, as well as increased privatisation of education, as well as of other services.

EAPN Czech Republic

Lower quality, segregated schools for some groups lead to lower ability to adapt in higher and university education (language, analytical skills...). There aren't any assisting programmes for vulnerable groups to succeed in primary, but also higher, education.

Most poor children do not live in rich families. The ability to successfully achieve in education too often depends on the level of socio-economic resources in the family and household, the lack of which creates a disabling environment for the child or youngster to pursue an education.

Disposable income, as well as housing and living conditions, and access to services are factors which significantly impact educational attainment. What is needed is wrap-around support for parents and families, and adequate social benefits and supportive services, to make sure that every child benefits from the early stages of quality education and care.

EAPN Germany

There is a lack of early childhood education. That is why a lot of children cannot compensate the disadvantages they have because of their social background. That means that children from socially disadvantaged families have worse school-leaving qualifications or none. The "Bildungs- und Teilhabepakt" (Educational and Participation Pact) of the Federal Government, which should support children of families receiving social security benefits, is too bureaucratic and complicated organized, that even some public authorities or some NGOs are over challenged.

EAPN United Kingdom

Children's future opportunities are strongly constrained by childhood poverty, and the attainment gap between poor children and others has remained constant. There is a strong link between academic attainment at ages 11 and 16 and poverty.

Insufficient resource allocation also means a **lowering of standards and of quality control for training programmes**.

There is a lack of clarity on the responsibility for equipping youth with tradable skills. The Beveridge curve shows that employers' needs and the skills supply are not aligned, indicating that the public education and training systems are defaulting on its obligations. However, instead of filling this gap, employers invest less and less in on-the-job training and quality traineeships, while their expectations from the traditional systems increase.

The **lack of cooperation and joint training programmes between employers** (private, but also public and from the third sector) **and educational institutions** is only deepening this gap and its consequences.

EAPN Romania

National recognition and equivalence of qualifications / competences (gained formally or informally) and diplomas is still at the beginning and not entirely adapted and flexible to respond rapidly to the need of the national labour market.

3.3. What is needed

Comprehensive and inclusive public education, combined with targeted support

A thorough understanding of the structural and individual characteristics and deterrents is needed, to underpin universal, comprehensive public education strategies, which ensure that equal schooling is indeed accessible to all, and that both schools and training centers are supportive, inclusive environments, free of discrimination and bullying. Not all children and young people are alike, and, while the educational system may be the same for everyone, the starting point is not. This means that additional, tailored support is crucial.

EAPN Czech Republic

The solution is an inclusive education policy. This means assisting programmes for vulnerable groups to succeed in primary, but also higher education, as a part of the educational system. It means scholarships and grants for education, travelling, including free time activities.

High quality early childhood education and care

This is the absolute pre-requisite for future educational attainment and completion. Delays and lags acquired in early schooling and pre-schooling days can significantly determine one's educational, inclusion and professional path. Families need to be supported to provide adequate care and access to education to their children, and, later on, youth need to be able to access adequate resources and services, in order to enrol into and complete training opportunities.

EAPN Germany

Inclusion can only be accomplished with the right amount of high quality early childhood education and with the elimination of the multi-leveled school system.

EAPN Romania

As regards, youth inclusion, there is an imperative need to have more effective interventions on increasing school enrolment.

Relevant training

Education equips people with social skills, with information and knowledge that helps us grow as individuals, and with the right competences to be able to access quality employment. This is why the quality of the educational and training offer is crucial, as the future social and professional integration of individuals highly depends on it. Moreover, the relevance of skills acquired through training, and their usefulness on the labour market, are also determining factors. For that, the worlds of training, including vocational training, and work need to come closer together and forge strong partnerships, with the full involvement of young people and their organisations, to develop sustainable and pertinent, high-quality curricula and training programmes.

EAPN Estonia

We need closer and more effective cooperation between higher education institutions, vocational education institutions and employers.

EAPN Germany

Schools should strengthen the cooperation between the employment offices and the enterprises, to support children during their orientation and their decision-making individually and needs-based.

3.4. Examples of good practices

Iceland

The campaign “Education is the road to employment” is run by the Directorate of Labour for job seekers. This offers two types of education: job-specific studies at particular upper secondary schools and foundation or access courses within universities which are intended for individuals aged 25 and above who plan to enter university but have not completed a university entrance exam (stúdentsspróf).

Italy – Some good practices related to the world of education and training as well as in supporting young people for the creation of new jobs. In Naples, was promoted by a group of teachers recognized as masters of the road”, the project "Chance" (second-chance schools founded in 1994) to retrieve the young people who had dropped out of compulsory education in the most difficult districts of the city. In the project "chance" has been experienced even the minimum income to support families who were dropping out of school and making the boys go to work to support the family.

Ireland - ‘Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools’ (DEIS) is an important Government programme, which focuses on addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities, from pre-school through to second-level education. 860 primary and second-level schools are participating in DEIS.

4. Employment and labour market

4.1. Problem statement

Young people continue to face more difficulties in entering and remaining on the labour market, as well as in accessing quality jobs, than any other age group. 12 EAPN National Networks (CZ, EE, DE, IC, IE, IT, MK, NL, PL, PT, RO, UK) mention unemployment (including long-term), underemployment, low wages, part-time or precarious jobs and undeclared work as key issues undermining young people’s well-being.

Unemployment rates for youth are not just statistics, but a dire reality for many young people on the ground. Often coupled with lack of access to adequate income support and services, it leads to exclusion, demotivation, inability to plan a future, difficult housing situations, and scarce participation in society. Many young people find themselves in a situation described as **NEET (not in employment, education or training)**.

EAPN Ireland

Currently, one of the main issues facing young people is unemployment. The majority of those 18-25 year olds who are unemployed are long term-unemployed. A [Eurofound](#) report from 2012 shows that 18.4% of people ages 15-24 in Ireland were not in employment, education or training (NEETs), the second highest level in the EU where the average was 12.9%. Just over half of these were unemployed.

