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The young generation sacrificed: social, economic and political implications of the financial crisis

Report¹

Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

Rapporteur: Mr Luca VOLONTÈ, Italy, Group of the European People's Party

Summary

The persisting economic instability across Europe has exposed young people to unprecedented hardship. Unemployment, underemployment, socio-economic inequalities, poverty and exclusion disproportionately affect the young generation, whose autonomy, dignity, well-being and access to rights are rapidly eroding. As a result, Europe risks not only producing a “lost generation” of disillusioned young people, but also undermining its political stability and social cohesion, justice and peace, as well as its long-term competitiveness and development prospects in the global context.

The report maintains that young people should be considered both as a key asset of an ageing Europe and as crucial actors for helping the society to overcome the crisis. To advance and prosper, Europe needs to reactivate intergenerational solidarity mechanisms and better share political, social and economic power with the young generation. This calls for enhanced support for and investment in young people through adequate policy choices and action.

The report thus proposes a series of measures for ensuring the smoother integration of young people into society through active citizenship, social dialogue, improved access to rights and sustainable employment. This notably implies strengthening youth policies and participation, fostering job creation, improving lifelong learning opportunities and social protection, as well as stimulating youth entrepreneurship and building public-private partnerships between social partners.

1. Reference to committee: Bureau decision, Reference 3832 of 23 January 2012.



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A. Draft resolution²

1. Young people are a key asset for Europe. Conditions must be created for them to participate fully in decision-making, democratic processes and the shaping of a more cohesive, prosperous and just society. Yet the financial and economic crises, together with underlying structural problems, threaten the effective exercise of rights by the young generation, whose autonomy, dignity and well-being are severely affected by growing economic and social inequalities. In some countries, the enormous public debt, financial speculation and the global economic crisis force the young generation to make painful sacrifices.
2. The Parliamentary Assembly denounces the very serious discrimination against young people and is deeply concerned by the fact that the young generation in Europe is disproportionately hit by the unemployment/underemployment-poverty-exclusion trap. This is nothing less than a tragedy in the making. If no tangible improvements are made, Europe risks not only producing a “lost generation” of disillusioned young people, but also undermining its political stability and social cohesion, justice and peace, as well as its long-term competitiveness and development prospects in the global context.
3. Whereas aging Europe needs the dynamism of young people to advance and prosper, policy makers have a duty to act rapidly and decisively to help deliver real opportunities for young people – or face the backlash of rising extremism and alienation in society. The Assembly is convinced that Europe needs to reactivate intergenerational solidarity mechanisms and better share political, social and economic power with the young generation. Adequately supporting young people today, even in times of austerity, is the best investment Europe can make in its future vitality and quality growth.
4. Regarding the major youth employment challenge, the Assembly reiterates the proposals contained in its [Resolution 1828 \(2011\)](#) on reversing the sharp decline in youth employment, and urges national parliaments to ensure due follow-up. It welcomes the job-creation strategy unveiled by the European Union in April 2012 and strongly supports proposals specifically relating to youth.
5. The Assembly refers to the valuable research work done by its partner institutions regarding strategies and tools for improving the integration of young people into labour markets and fostering progress in society. It is in particular convinced of the utility of putting into practice the proposals of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), as outlined in OECD employment outlooks and studies on Jobs for Youth and on Challenges Facing European Labour Markets, and recommends their implementation.
6. Moreover, the Assembly urges the Council of Europe member States:
 - 6.1. regarding youth policies, to:
 - 6.1.1. focus youth strategies and action plans on better integration of young people into society through active citizenship, social dialogue and sustainable employment opportunities;
 - 6.1.2. ensure that young people have full access to all their human (including social) rights;
 - 6.1.3. ensure that youth policies are put high on the political agenda and receive adequate funding;
 - 6.1.4. reallocate part of unspent budgetary balances and supplementary resources generated through adjustments in taxation to youth-oriented projects, programmes and organisations;
 - 6.1.5. implement family-friendly policies in support of young parents and the proposals contained in the [Recommendation 1912 \(2010\)](#) on investing in family cohesion as a development factor in times of crisis, in the reply from the Committee of Ministers ([Doc. 12450](#)) and in [Resolution 1864 \(2012\)](#) on demographic trends in Europe: turning challenges into opportunities;
 - 6.1.6. foster the implementation of proposals laid out in [Resolution 1778 \(2010\)](#) and [Recommendation 1948 \(2010\)](#) on the promotion of volunteering in Europe and in [Resolution 1800 \(2011\)](#) on combating poverty;
 - 6.2. regarding youth employability and skills, as well as the transition from studies to work and between jobs, to:
 - 6.2.1. refocus their macroeconomic policies on sustainable job creation and investment in quality education, training and lifelong learning schemes;

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 22 May 2012.