EAPN Italy

For the group aged 18 to 29, the national unemployment rate is 28%, but it is 40.5% in the Southern regions, compared to 20.1% the Northern regions. The NEET rate for the 15-29 year old group is 23.9%, compared to an EU average of 15.8%.

EAPN Portugal

Unemployment is the biggest problem among young people under 25 years old. The youth unemployment rate was 36.8 % (November 2013, Eurostat - also the fifth highest rate in the EU).

EAPN Romania

Young people are more exposed to the negative effects of unemployment, as youth unemployment is chronic, extended for more than 1 year: 43.3% of unemployed between 15 and 24 years were long-term unemployed in 2012.

EAPN United Kingdom

UK youth unemployment is nearly three times higher than the adult rate; in the third quarter of 2013, it was 20.8%.

Young people also face more obstacles, and yet receive less support, when trying to engage with the labour market, especially for the first time. **Sanctions and tightened eligibility** do not adequately cater to the complex nature of structural and individual barriers, and may even contribute to deepening existing problems. Often ineligible for unemployment benefits, as they haven't yet had their first job, or excluded from other social assistance because of age limitations embedded in national law, young people find themselves without any income. Those who do receive a form of social protection often find themselves in a situation where this is made conditional upon accepting job offers proposed by the employment services, even if they are of low quality, and/or unsustainable.

EAPN United Kingdom

Young people are referred to the providers by public job centres after six months of unemployment. In its first year of operation more people were sanctioned (had their benefits cut or removed) than were found a job through it. Those aged under 25 accounted for 27% of Jobseeker's Allowance claimants in November 2012 but 47% of all sanctions between January and October 2012. A new, harsher regime was introduced after October 2012, so sanctions are likely to have risen further (MPSE 2013).

One of the most important factors contributing to high rates of youth unemployment is the **absence of jobs in general, and of quality, sustainable jobs in particular**. In an overall post-recession context, which has been described as a "jobless recovery", young people find it even harder than other age groups to find and access employment opportunities. Job creation efforts do not always take into account young workers, and entry-level jobs have disappeared, making way for the cheaper (or even

free) option of **internships**. While high-quality work experience placements are extremely valuable learning opportunities and help young people get a foothold into the labour market, internships on the market often do not observe decent working conditions (including wages), nor lead to stable employment, and are sometimes not even recognised as proper work experience by subsequent employers. Equally, subsidies for employers to take on young people have proven successful, in general, but several concerns are raised about employers using the money for other purposes, or offering poor-quality, precarious employment in exchange.

EAPN Cyprus

The main problem that young people face is the lack of employment opportunities.

The jobs which are available to young people are often of **low quality**, “mini-jobs”, featuring atypical contracts, low wages and low employment protection. Young people, especially women and migrants, are more affected by precarious employment than other segments of the population, their employment conditions are less stable and, when facing unemployment, their social protection is either reduced (due to less contributions) or even not assured. They are also more likely to experience **in-work poverty** (11.9% of young workers experienced in-work poverty in 2012, as compared to 9% of the overall population). Low wages and employment insecurity make it impossible for youth to lead autonomous lives and to start a family.

EAPN Iceland

The low wages policy is a problem. Those who are receiving the lowest wages find it difficult to build up a family and a home.

EAPN Ireland

The issue of quality jobs for young people is a problem, particularly as a large number of young people are in temporary or part time jobs. The percentage of young people aged 15-24 in temporary employment has risen from 11.2% in 2004 to 34.9% in 2012, according to a [Eurofound](#) study).

EAPN Romania

In 2008, at the beginning of the economic crisis, 23.1% of young workers in Romania were poor. In 2011, the number went up to 30.7% for workers aged 18-24, the highest in the EU.

In an employers’ labour market, disadvantaged job seekers such as young people need to find alternative solutions. EAPN members signal **underemployment**, as well as **undeclared work**, as survival strategies employed by youth to make ends meet. However, these emergency “solutions” also contribute to instability, precariousness, low income, reduced or absent social protection, as well as erosion of skills, isolation and low self-esteem and participation.

EAPN Portugal

As most of the jobs opportunities for young people in the labour market are of lower quality, this segment of the population is forced to take low-paid jobs, to voluntarily “downgrade” their skills when looking and applying for a job and to decrease the investment in curriculum development.

EAPN Italy

There is a high rate of undeclared work. Irregular workers in Italy reach the threshold of 3 million, a recent study identifies at more than 21% the rate of the underground economy in Italy, among the highest in Europe.

EAPN members also refer to a **mismatch between education and training and the labour market needs**. Young people today are arguably more qualified than previous generations, yet there is a gap between the supply and demand of skills.

EAPN Portugal

The labour market registers a clear mismatch between the needs of employers and the skills of employees, which continues to get worse as thousands of skilled young people leave country.

EAPN Romania

In particular, young people have difficulties regarding their participation on the labour market, such as: massive employment in the informal sector, lack of decent paid job opportunities, high self-employment in subsistence activities, job insecurity and in-work poverty, poor access to forms of continuous training, and mismatches between school and labour market needs.

4.2. Underlying causes

The **lack of (entry level) jobs** is identified by most EAPN members (CZ, EE, IE, MK, PT, RO, UK, FEANTSA) as the main cause of youth unemployment. There is a manifest lack of direct investment and support to job creation, and the tailoring of at least part of such investment in creating jobs that are accessible to young people. Particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas, the development of agriculture or local industries is not prioritised, nor financed. Employers also have a role to play, as they do not take full advantage of the opportunities in place, or offer inadequate placements.

Germany

There is the opportunity for employers to use training accompanying aid, to support disadvantaged youngsters with their new job and the new situation. But these opportunities are often not used by employers, and the training placements are low-paid and have difficult working conditions, which makes them unattractive for young people.

EAPN Romania

In rural areas, there is a shortage of providers of vocational programs and the local labour market has few job opportunities. Nonetheless, there is no clear local strategy to increase entrepreneurship or labour participation of any category, including youth.

Macedonian EAPN

In smaller towns and villages, there is no developed industry, no new job creation.

Poor quality jobs and undeclared work are identified by most members (DE, IT, MK, NL, PT, RO, UK, FEANTSA) as reason for poverty, exclusion and hardship. The **low quality of the jobs available** perpetuates a vicious circle of poverty and insecurity, as low paid, unstable, undeclared employment is a major cause of further exclusion from the labour market and from society.

EAPN Portugal

Young people in precarious employment face higher job insecurity and uncertainty about the future, which are relevant negative factors affecting the possibility to plan their life and to establish their goals according to reasonable expectations about upcoming opportunities.

4.3. What is needed

Inclusive and supportive active labour market policies

The first step towards a job is looking for it, and this endeavour is much more complicated and resource-consuming than it may seem, especially for young people engaging with the labour market for the first time, and even more so for those facing specific obstacles. Subsequently, personalised

counselling and comprehensive, pathway approaches to inclusive labour markets, coupled with income support and access to services, are identified as a key pre-requisite by most EAPN members (CZ, EE, IE, PL, PT, RO, UK, FEANTSA).

There is work to be done on the supply side, by adequately preparing and supporting young people to find quality employment, but also on the demand side, as employers need to open up decent jobs for young people, and foster inclusion and non-discrimination on recruitment and at the workplace.

Poverty is the main underlying cause for lack of professional and social participation, and it needs to be addressed as the complex, multifaceted phenomenon that it is, rather than implementing narrow, counter-productive, one-size-fits-all approaches.

EAPN Czech Republic

We need flexible, good active employment policy with adequate budget, creative and good traineeships programmes, developed together with civil society.

EAPN Poland

Solutions are measures focused on transition from schooling system to work in educational system (vocational orientation) and in employment services (special measures for young unemployed).

EAPN Portugal

The way forward is the reinforcement of the Active Inclusion Strategy, based on individual and integrated pathways for inclusion, and not just activation, coupled with measures to combat unemployment that are not focused on precariousness of labour and low wages, but on the strengthening of decent work.

FEANTSA – Access to employment is an essential factor in reintegration processes, but young homeless people have a range of complex needs often prevent the young homeless people from progressing into work. They definitely need specific education and work support.

Investment in quality and sustainable job creation

Job creation, particularly in new industries, of decent quality and accessible to young people, is referenced by a number of countries (IE, IT, MK, PT, RO, UK) as another much needed solution. This goes hand in hand with the promotion and financing of quality internship and work experience placement opportunities. Efforts should be concentrated particularly on the regions and sectors currently experiencing the highest unemployment, and pay particular attention to the accessibility of these opportunities to young men and women from key groups, facing multiple obstacles. Social economy, especially Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs), can play a key role in integrating young people facing difficulties and discrimination. Mentorship schemes and job sharing are an interesting idea to explore, fostering the sharing of knowledge and expertise, as well as working time, between generations.

EAPN Italy

Implement necessary actions to encourage local development that, in this time of crisis, has been shown to generate new employment, self-employment and the creation of new businesses in new sectors, and in particular in the new technologies of information, communication etc.

EAPN Portugal

Provide Incentives to companies and employers that promote stable and non-precarious quality jobs for young people (and for all workers). Invest in innovative areas (organic and sustainable agriculture, ecological products, third sector, culture and art, local and regional development, conservation of cultural heritage and technological innovation in small and medium enterprises).

EAPN Cyprus

The government is oriented to sweeping privatization, which will aggravate the problem of unemployment, instead it must take initiatives to support social cooperatives and partnerships within the wider public sector, for growth and job creation. It is a matter of urgency to subsidize research projects that will enable the employment of young people with high academic qualifications.

Better cooperation between education and employers

Several EAPN members (EE, DE, IC, IT, PL, PT, RO) agree that the education and training system needs to be better aligned with the needs of the labour market, in order to ensure that young people are equipped with those skills and competences that will allow them to access stable, quality employment. However, a broader approach to training is also needed, and non-formal skills need to be adequately recognised and valued.

EAPN Portugal

What's needed is investment in education and training (including vocational), focused on the specific needs of the labor market and considering the specific needs of the most vulnerable groups such as young people.

EAPN Estonia

The state, local authorities, youth associations and the private sector have to pay more attention to recognition of skills and experiences acquired in the course of a voluntary activity, and should equalise voluntary work experience with that of paid work.

4.4. Examples of good practices

Germany

The project "Mo.Ki" organizes a chain of prevention for socially disadvantaged children and juveniles – from birth to the beginning of the working life. First possible support, inclusion of the parents and precise networking with all approx. 60 institutions and organizations on a local level (for example: midwiferies, kindergartens, family centres), reduce the effects of the social selection of the education system. These organizations ensure the success of education and schooling. "Mo.Ki" improves the educational careers of these socially disadvantaged children and juveniles verifiably. Difficult circumstances make it hard for many families to support their children during the institutional transitions. The project Mo.Ki supports and empowers the parents and the children at very early stages.

Aims of Mo.Ki:

- Establish and ensure a successful development and an educational career for as many children as possible
- Reduce the correlation between social origin and educational success.
- Guarantee all children a better chance of education, schooling and encouragement and therefore a self-determined life.
- Prevention from and early recognition of anything that endangers children's welfare

Portugal

From 2007 to 2010, EPIS (Empresários para a Inclusão Social), in partnership with the Ministry of Education, local authorities and local businesses, tested and validated a training pilot project for school success in 10 partner municipalities, focused on students attending the 3rd cycle of schooling, aged 13 to 15 years. In 2010, during the dissemination and internalization of the methodology, the EPIS continued monitoring the project implementation in the partner municipalities that wished to continue in the Network Program "Mediators for Academic Success", and broadened its scope of operations to new municipalities, with the objective national coverage. In 2012, its activity focused on

employability, through the launch of the Professional Insertion Fund that supports apprenticeships in business environment, aimed at young people who completed the 9th degree and are more than 18 years old. See more in www.epis.pt.