6.2.2. adjust their educational systems towards equipping young people with a wider array of skills and linguistic abilities to better qualify for the evolving needs of labour markets and multiple vacant jobs across Europe;

6.2.3. improve youth access to high quality education, which can be better achieved by greater competitiveness of schools in both the public and private sectors;

6.2.4. remove administrative and tax obstacles to youth mobility for studies, training and work, and stimulate this mobility;

6.2.5. give impetus to youth entrepreneurship through an enabling environment, advisory services, tax facilities, grants and microcredits especially designed for young people;

6.2.6. use the United Nations International Year of Cooperatives 2012 to encourage the creation and development of youth co-operative enterprises;

6.2.7. improve the Europe-wide recognition of professional qualifications and non-formal education;

6.2.8. offer tax incentives for employers who propose apprenticeships to young people while retaining older workers, notably for the inter-generational transmission of skills in the workplace;

6.2.9. endorse and promote the implementation of the European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships in the national context;

6.3. regarding social protection, to:

6.3.1. support the implementation of national “youth guarantee” schemes to ensure that no young person is out of employment, education or training for more than four months against their will;

6.3.2. guarantee equal opportunities for young people to choose freely and have effective access to quality education through a systematic use of scholarships having regard to family resources;

6.3.3. enhance public social security coverage and encourage a greater use of private pension schemes for young workers in temporary, low-paid or otherwise precarious employment;

6.3.4. ensure that first-time jobseekers have access to social benefits;

6.4. regarding the promotion of active citizenship and social dialogue, to:

6.4.1. make better use of new means of communication, consultation and institutional representation (including youth councils, youth organisations and youth parliaments) for building more collaborative social models that give voice to young people and adequately taken their input into account;

6.4.2. foster social dialogue for addressing youth problems by developing public-private partnerships between educational institutions, enterprises, local authorities, trade unions, employment agencies and social services;

6.4.3. consider setting up multifunctional youth support funds aimed at providing more scholarships for students, fostering the creation of start-up enterprises by young entrepreneurs and promoting social inclusion projects for the young generation.

7. The Assembly resolves to make regular use of its “state of democracy and human rights” debates and other existing monitoring mechanisms provided in the Council of Europe legal instruments in order to assess progress made and the effectiveness of measures taken by member States in improving access to social rights, notably for the more vulnerable segments of the population such as young people in general, and the disabled or the most marginalised in particular.

B. Draft recommendation³

1. The Parliamentary Assembly, referring to its Resolution ... (2012) on the young generation sacrificed: social, economic and political implications of the financial crisis, invites the Committee of Ministers to bring this resolution to the attention of member States, in particular on the occasion of the 9th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth (Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation, 23-25 September 2012) and the World Forum for Democracy (Strasbourg, 5-11 October 2012), including the Youth Assembly (5-7 October 2012), and to promote its implementation.
2. Moreover, the Assembly asks the Committee of Ministers to assist member States in modernising their legal and institutional systems in as much as they relate to youth policies, in order to enhance European co-operation and the effectiveness of mechanisms towards fostering youth access to the socio-economic rights and opportunities enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) and the revised European Social Charter (ETS No. 163).
3. The Assembly also recommends that the Committee of Ministers:
 - 3.1. accelerate the consideration of the draft recommendation to member States on the access to social rights for young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods, with a view to adopting and presenting it to the ministers responsible for youth during their conference in Saint Petersburg;
 - 3.2. consider again the proposal to draft a European framework convention on the rights of young people, as proposed by the Assembly in its [Recommendation 1978 \(2011\)](#) and the various European youth organisations;
 - 3.3. closely involve the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity (North-South Centre) and the Council of Europe Development Bank in promoting youth-oriented policies and capacity- building measures, not least in the framework of the Council of Europe neighbourhood strategy in southern and eastern Mediterranean countries;
 - 3.4. urge the Youth sector and the Social Cohesion and Diversity Department to prepare proposals for further joint programmes with the European Union aimed at improving access to social, economic and political rights by young people.

3. Draft recommendation adopted unanimously by the committee on 22 May 2012.

C. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Volontè, rapporteur

1. Introduction: the young generation as a hostage of the financial crisis

“The economic crisis demonstrates the importance of ushering in a new era of sustainable global economic activity grounded in responsibility.” From the final statement, G20 summit, 29 September 2009, Pittsburgh

“If today’s youth do not find prospects for their lives, our today is mistaken and wrong.” Pope Benedict XVI, World Youth Day, 19 August 2011, Madrid

1. It is widely recognised that the young generation is a key asset for each and every society. However, it is also clear that the young generation is paying a very high price during the present crisis. In the current context of economic instability, the young generation appears particularly vulnerable to economic shocks. Young people are the last to be hired and the first to be fired,⁴ and there is no doubt that the economic crisis has exposed their fragility in the labour market. Among the consequences of youth employment problems are social insecurity, disillusionment with politics and democracy, poverty, disengagement from political life and emigration. Demonstrations which have broken out all over the world show the level of frustration felt by the young about the social opportunities open to them compared with those of previous generations.

2. During the debates at the Assembly’s Standing Committee last November, members underlined that the difficulties faced by the young generation had revealed a set of structural problems in society: the eroding access to employment, housing and social benefits and the resulting lack of development prospects; the impossibility for many young people to continue to study in their chosen field and to find a proper job in their home countries; the massive emigration of educated and highly qualified young people to more dynamic economies outside ageing Europe; and finally the youth’s loss of confidence in democracy because of the lack of inter-generational solidarity. As one committee member warned, the total lack of hope and access to employment and social benefits could lead to frustration and acts of violence directed against the authorities. Europe has to address these problems urgently. It should seek to empower the young generation by focusing on the social, economic and political rights of disadvantaged young people.

3. In the light of these serious problems, the rapporteur wishes to explore the social, political and economic challenges lying ahead for the young generation and society at large. The report is based on a review of official policy documents, statistics and scientific articles, as well as exchanges of views with experts, such as during the committee hearing on 22 March 2012 and during the April 2012 part-session. The report aims to develop a set of practical recommendations that could contribute to building a more inclusive society where every citizen, whatever his or her age, can live in dignity and participate fully in the joint undertaking.

2. Overview of challenges for Europe and its youth facing the crisis

2.1. Growth and development needs youth

4. The Assembly has many reasons to be deeply concerned about the increasing difficulties the young generation is facing, and not only on the grounds of fairness and social justice. There are also plenty of opportunities that Europe should embrace to make better use of young people’s wealth of knowledge, enthusiasm and undeniable innovative capacities. Europe’s sluggish growth in recent years reflects missed opportunities and dwindling prospects for the young generation to contribute to economic and social development.

5. Is Europe a continent for young people? In other words, has our continent any chance at all of pulling out of the crisis if it does not focus enough on policies to support the younger generation and to involve them in the world of work? Will it be possible to safeguard the pensions of the older generation without providing jobs for young people? Can Europe grow and prosper without the input of young people? At the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2012, many European leaders joined the heads of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in a call for action to create jobs amidst warnings that youth unemployment was a time bomb ticking under the global economy. Indeed, as the case of Tunisia has shown, just one spark is enough to set an entire region ablaze. Europe’s political elites cannot afford to ignore these warnings.

4. “Global employment trends for youth: 2011 update”, International Labour Organization (ILO), October 2011.

6. All too often today young people are viewed as a problem to be addressed rather than an opportunity. Yet the rapporteur is convinced that this economic crisis is both a challenge and an opportunity for Europe, and all young Europeans should be considered as a crucial part of the solution for overcoming the crisis. Indeed, as the President of the European Central Bank put it, “economic growth in Europe cannot do without young people, and neither can young people do without growth”. It is essential to make the most of the contribution that young people can offer to continued economic development and modernisation of society. The know-how of young people is decisive in feeding a knowledge-based economy and we should maximise this human capital that has been a central determinant of growth for the last twenty years.

7. What is particularly worrying about the current crisis is that using traditional social protection patterns and support measures does not seem to work. The fear of a creeping recession is causing widespread uncertainty which affects above all the sections of society with the least social guarantees, notably those who live on the margins of the protection system and outside the network securing acquired rights. Unfortunately, it is precisely the young people without solid professional qualifications who face the most uncertain future. Increasingly, in addition to measures by the authorities to better regulate the market and to ensure compliance with the rules, it is the strategies of individuals that can make all the difference: much depends on their ability to commit themselves, to muster resources for investing in their education and training, to define their professional projects and then to seek guidance of authoritative professionals to learn from their skills.

8. The uncertainty caused by this crisis is creating disillusionment, especially among unemployed young people, which makes them want to give up searching for employment as fewer opportunities are available to them. The desire for self-fulfilment – which is so strong among young people and is a fundamental drive of human beings – seems to be vanishing with the crisis even though the hyper-liberal and hyper-consumerist model itself is in crisis. The prevailing attitudes are still driven by the productivity-consumption cycle and not by the quest for dignity of human beings. It is utterly intolerable to allow the renunciation of personal self-fulfilment and growth to set in. Europe can supersede the crisis through personal and collective choices for which its institutions should lay the foundations.

2.2. Ageing, unemployment, poverty, social exclusion, migration: Europe's depletion and loss of democracy

9. The face of Europe is radically and rapidly changing. European society is ageing and, at the same time, its population is shrinking due to low birth levels and economically motivated emigration. Young people (aged between 15 and 29 years) represent 20% of the European population today and will be only 15% in 2050, when the elderly people (over 65 years) will be double that of the working age population (15-64 years). The main consequence of these demographic changes is that young people are becoming a minority and their voice within the democratic system is weakening. Moreover, with fewer and fewer contributors, the public expenditure on pensions is growing disproportionately and puts the sustainability of pension systems at risk. This demographic decline of Europe needs to be reversed through strategies that boost the labour force participation among the underused or excluded population groups, including young people, and policies that are family friendly, reduce economic precariousness and improve work/private life balance.⁵

10. Youth unemployment has been rising dramatically across much of the developed world, notably in Europe, and the rate of youth unemployment is the main indicator to describe the difficult situation of the “limbo generation”. Globally, young people are nearly three times as likely as other adults to be unemployed. Unemployment affected 12.7% of economically active young people worldwide before the onset of the economic crisis. If until 2007 youth unemployment was quite stable as new jobs were created between 1996 and 2006, since 2008 it has increased sharply. The International Labour Organization (ILO) reports that, in 2011, 74.8 million youth aged 15-24 were unemployed, which represented an increase of more than 4 million since 2007 or 1% more than the pre-crisis level.⁶ In the European Union countries, youth unemployment stood at a record high of 22.4% compared to the average 10% unemployment rate for the working age population. Among youth at work, nearly half (42%) are employed on temporary contracts as compared to 11% for 25-59 year olds.