Eurodiaconia

The Cascina Sociale Carlo Alberto is a farming project, run as a social enterprise, initiated by the Diaconia Valdese Fiorentina in Italy. The project aims at revalorising abandoned, unused land, by practicing social and sustainable agriculture, contributing to community and local development, while also providing employment opportunities and inclusion pathways for unemployed young people in the area. More information (Italian only): <http://www.cascinasocialecarloalberto.it/>

France (via FEANTSA)

The TAPAJ programme was first introduced in Bordeaux during the summer of 2012. This programme aims to provide young people living in the street and aged between 18 and 25 years old to work. The principle is simple. Each month, the young person signs a specific contract with AR33, an organisation providing re-settlement support services. This allows the youngster to perform every Tuesday afternoon four-hour mission, paid € 10 an hour. Initially the main tasks consisted mostly in manual jobs in public parks, such as cleaning green areas. At the end of the day, young people receive a check that can be redeemed immediately in a post office against cash. If young people do not come back the following week one week, the contract is not questioned. The same applies if they decide to work only two hours instead of four. The aim of the programme is to have a work contract as flexible as possible in order to enable the young homeless person to slowly return to employment. After this experience, they can move to a more formal work position. The programme has continued in 2013 offering possibilities for longer-hour contracts.

5. Participation and empowerment

5.1. Problem statement

Participation and empowerment need to be an over-arching element of any inclusive youth policy, especially in the current context of young people's disengagement and disenchantment with democratic processes, and increasing social unrest in many countries.

There is a clear **need to engage more directly in dialogue and empowerment processes**, at macro (policy- and decision-making) as well as micro (personal development, life coaching) scale, as well as social and cultural participation. However, these opportunities are not always available.

Youth in Europe feel increasingly **marginalised, isolated, undervalued and rejected, which can lead to a profound erosion of self-esteem, negative self-image, low perception of self-worth, hopelessness**, and in extreme cases, even to depression and other related mental health problems.

EAPN Malta

Lack of participation in dialogue is a big problem, or worse, manipulation by political parties and/or other institutions.

EAPN Norway

Need tailored packages and more consultation with youth and more creative groups to allow young people to exchange and come up with solutions, involving local authorities, so their voice can be heard.

Narrow governmental approaches to participation usually focus on young workers, rather than young people, and prioritise employment above all else, also placing the responsibility for getting a job on

the young jobseeker. Ironically, these strategies have had the opposite result, as young people feel ignored, marginalised, and unsupported, and choose to emigrate, thus depleting their country's workforce.

The low quality of jobs and the lack of opportunities are other reasons pushing youth abroad. **Emigration of young people is on the rise in most European countries**, and, while labour mobility in itself is not a bad thing, it should not be forced migration, motivated by despair, poverty, and exclusion.

EAPN Estonia

Young people are leaving. If they work in Finland, in UK, or in Ireland, they get 2 to 3 times as much.

EAPN Poland

Young people prefer to work in other countries, because of better conditions and treatment – permanent health systems and social security. 2 million young people go to UK, to Ireland, and not to Germany, Belgium, and France, and this is the entrepreneurial youth that we lose.

EAPN Romania

Massive labour migration affects especially high-skilled youth. In general, about a quarter of young professionals feel that they have more opportunities outside the country than in Romania.

5.2. Underlying causes

The main reason prompting young people not to engage with society, the labour market, and decision-making, or even to leave the country all together, is the lack of participative structures reinforcing a vicious circle of demotivation, shame, and loss of hope.

As opportunities for engagement are not provided, their access to information is not supported, and their input often discarded, young people lose faith in the institutions, both at national and the EU level, and disenchantment soon becomes disengagement.

EAPN Estonia

Young people do not feel like they are needed in society. Politics are not taking into account youth problems.

EAPN Ireland

Young people lack opportunities to engage in a meaningful way in decisions that affect them. Consultations with young people are tokenistic.

EAPN Malta

There is a lack of information available, especially to illiterate young people.

EAPN Netherlands

Young people don't engage anymore because they feel that they don't have a future.

5.3. What is needed

Build structured dialogue to meaningfully involve young people

Governments need to invest in building strong partnerships with young people and their civil society organisations, and ensure the proper channels and process so that these can get involved in youth policy-making at national, regional and local level, and to contribute to broader policy solutions with other groups.

Young people are part of the solution, not of the problem, and that need to feel as such, and contribute to the identification of the best policy mix in order to address the problems that they face on a daily basis. It is also crucial that young people have a say in service delivery, in a user-driven perspective, and that their social and cultural participation, including involvement in their communities and civil initiatives.

EAPN Estonia

Legalise the obligation to involve young people in making decisions that concern them, both on the level of state and local governments – establish a system. Guarantee sufficient funding for participation councils, to support the development of structures and activities that promote cooperation.

EAPN Ireland

Include of young peoples' voices in decisions that affect them, and lower the voting age to 16.

EAPN Finland

Youth Parliaments promote youth consultation in decision-making and encourage young people to become interested to advocate matters of young.

Support self-esteem and confidence for youth

It is hard to find your place in society if you're facing poverty and deprivation, are bullied by services, and can't access decent employment. It is even harder to believe that your contribution matters, and that it is worth getting involved. Much better support needs to be ensured to actively encourage young people to participate in their communities, and to back youth participation and programmes, including volunteering, peer-to-peer support, cultural and free time activities, as well as civic and political engagement. If young people are indeed the future, their voice should be heard from early on.

Macedonian EAPN

Youth activism needs to be encouraged!