11. The worst employment situation in decades has caused a real social and economic trauma that threatens society's long-term development. The financial and economic crisis is turning into a social crisis. The boom of temporary contract workers, for example, is creating a generation of young people in precarious

5. See the report on “Demographic trends in Europe: turning challenges into opportunities” by Ms Nursuna Memecan, [Doc. 12817](#), and [Resolution 1864 \(2012\)](#).

6. “Global employment trends 2012”, ILO.

employment with few social guarantees and, as a result, with difficulties to accede to housing and to found a family. In fact, the rise of precariousness leads to persistent underemployment, social and financial insecurity, as well as a more alienated social framework.

12. This social crisis is producing a generation of people who are deprived of the possibilities to provide not only for themselves and their families, but also for the elderly. Despite better levels of education than their parents, young European's living standards will be worse than those of the earlier generations ever since the Second World War and they will need their parents' support for longer before acceding to stable autonomy. More and more young people today suffer from social exclusion, depression, poor health and relatively high rates of crime, incarceration and suicide. At the same time, ambitious young people seek opportunities away from their home countries more readily than the older generations that are anchored in work and family commitments. Youth problems thus translate into direct costs to society, such as via additional benefit payments, lost tax revenues and wasted capacity, and indirect costs due to emigration and "side effects" on the labour market.

13. In times of economic downturn, young migrants become particularly vulnerable. As their movements across national borders are both an expression and a consequence of globalisation, their vulnerability increases when the downturn is global in nature. It exacerbates inequalities that in turn undermine social cohesion and democracy throughout Europe. The young generation's decreasing political participation is visible through low voter turnout, membership in political parties, interest in politics and trust in representative institutions. Indeed, young people have little incentive to be part of a governance system which has failed to defend their interests. The young generation is falling into slow and progressive political apathy, leaving the foundations of democracy across Europe shaky and unstable.

2.3. Changes in labour markets and the drain on Europe's competitiveness

14. Throughout Europe, the financial and economic crises have accelerated labour market reforms, which were already under way in many countries with adjustments to globalisation,⁷ and have accentuated their effects on young people. Although increased openness of national labour markets, greater mobility of workers or job seekers and more flexible contractual policies are becoming the new reality,⁸ some question the case for total labour market liberalisation because of substantial undesirable social consequences. With the crisis, many more jobs were cut than new ones created and the pool of jobs shrank, whilst the numbers of long-term unemployed in all age groups soared to unprecedented levels. Yet, despite the softening of labour market regulations in many European countries, employers, faced with poor growth prospects, hesitate about hiring young people with little or no work experience and hence a greater need for in-work training.

15. According to the European Commission, there are about four million jobs vacant in the European Union countries: they are waiting to be filled and could certainly help reduce youth unemployment. Moreover, the Commission believes that member States have a huge untapped potential for job creation and can create more than 20 million jobs in the green economy, health and new technology sectors by 2020. In April 2012, the European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion unveiled an ambitious "Employment package".⁹ This package includes proposals for taxation shifts to support hiring incentives and self-employment, strengthening health workforce planning and recruitment strategies, promotion of digital and green skills, action to reduce skill mismatches, improve contractual policies and enable labour mobility by lifting legal or practical obstacles to the free movement of jobseekers in Europe, as well as the launch (as of 2013) of a Europe-wide portal for job offers, placement and recruitment. States should now pick up the challenge by devising national strategies to deliver more job opportunities for young people.

16. A recent study¹⁰ on the situation in 21 European Union countries has shown that the most marginalised young people (those who are not in education, employment or training – the "NEETs") cost some €100 billion each year, or about 1% of the average gross domestic product (GDP), in wasted resources (foregone

7. Such as the Hartz reforms of the early 2000s in Germany and Spain's successive liberalisation rounds in 1994, 1997, 2001-02 and 2006, as well as the latest reform package of 2012.

8. Flexicurity has become the EU's key labour market strategy over the last decade. With the global financial and economic crises, it has been shown to increase segmentation of the labour force between "insiders" (relatively protected workers) and "outsiders" (relatively unprotected population – the unemployed, those in discontinuous or precarious employment and the vulnerable groups, including young people). The public policy discussion on flexicurity is considering whether this strategy is still valid in economically difficult times within the new context of limited job creation.

9. See the Communication from the European Commission on towards a job-rich recovery, Com(2012)173final of 18 April 2012.

10. "Young people and NEETs in Europe: first findings", European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 20 December 2011.

earnings) and are an extra burden on public budgets (via additional welfare payouts, criminal justice expenditure, etc.). The NEET group represented, in 2010, nearly 13% of the young generation (aged 15 to 24 years) – or 7.5 million young people – in the European Union. On the other side of the spectrum, we have many young graduates who studied and trained for a professional world that no longer exists: having invested in their education, society is failing to offer adequate job opportunities and thus ends up wasting its investment in future competitiveness.

17. It is therefore not surprising that a large number of young Europeans are considering leaving (or have already left) the economic and social devastation of their home countries caused by the financial crisis and austerity programmes, which inevitably leads to increasing inequality – perceived or real – in the labour market. One of the consequences of such emigration is the danger of the labour market's emptying of young people in some countries, such as in eastern and southern European countries, and the overcrowding in others. Crisis-induced economic emigration of young people can have both positive and negative impacts on the host (recipient) country and the country of origin. Fostering job creation, the integration of young workers and offering better long-term employment prospects for young specialists are hence important aspects of tackling this type of migration for a win-win result.

18. For the host (receiving) countries, mostly in western or northern Europe, young immigrants offer various benefits. They will often accept jobs that people in the host country do not or cannot do for various reasons. Moreover, migrant young workers often work for lower salaries, offer new talents and skills and can contribute to the diversity of the host society, thus furthering tolerance and understanding. However, there are also many disadvantages in the young generation's migration: immigrants can be exploited for their cheap labour; eastern and southern European countries may suffer the “brain drain” and the loss of competitiveness as the resources they spend in educating and training their students flee elsewhere; and tensions and hostilities can also arise whenever extremists exploit sensitivities by blaming immigrants for the woes of the local population or for (allegedly) receiving more favourable treatment than the local poor.

19. Going deeper into this issue, we should very seriously consider the problem of “brain drain” which could be regarded as a form of capital flight and deskilling, especially when young migrants in their destination country take jobs below their qualifications, while their country of origin experiences the loss of skilled individuals. The loss of talent is potentially devastating for all of Europe, but the situation is becoming particularly worrying in the Baltic and Mediterranean countries where, in recent years, the phenomenon of “brain drain” has been acute because of the effects of the crisis and bleak prospects for tangible economic improvements. This latest wave of emigration is different from previous ones because this time university-educated workers are the first ones who choose to leave.

20. Europe is suffering from brain drain in more ways than one. In Spain, for example, where nearly one in two youths is unemployed, many of those who manage to find employment have to make their living on a low salary (they are called *mileuristas* because of their €1 000 monthly wage). Those who decide to move abroad in search of decent employment look at Europe first (mainly Norway, Germany and the United Kingdom, where the economy is relatively healthy), but many go further, including by moving to Latin America, Brazil, China, the United States, Australia or the Gulf countries. It is estimated that Spain will lose about 500 000 of its residents over the next decade, and there are already more people who leave the country than enter it.

21. In Ireland, youth emigration has doubled since 2005. Greece and Portugal are following suit. Thus over 65 000 people leave Portugal each year, with a majority choosing to move to former colonies such as Angola, where salaries are high for university-educated workers. Similarly, thousands of young French leave each year for the French-speaking province of Quebec in Canada. The United Kingdom is also one of the top providers of young immigrants to Canada, and the United States has been attracting underpaid European university professors and young scientists for quite a while now.

22. Among the “push factors” for youth migration inside or outside of Europe are concerns about a lack of employment and promotion prospects, rigid management structures, inadequate facilities, heavy workload despite the low salaries, worsening living conditions, poverty, adverse labour market policies, lack of public support and a growing sense of insecurity.

2.4. North–south, east–west: what differences?

23. The youth situation across Europe is very uneven and significant differences between European countries have to be taken into account. Thus, whereas youth unemployment has risen sharply since 2007, it remains below 10% in Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and Norway, but most European countries, especially in the south, report youth unemployment rates well above 20% and even 30%. Moreover, in southern Europe, unemployment levels among young women are higher than among young men and keep on

rising. Youth unemployment levels are particularly worrying in Spain (51.4%) and the Balkan States (above 50% in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and Kosovo¹¹), Greece (51.2%), the Slovak Republic (36%), Portugal (35.1%), Lithuania (34.4%), Italy (31.1%), Latvia (29.9%) and Ireland (29.6%).¹² This raises serious questions about the rationale of policy choices and austerity measures adopted by these countries facing an economic crisis.

24. In addition to the widespread increase in youth unemployment, there is new cause for concern due to growing long-term youth unemployment, which results in insecurity and uncertainty among young people (the effect and the cause of a lack of confidence in investment and risk taking) which all researchers today consider to be one of the most dramatic factors in the slowdown in development. The most insidious risk now threatening the European continent is short-sightedness, making us incapable of looking at the “day after tomorrow”. The risk we are now running is that of clipping the wings of young people just at the age when their minds are most vibrant and when they are keener to engage and create than at any later time during the rest of their lives.

25. Has the crisis spared some countries and their youth? Germany’s prosperity despite the crisis is widely envied and the “German model” is often cited as an example to follow by other European countries, notably the southern ones, which are painstakingly trying to reduce youth unemployment, increase youth welfare and enhance competitiveness. However, many critics observe that some structural reforms of the labour market that helped to create new jobs also expanded precarious employment, especially for the young generation: temporary contracts and low-paid jobs have increased wage inequality and young German workers are frequently underpaid compared with young workers in other European countries which have a similar standard of living.

26. Besides the fact that there is no minimum wage in Germany, low-wage contracts in this country grew three times faster than other types of jobs between 2005 and 2010. In Germany, some jobs can be paid exceptionally low, especially in the eastern regions, and the numbers of the working poor have increased dramatically (7.2% of workers earn so little that they were very close to the poverty line in 2010 compared to 4.8% in 2005) even if their share is less than the eurozone average (8.2%).