EAPN United Kingdom

Only a radical change in direction, including from young people, can provide the climate for tackling youth exclusion.

5.4. Examples of good practices

Ireland

Comhairle na nÓg are child and youth councils in the 34 local authorities of the country, which give children and young people the opportunity to be involved in the development of local services and policies. Young people under the age of 18 do not have a vote in national or local elections, Comhairle na nÓg is therefore designed to enable young people to have a voice on the services, policies and issues that affect them in their local area.

Towards an integrated approach to youth poverty

We have reviewed, in previous sections, the main elements which, in the opinion of our members, prevent young people from fully participating in society, remaining vulnerable to unemployment, poverty, and social exclusion.

The wide variety of topics, as well as the complexity of the underlying causes and the dangerous potential of their long-lasting effects require strong, integrated approaches, developed in a participatory manner, and backed by appropriate funding.

Any efforts need to start with a correct quantification and qualification of the problem, which is difficult, as statistics on children and youth poverty and missing or incomplete in some countries (CY, PL).

Young people need to be considered, simultaneously and in a nuanced manner, both in the wider context of their families, as well as individuals, entitled to their rights.

Young people need access to rights, resources and services, in order to be able to participate as equals and lead dignified lives, as full and accomplished members of our societies.

Integrated support to fight youth poverty and promote comprehensive youth inclusion, beyond employment, needs to be a priority. This should include support to ensure adequate income (through both quality work, as well as social protection), access to quality services, and right to empowerment and participation.

The youth of Europe need their rights to be respected, they need to be supported with adequate financial resources, to be shielded from discrimination, to benefit from equal access to education opportunities and a whole range of other accessible, affordable services, to be guided towards the labour market and quality jobs through pathway approaches.

Last but not least, they need to feel included, valued, and to be given opportunities to engage and become active citizens.

However, and despite the prominence of the problem, national approaches remain piecemeal, incomplete, not fully adequate, and sometimes do even more harm than good on the ground.

EAPN Ireland

Foroige is the main national youth organisation in Ireland providing services to 54, 000 young people through clubs and projects for disadvantaged young people. Youth Work Ireland is a Federation of clubs and the National Youth Council is the National Network of all youth organisations including Foroige, Youth Work Ireland, scouts, cubs etc. In early 2014, the Government published Better Outcomes – Brighter Futures a new national policy framework for children and young people for the period 2014-2020 will build *Our Children-Their Lives*, the first National Children’s Strategy (published in 2000). This is being coordinated by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs which is under the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. The framework contains a new child poverty target which is to remove 70,000 children from consistent poverty by 2020, a reduction of two thirds.

EAPN Poland

It is not clear how important is youth for our government policy. A big media event was the publication of the report Young 2011 with 35 general recommendations, but it was a one-off event just before parliamentary elections, and without visible consequences. We have no agency or body responsible for general youth problems, which are channelled into several ministries responsibility. The youth strategy 2003-2012 was document without any implementation power. There is no political will to push youth problems into agenda with two exceptions - unemployment and (higher) education. Main discourse is predominated by one message: we should adjust educational system to the needs of the labour market.

EAPN Iceland

It is extremely important that the authorities prepare long-term plans as regards the educational and employment issues of young people. Particular attention should be paid to those who need specific support, such as young people of an ethnic background who are less likely to finish their college education than their peers.

The most important thing remains giving young people a message of hope. Decision-makers need to realise that youth inclusion goes beyond bogus labour market integration, and that current strategies risk dangerous consequences in the long-term.

It is in their power to ensure that this is not a lost generation. The young men and women of Europe need a positive and respectful approach, access to resources, opportunities, services and rights, empowerment and participation.

Eurochild

There is a need to give a more human face to youth policy, to focus on the needs of young people and identify them together.

PART II - THE EUROPEAN LEVEL: WHAT ROLE FOR THE EU?

1. Youth issues in Europe 2020 and other European initiatives

It is difficult to speak of policies addressing youth inclusion. The first obstacle is that such policies are not currently being articulated as such. There are overlaps, as well as gaps, between youth policies (which don't always focus specifically on the inclusion of vulnerable youth) and inclusion policies (which doesn't always consider youth as a priority group, with specific needs).

At the level of the European Commission, youth policies fall mainly under the remit of DG Education and Culture, while initiatives targeting the labour market, such as the Youth Guarantee, are the purview of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

DG Education and Culture has put forward, in 2009, an [EU Youth Strategy](#) for 2010-2018, to be delivered through the previous Youth in Action funding programme (now Erasmus+). While the strategy seems to feature an integrated approach, proposing 8 fields of action (education, employment, health, participation, volunteering, social inclusion, youth and the world, creativity and culture), some aspects, such as education, employment, and social inclusion, are dealt with by DG Employment, with little coordination with DG Education and Culture and other DGs, responsible for other priorities. The cooperation between the two DGs, not least as far as the implementation of this Strategy is concerned, could be further strengthened, as, for the moment, it is unclear where the centralised accountability for this Strategy lies.

The Europe 2020 Strategy features three so-called "social targets", on employment, education and training, and poverty reduction. While the first two objectives include a clear priority for youth, the latter one, dealing with the fight against poverty and social exclusion, hardly includes considerations about the specific situation of youth. The target on lifting at least 20 million people out of poverty and exclusion by 2020 is underpinned by Guideline 10 of the [Integrated Guidelines](#), which does mention that Member States should ensure income security and poverty reduction for youth, but only nominates them tokenistically in a long list of other vulnerable groups. If we look at the Flagship Initiative European Platform Against Poverty and Social Exclusion (EPAP), in the overview of [EPAP actions completed by July 2013](#), only one refers to young people – "Ensure proper implementation of the School Fruit Scheme launched in 2009 in order to encourage good eating habits among young people, including from low income families, by supplying them with fruit and vegetable at school." More hope is provided by the overview of [ongoing EPAP actions](#), where it is clearly mentioned as an objective that "any future EU initiatives in the field of youth will include proposals which will, amongst other things, aim to combat poverty and social exclusion among disadvantaged youth through non-formal learning and participative methods."