27. The various measures taken by many European governments in the last two years in response to the crisis include freezes and cuts in public spending (such as in Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania and Spain), reforms of pension systems and changes in the structure of social benefits and allowances. Both the public and private sectors’ investment in social capital, as well as the lives of millions of citizens, are affected. Some economists have serious doubts about the appropriateness of these austerity measures, which could leave lasting scarring effects on society in general and on the young generation in particular.

28. Across Europe, youth political participation has generally declined during the last few years although trends are different in various countries and regions. According to the research of the European Social Survey, youth participation in elections in all European countries is lower than general voter turnout. Moreover, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) analysis of voter turnout in national elections shows a clear downward trend among the young generation in many western European countries, such as Austria, France, Finland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal and the United Kingdom. The picture is mixed in most other countries and only some Scandinavian countries register no significant changes.

29. This decline, and hesitant behaviour, are a clear sign of the impact of the crisis on young people’s trust in institutions and politics. A recent study by the Gallup organisation showed that 20% of young Europeans had not voted in elections at local, national or European level in the last three years. Moreover, various social surveys¹³ indicate that two out of three young people in Europe are not interested in politics; in eastern Europe, most young people today are less interested in political life than twenty years ago, whereas political activism is growing in southern Europe (notably France, Italy, Romania and Spain) and Ireland and remains rather high in Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands.

11. Any reference to Kosovo in this text, whether to the territory, institutions or population, shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council [Resolution 1244](#) and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

12. Eurostat news release 31/2012 of 1 March 2012. Data for the Balkan countries is based on the information from national statistics agencies on the situation in 2010-11.

13. European Social Survey, 2010.

30. Similarly, the membership of young people in political organisations, such as parties or trade unions, is following suit: if the level of participation is still very high in the Scandinavian countries, it decreased dramatically in the south of Europe. Similarly, numbers of young people (under the age of 30) as members of parliament vary from zero in countries such as France, Cyprus, Greece, Liechtenstein and Malta to 6.7% in the Netherlands and 8.9% in Estonia.¹⁴ The NEET group is typically, and often considerably, less engaged in politics and social structures.

31. Research shows that there is a clear link between the young generation's political participation, standard of living and political socialisation through family background. While the low interest and frustration with politics is focused on conventional forms of participation, alternative forms of social and political engagement are mobilising young people worldwide. Since the onset of the economic crisis, we note, in some European countries, a worrying rise of extremist and xenophobic movements that seek to lure in the marginalised youth. The results of recent parliamentary elections confirm this trend. Assembly [Resolutions 1826 \(2011\)](#) on the expansion of democracy by lowering the voting age to 16 and [1874 \(2012\)](#) on the promotion of active citizenship in Europe emphasise the importance of fostering youth participation and involvement in political decision making through the lowering of the voting age to 16 and support for democracy dialogue at local level (including via youth councils and youth parliaments) as a means of promoting active citizenship.

3. From social protest to political confrontation

32. It has been argued that high unemployment and a poor economic situation have given a wake-up call to this young generation. Protest movements have erupted against the political establishment perceived as incapable of adequately representing the needs of vast segments of the population. The Arab Spring of early 2011, the Icelandic “kitchenware” revolution and the Spanish *Indignados* camp movement (which began in May 2011) sparked massive social protest movements worldwide, including the Portuguese “Geração à Rasca”, the Greek rallies, Stuttgart 21, “Occupy Wall Street” and the Austrian, British and French student marches. Global demonstrations were held on 15 October 2011 in more than 950 cities of 82 countries. The largest protests took place in Spain, where hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets.

33. The European protesters want more and better jobs, fairer distribution of wealth and a radical change in party politics viewed as outdated, disconnected from reality and corrupt. They consider themselves hurt by the erosion of social and economic rights through successive austerity measures approved by politicians. Even though protesters form a heterogeneous group, they share a strong conviction against welfare cuts and the great majority of young people involved urge peaceful mobilisation and change.

34. One year after the *Indignados* and other demonstrations swept through cities in western countries, many young protesters went back to the squares in about 50 countries to reiterate the message that indignation continues and that there are even more reasons to protest. The current challenge is to move from protest to proposals: no more bailouts for banks, quality education and public health for all, fight against precarious employment, need for safe and affordable housing, pensions for everybody, payment of salary arrears. The network of *Indignados*-inspired associations will hold seminars and debates in many European capitals and beyond in the coming months.

35. Despite their discontent with conventional political participation, young Europeans still believe in democratic and civic values. They have their own strong views on social issues, society and politics and engage in different forms of democratic activities that correspond to their understanding of democracy, citizenship and integration into society. The young generation, in fact, is testing new forms of civic participation (such as through social media networks) based on evolving values and lifestyles – more individualised, spontaneous and informal. The Internet, social networks and the new technologies in general have a strong potential to boost youth participation in politics. They are also becoming more interesting to policy makers willing to engage in direct dialogue with the young generation.

36. At the same time, the more conventional structures for the involvement of youth representatives in political decision making do not always guarantee that the youth voice and needs are duly taken into account. National context strongly influences the associative participation of youth. Thus, the Nordic countries have the highest rates of active civic engagement; they are followed by central European and Anglo-Saxon countries, whereas eastern European countries lag behind the Mediterranean countries.

14. “Youth participation in policy making” by Manfred Zentner, Vienna, November 2011, in the framework of the Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth.

37. Among the lessons to be drawn from the various social protests, we see a call for more solidarity – within and between generations. Intergenerational links need to be strengthened, and we also have the responsibility to better guide young people in the context of a changing socio-economic environment as the young generation will live in a less affluent society in which it is more difficult to find stable employment and to found a family and in which the quality of life cannot be deceptively reduced to consumption. To keep the engine of desire for a better life going even in times of crisis, the political and social elites in Europe ought to reaffirm their commitment to human-centred development policies that pay adequate attention to the needs of all generations.

4. Building a better future together: how could the main stakeholders do more?

4.1. Investing in youth via an integrated approach of policy makers and social partners

38. Neglecting the plight of the young generation will act as a boomerang against the cohesion of European society built on shared values. Indeed, there is now an urgency to act. Taking into account the size and implications of youth problems, as well as the social costs of the young generation thus sacrificed, what could the main European actors do to help improve the situation? For, if the policy makers fail to offer realistic solutions, Europe will pay a high price for this “limbo generation” and will compromise its security, competitiveness, social welfare and future development. Because of the crisis, Europe should seize the moment to better tap the talents, energy and creativity of its youth.

39. The rapporteur recalls a series of recommendations addressed to member States through the Assembly’s [Resolution 1828 \(2011\)](#) on reversing the sharp decline in youth employment¹⁵ and underscores the importance of employment for youth integration in society, notably through better access to social rights and stronger involvement in decision making at local, national and European levels. He reiterates the Assembly’s position that the European Union and the Council of Europe should do more to help their member States offer better employment opportunities to the young generation. Moreover, their institutional partners, including the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB) and the North-South Centre, the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Investment Bank (EIB), could usefully supplement both European and national action.

40. With its Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, the European Union seeks to provide a strategic response to the problems in employment. It has placed more emphasis on the quality of its proposed development model in terms of inclusion (work), intellect (knowledge) and sustainability (equity) against a set of benchmarks to measure progress. Key objectives include proposals to increase the employment rates of 20-64 year olds, to reduce early school dropout rates to 10% and to increase investment in innovation to 3% of GDP. Moreover, the EU’s Youth on the Move project focuses on a number of important specific activities to attain these objectives for young people. So far, however, results are disappointing.

41. In this context, we should note the valuable co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union in the youth sector, such as under the Youth Partnership Framework Programme 2010-13 for promoting knowledge-based youth policies, recognition of non-formal learning/education and capacity for action. The programme’s emphasis on South-East and eastern Europe, the Caucasus and the southern Mediterranean is particularly welcome. The reach of this programme could be further broadened so as to better exploit complementarities between the EU’s initiatives (Youth on the move and Youth Opportunities)¹⁶ and the Council of Europe’s youth policy objectives¹⁷ for boosting youth employment and employability through education, training, lifelong learning and mobility.

42. Towards this end, co-ordination is pursued between the European Union and the Council of Europe in a joint 2011-12 programme on Europe of Welfare for All: Facilitating Youth Transition to Active Life by Reinforcing Shared Social Responsibility, which emphasises the special needs of the NEET group. This programme aims to foster solidarity with young people and to facilitate youth transition to active life through multi-party involvement, such as via a digital platform that could be used for pooling and exchanging good practices.

43. The rapporteur considers that there are no quick fixes to ensure a good start for young people in the labour market. A solid educational background and vocational training are stepping stones in that direction. However, with the crisis, even highly qualified young workers face exceptional difficulties. The private sector

15. See [Doc. 12626](#), report by Ms Marija Pejčinović-Burić.

16. See Communication COM(2011)933 from the European Commission, 20 December 2011.

17. Such as formulated in Committee of Ministers Resolution CM/Res(2008)23.

can play an important role in fostering access of young people to jobs, not least via the creation of new jobs. For example, promoting a greater use of apprenticeship schemes, on-the-job training and internships could benefit both companies and young employees, provided that decent remuneration and working conditions can be ensured.¹⁸ Governments need to guarantee that minimum wages are paid and working hours are respected so as to protect young apprentices and workers from exploitation. We should also support a call to reallocate a large share of the €82 million of unspent EU structural funds to employment projects for the young people in the neediest member States.

4.2. Emphasis on quality, fairness and freedom of choice

44. The ILO, in its report on “Global employment trends for youth: 2011 update”, lists a series of policy measures that are required to ensure the young generation’s autonomy. This includes investing in the quality of education; improving the quality of jobs and the competitiveness of enterprises; developing an integrated strategy for growth and job creation to ensure long-term, sustainable and concerted action for the promotion of decent social benefits; and pursuit of financial and macroeconomic policies that aim to remove the obstacles to growth. Empowering young people through work and input to decision making is key to upholding Europe’s prosperity because it is this young generation that will succeed or fail to sustain the solidarity and democracy of tomorrow.

45. The main factors in determining the lifelong remuneration of young people, which is generally linked to their educational background, have changed as a result of the crisis, and increasingly depend on their families’ socio-economic status. To guarantee less skewed starting conditions for young Europeans, it may be useful to consider measures to redistribute wealth and not only incomes. For instance, by receiving a capital grant at the beginning of their adult life, each young man and woman could more freely and more responsibly decide on their own future and be able to start up a business or acquire a university education.