The [Youth on the Move](#) package, one of the Flagship Initiatives of Europe 2020, is currently being implemented through a wide range of follow-up documents, such as the [Youth Opportunities Initiative](#), or the [Youth Employment Package](#) (which includes the Youth Guarantee and the [Youth Employment Initiative](#), which are further analysed below, among others). While potentially a good approach, it is limited to promoting employability and employment-related training, failing to adopt a comprehensive approach which would ensure broader social participation and inclusion, or to create links with other European social inclusion initiatives, such as the poverty target, or the European Flagship against Poverty.

Indeed, there is a [Council Recommendation](#) (15652/1/12), of 27 November 2012, on the participation and social inclusion of young people with emphasis on those with a migrant background, as well as

[Council Conclusions](#) on the contribution of quality youth work to the development, well-being and social inclusion of young people (8575/13), of 16 May 2013. Equally encouraging is the [Draft Council Resolution](#) on Structured Dialogue process, including the social inclusion of young people (9026/14), of 30 April 2014. These are largely positive documents, reflecting a number of concerns presented above in this paper, and dealing with youth issues beyond the labour market. However, the follow-up and implementation of these documents remains unclear, especially in what concerns their application to initiatives spearheaded by DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

Youth policies are monitored in the framework of the Europe 2020 Strategy, and its 5 headline targets, through the European Semester. However, while a lot of attention is being paid to youth policies underpinning the employment and education targets, very little is said or monitored about the contribution to youth policies to achieving the poverty reduction target. The [Annual Growth Survey](#), the [Joint Employment Report](#), and the [Country-Specific Recommendations](#) of 2014 make generous references to young people, but exclusively in what concerns youth employment and the implementation of the Youth Guarantee. While most of these references are positive – relating to quality of job offers and personalised support for young people towards the labour market – they lack a much needed complementary perspective, or combatting youth poverty and social exclusion, not only as a pre-requisite for achieving the employment and education targets for youth, but also the poverty target.

The currently ongoing Mid-Term Review of the Europe 2020 Strategy constitutes a great opportunity for a fresh look at integrated approaches to combat youth poverty, with the fight against youth unemployment a significant pillar, reinforced by access to decent income, quality services, and meaningful participation. EAPN members make some concrete proposals in this sense at the end of this paper. A challenge for the new European Commission will be to ensure integrate, coordinated, overarching approaches to youth policies, covering a wise policy mix and ensuring accountability and coherence along the different DGs implementing it.

2. The Youth Guarantee

As part of the Youth Employment Package of December 2012, mentioned above, the European Commission called on Member States to “ensure all young Europeans receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or traineeship, within four months of leaving school or becoming unemployed. This is known as the “Youth Guarantee”. The European Commission called for the Council to adopt a Country Specific Recommendation on the Youth Guarantee, and for Member States with youth unemployment above 25% to submit a Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan by October 2013. To support it, ESF (and ESIF) funding was mobilised and frontloaded, also through the Youth Employment Initiative, aimed at 15-24 year old NEETs in Member States with more than 25% youth unemployment.

Member States were asked to prepare Youth Guarantee Implementation Plans, and submit them to the European Commission, in December 2013-January 2014. These were assessed in the framework of the European Semester, by the Commission and the Employment Committee (EMCO) through its multilateral surveillance. Inside the Commission, an evaluation grid was developed (but has not been made public), with the cooperation of country desks, the country teams of the Secretariat General, DG ECFIN, and DG EAC. Following the assessment, the [Commission conducted bilateral meetings with Member States](#), and the majority of countries received Country Specific Recommendations on the Youth Guarantee (and a smaller number generally on youth outreach). It is not clear though what will happen after the frontloading period is over, whether there will be more Youth Guarantee Implementation Plans in the upcoming years, and what is the link with the NRPs, the Integrated Guidelines, and the Europe 2020 targets, including the poverty-reduction one.

Most EAPN networks (CY, IE, IT, PL, PT, ES, RO, + Finland via FEANTSA) consider the Youth Guarantee a good opportunity in principle, albeit with some important limitations and risks, while a few express

their faith in and support for the initiative (MK, NL, RO, UK). However, such a strategy would succeed only if correctly implemented, which means taking into account both structural, as well as individual obstacles to employment and social participation, rather than devising quick, unsustainable and ill-fitting solutions. Equally, the quality of jobs and educational opportunities as part of the Youth Guarantee needs to be carefully monitored against reliable indicators. The compulsory element and the time limit are encouraging elements, but there is concern that this will only prompt Governments to “play it by the numbers”, pushing young people into low-quality placements only to meet the quota.

EAPN Portugal

The National Implementation Plan for a Youth Guarantee was published at the end of 2013. The Plan acknowledges the duration and complexity of the transitions between education, work and adult life, and therefore extends the Youth Guarantee to young people until 30 years old.

EAPN Cyprus

The trade unions in membership of EAPN Cyprus participated in the formulation of the National Implementation Plan for the Youth Guarantee. Our main position was that the Government should take appropriate legislative measures so that the Youth Guarantee provisions do not, among others, render young people targets of exploitation and cheap labor, nor replace fixed and adjusted employment.

EAPN Ireland

The Youth Guarantee is a big opportunity to positively address access to quality education, training and employment for young people. However, there are many reservations such as the quality of the opportunities that will be offered; that the relevant agencies have the capacity to meet the needs of these young people; that the resources will be sufficient and that it is not being implemented as part of an integrated approach addressing access to adequate income and services. It is also being implemented with strong conditionality including the threat of reducing social welfare payments. It is extremely important that youth organisations and the Department of Youth and Children’s Affairs are involved in the design and delivery of the Youth Guarantee.

Some networks voice significant criticism of the initiative, and highlight shortcomings that might endanger the overall result. Main concerns are related to the **quality of work and educational placements proposed, lack of real concern for young people’s wellbeing** in the implementation, and **lack of needed complementary reforms**, especially regarding **adequate income and access to services**.

EAPN Estonia

There’s a lot of negative reaction from youth organisations about the Youth Guarantee. It’s a race to reduce the numbers, above all.

EAPN United Kingdom

The Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiatives are both market-oriented, aimed at putting money in the hands of the employers, without any follow-up or feed-back.

EAPN Italy

Unfortunately, alongside these measures is not provided for the reform of employment services. Given the low efficiency of such services, the risk is that this will undermine the implementation of the Youth Guarantee.

United Kingdom

The European Commission recommended that the government step up from the Youth Contract to a Youth Guarantee, increase the quality and duration of apprenticeships, simplify the system of qualifications, strengthen employer engagement, especially in technical skills, and reduce the number of 18-24 year olds with poor basic skills, including through effective implementation of traineeships. The government's response to weak basic skills was to propose withdrawing welfare benefits from young people who fail to achieve a given standard in maths and English.

FEANTSA

The results of the Finnish youth guarantee remain to be seen: in April there were more young people unemployed than in April last year. A recession is a challenging time to implement the measures, even though the target to improve inclusion is widely recognized. The measures have been criticized for not including housing, since having an affordable home is a prerequisite for being able to commit on studies or work.

Eurofound recently launched a project on the implementation of the Youth Guarantee, mapping efforts in 10 Member States, regarding general context and status quo, success factors, barriers, challenges and costs in the implementation, and concrete actions to be undertaken. However, their previous research ([Eurofound, 2012](#)) showed that the youth guarantee schemes which served as a model for the EU scheme (Finland and Denmark) do not work for young people with complex needs, including homeless people.

FEANTSA

The European Union should urgently develop alternatives to the EU Youth Guarantee if it is serious about getting ALL under 25's into a job, training, or education.

3. The role of EU funding

EU funds can play an important role in supporting broader inclusion approaches for young people, to ensure their social participation and integration on the labour market. The role of EU funds especially in job creation needs to be fully thought through though, as, for instance, employers' organisations (such as BusinessEurope) advocate that the only way to combat youth unemployment is by giving companies subsidies to hire youth.

This echoes the risk to see the ESF predominantly used to support the European Employment Initiative, which is a narrow-scoped approach based on work. A combined use of EU Funds (ESF and Erasmus +) could be used in a targeted manner, to ensure smooth transition from inclusive education to quality employment through vocational and educational training programmes (VET), and ensure intra-EU cross-border mobility for training placements.

Other EU funds can also prove relevant, for instance, to provide youth in rural areas with opportunities, through revaluing agriculture, investing in small scale agricultural ventures and farming, and creating an enabling environment for this type of youth entrepreneurship, in the countryside. In this frame, the CAP post-2013 aims at incentivizing the installation of young farmers with specific payment rules.

Regarding the next programming period of Structural Funds, the key focus regarding youth issues is still employment-driven. The ESF has indeed a clear role in delivering on the Youth Employment Initiative. Member States with youth unemployment rates over 25% will benefit from support drawn from a €3 billion special allocation (€ 3,2 billion in current prices) to fight youth unemployment under the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI). This support will have to be complemented by at least the same

amount drawn from the Member States' ESF allocations and in particular help Member States to implement their Youth Guarantee Implementation Plans².

However, much more needs to be done to make sure that EU funding, particularly EU Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) can fully contribute to the inclusion of socially vulnerable youth. This is a central issue that Member States and regions should tackle, in order to deliver on the poverty reduction target through ESIF (including via a compulsory use of the 20% ESF earmarked for poverty reduction). Several EAPN members clearly pointed out the fact that ESIF are underused in that regard.

EAPN Cyprus

Re-training, teaching and skill development are good practices in Cyprus but they are mostly promoted through local funding and the EU Structural Funds assists to a point towards social and economic growth but unfortunately they do not effectively counter the problem.

Macedonian EAPN

Macedonia was able to use the Structural Funds for youth employment, but unfortunately these funds are not used in full amount and as intended.

EAPN Romania

During May of 2012 and July of 2013, the absorption rate of European Structural Funds in Romania reached a total of 19.1 per cent, and 16.62 per cent through the Human Resources Development Operational Programme (HRD OP).

Successful projects should really start by tackling schooling difficulties of socially disadvantaged children, including extra-curricular activities.

EAPN Malta

Ic Cavetta Project ESF 3.66 is a literacy toolkit to teach basic Maltese Language to youth and adults. This tool kit was created by the NGO "Paulo Freire Institute".

These projects should also provide tailor-made, personalised support – counselling, coaching, and learning guidance – including through second chance schools, informal, non-formal learning schemes.

EAPN Germany

- The Project "Kompetenzagentur" (Competence Agency), which existed 200 times in Germany, got 35 Mio. EUR yearly from the ESF. There juveniles got individual coaching and learning guidance. That supported them during their search for training after school.
- On the federal level there was the program "strengthen youth", which was funded with ESF-budget. The Competence Agency was funded with it and the project "refusing schooling – second chance".

The locally-based component is also a crucial element to make sure that the activities carried out really answer the specific needs of young people on the ground.

EAPN Germany

In the new ESF-funding period there will be a bigger focus on community orientation. The new name of the program is going to be "strengthen youth in the quarter". At this the local authorities will have more responsibility to organize assistance from a single source for socially disadvantaged children.

When dealing with socially disadvantaged groups of young people, projects should also tackle the issue of lack of social capital that makes social integration and, ultimately a long-term and successful

² The ESF national shares dedicated to the Youth Employment Initiative are available [here](#).

integration into the labour market, very difficult. Therefore, networking opportunities should be created.

EAPN Germany

Multi-generation-facilities offer networking possibilities for different target groups could create synergies with funding from the ESF and the Federal Ministry for family affairs (BMFSFJ)...

All disadvantaged and segregated areas should be covered (both urban and rural areas) by EU funded support.

EAPN Romania

Under HRD OP some good practices were developed in order to help young people to achieve their goals and improve their life and living conditions. For example, in rural areas, where there is a shortage of vocational programs and support to labour market integration, the ESF projects were the ones that had offered these types of opportunities and tailored services to respond to the needs of young people. These projects made possible concrete interventions for the beneficiaries such acquiring competences and skills, continued education, raised their awareness, increased labour market participation and equal opportunities.

The creaming phenomenon hinders any meaningful contribution of ESIF to youth inclusion. That is why all socially vulnerable groups of young people should be targeted, including Roma, as well as migrants and asylum seekers. This will encourage a greater opening of public and private institutions, so as to better combat discrimination of these groups.

EAPN Czech Republic

Programmes are being run to support Roma children in education and also in post-compulsory education involving FSG Spain – Promociona, IQ Roma servis CZR – Gendalos. This entails building parks, multicultural playgrounds and free time facilities in excluded localities, – eg. Brno, CZR, Svitavskénábřeží for EU money.

EAPN Germany

The so called Bleiberechtsnetzwerk (ESF) (a network that fights for the right to stay) offers qualification and education to asylum seekers and tolerated persons. It had an enormous impact on the intercultural opening of institutions like schools, Job agencies and vocational training institutions and improved chances for inclusion of young members of this discriminated group.

Innovative projects should be encouraged, as a powerful tool to fight social exclusion of young people, as well as against youth unemployment, provided they are set in a local context, and are NGO-driven, or entail strong NGO participation. A key success factor of those projects is how to scale them up, so as to influence local and national policies.

EAPN Italy

Currently some regions seek to support innovation and youth employment funding, even with the support of the ESF, the creation of Fablab (Factory workshop with the use of new equipment such as eg . 3D printers and scanners).

EAPN Poland

ESF funds are used to combat social exclusion of young people. Mainly they are channeled in funding innovative projects under the theme Instruments of social intervention and chances equalizing. There were 29 in implementation phase, but it is unclear how much their results and products influence local policies. In innovative projects there are requirements for disseminating and mainstreaming but scaling up good enough innovation is difficult task. Many of those projects are designed for particular

groups e.g. traumatized, leaving foster care or correctional facilities, rural youth, or focusing on some youth work methods e.g. tutoring, culture therapy.

All aforementioned elements are still hindered by the difficulties faced by (small) NGOs in accessing EU funding. Administrative (paperwork, red tape) and financial (lack of pre-financing, high co-financing requirement) obstacles make access to ESIF very problematic for NGOs. Managing Authorities should remove these obstacles as much as possible, to make NGO access to ESIF a reality.

EAPN Netherlands

ESF money will be used for the Youth Ambassador. In total 30 million EUR coming from the ESF will be available, on top of the 50 million EUR from the government. For organizations like ours or others on the market, it is as good as impossible to get access to ESF funding to create an innovative project. There is always the need to get also money from a government institution. They spend their money on big projects and in the same way they always did.

Recommendations for the European Union

1. Fight youth poverty and exclusion – not just unemployment

- ⇒ Abandon the assumption that all issues of youth inclusion will be solved by integrating them in the labour market, especially when the jobs proposed, particularly to young people, are of poor quality and sustainability.
- ⇒ Change the political discourse and focus from “youth unemployment” to “youth inclusion”, using, for instance, an active inclusion approach, based on adequate minimum income, access to quality services, and inclusive labour markets.

2. Put forward a real, integrated, rights-based Youth Strategy, with a strong social inclusion component

- ⇒ Ensure that this strategy benefits from comprehensive implementation and that responsibility for it is not split between institutions and documents, which undermine its coherence and endanger its effectiveness.
- ⇒ Include specific policy actions, with appropriate funding, for particularly vulnerable youth groups.

3. Make youth inclusion an explicit focus in the poverty-reduction efforts under Europe 2020

- ⇒ Highlight youth as a group at particular risk of poverty and social exclusion, in the Annual Growth Survey, and address CSRs on this issue;
- ⇒ Give more priority and visibility to youth inclusion, beyond mere employment and education, in the European Platform Against Poverty and other initiatives aimed at achieving the poverty reduction target, including by considering a sub-target.
- ⇒ Add social inclusion concerns and policy initiatives to the Youth on the Move Initiative, which currently only accounts for education and employment.

4. Make sure the Youth Guarantee delivers!

- ⇒ Monitor, through the European Semester and the assessment of the National Implementation Plans, that the offers of employment or education proposed to young people are indeed of quality;
- ⇒ Provide for follow-up support and monitoring once young people have been placed in employment or further education;
- ⇒ Complement the provisions of the Guarantee with access to adequate income, quality services, as well as participation mechanisms.
- ⇒ Ensure that also the most excluded NEETs, such young homeless, are covered by the implementation plans. And if this is not the case/not possible, develop specific initiatives to strengthen link with the labour market for young people experiencing homelessness, by collecting and promoting best practices.

5. Make youth a thematic priority in the Social Investment Package

- ⇒ Put forward a Recommendation, on the model of Investing in Children, on how comprehensive, sustainable youth inclusion can be achieved in the EU, with concrete proposals for action and a roadmap for implementation.

INFORMATION AND CONTACT

For more information on this publication
and on EAPN's work on employment, please contact
Amana Ferro, EAPN Senior Policy Officer amana.ferro@eapn.eu

For more information about EAPN's policy work and positions, please contact
Sian Jones, EAPN Policy Coordinator sian.jones@eapn.eu

See EAPN publications and activities on www.eapn.eu



The European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) is the largest European network of national, regional and local networks, involving anti-poverty NGOs and grassroots groups as well as European Organisations, active in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. It was established in 1990.

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For more information:

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