46. During the last decade, the environment has certainly changed and become more dynamic. Stable employment is a thing of the past and the idea of a lifelong job has been replaced by that of a pathway. As a result, there is a significant increase in the numbers of people changing jobs, and in occupational, professional and contractual mobility. Thus, working experience, particularly for a young man or woman today, can be more realistically seen as an “occupational pathway”, which can be taken in different sectors and with different responsibilities and posts, requiring widely differing skills and knowledge.

47. This is making it increasingly more important for the European social systems to differentiate between “precarious work” and “flexible work”. It is certainly necessary to continue labour market reforms in order to reduce the rigidities affecting young workers entering the labour market, but at the same time the professions must be fully liberalised and more modern job-placement systems introduced to meet local and global needs, with incentives to encourage freedom of choice in education and vocational training, with adequate social security coverage for temporary workers and so on.

48. The most serious charge levelled against the way in which the economy has been increasingly biased towards the speculative financial sector, and the crisis this has produced, is that the political world has neglected the importance of improving the quality and the quantity of the human capital for long-term stable development (as advocated by Gary S. Becker and James Heckman who were awarded the Nobel Prize for their work). For human capital impacts on the capacity to produce and on productivity in various ways: it increases a country’s research capability and the generation of new technological development; it makes it possible to use technology better, increases creativity and hence generates innovation, and leads to the development of skills in the local environment, which is one of the keys to local and national success.

49. Many countries had been expanding tertiary education through massive investment before 2007. OECD countries, for instance, spend on average 6.2% of their collective GDP on educational institutions, ranging from more than 7% in Denmark, Iceland, Russia and the United States to 4.5% or less in Italy and the Slovak Republic.¹⁹ However, research shows²⁰ that more expenditure on education does not automatically yield higher achievement levels and that the quality of education is more important than the duration of studies. We should therefore insist on the importance of investment in quality-oriented education. It is worrying that, in 2011, roughly half of EU member States were reducing their budgets for education.²¹

18. Apprenticeship contracts can represent a double-edged sword when companies misuse them to underpay young workers. Such situations can breed precariousness, as reported in Germany and Austria.

19. “Education at a glance 2010”, OECD.

20. Such as by E.A. Hanushek and D. Kim on “Schooling, labour force quality and economic growth” (1995) and by E.A. Hanushek on “Lack of incentives and foundational problems in education”.

50. From a policy-making perspective we should consider support for young people and human capital not as social expenditure but as medium- to long-term investment in the growth of individual countries and the European continent. This might seem obvious, but the short-termism that predominates today in many European countries shows that such an approach is anything but obvious. There are two complementary objectives that must not be set off against each other: one quantitative and one qualitative. In other words, it is important to increase the numbers of diploma-holders and graduates while, at the same time, improving the quality of their education by doing more to foster excellence among young people and to help those who are in real difficulty. To paraphrase Germany's famous educationalist, Wolfgang Brezinka, the courage to offer a good education demands, first and foremost, the courage to require more of oneself and one's own way of life, living consistently with the values that give stability and meaning to life.

51. The rapporteur considers furthermore that other measures that could have a positive impact on improving young people's economic and social opportunities include action to remove obstacles to, and lower the costs of, starting up or managing new businesses; to foster access to risk capital, by promoting venture capital; to reduce the segmentation of the labour market which is too skewed today in favour of the older generations; and to better employ students' skills and abilities.

4.3. Need for coherent action to improve access to socio-economic rights

52. In its reply to Parliamentary Assembly [Recommendation 1978 \(2011\)](#) "Towards a European framework convention on youth rights", the Committee of Ministers considered that the current Council of Europe structures, policies, programmes and legal tools provided sufficient coverage of youth rights and that the priority should be given to the more effective implementation of existing instruments, such as through the systematic encouragement of policies to enhance access of young people to their rights.

53. The rapporteur recalls that, in addition to the fundamental rights enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5), the revised European Social Charter (ETS No. 163) contains a series of provisions relating to youth and youth rights, notably Articles 7 and 17 (right of children and young persons to social, legal and economic protection), 11 (right to protection of health) and 16 (right of the family to social, legal and economic protection). Moreover, various articles cover the rights of young people to education and training (Articles 7, 9, 10 and 17), employment (Articles 1-4, 7, etc.) and housing (Articles 16 and 31). As the crisis-induced austerity measures are escalating inequalities in society and threatening the ability of young people to exercise their rights, it is essential that member States fully adhere to the Charter and uphold their commitments towards the young generation.

54. Building on its [Resolution 1824 \(2011\)](#) on the role of parliaments in the consolidation and development of social rights in Europe, the Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on the 50th Anniversary of the European Social Charter (adopted on 12 October 2011) and the conclusions of the European Committee of Social Rights on non-conformity by member States with the provisions of the Charter (adopted in December 2011 and published in January 2012), the Assembly should now use its authority and co-operation structures for raising the concerns highlighted in the conclusions with the national parliaments concerned, notably as regards young people that are particularly vulnerable. Moreover, it remains to be seen how the proposed Council of Europe charter on shared social responsibilities and the revised Strategy for Social Cohesion could contribute to involving all social partners in the implementation of the young generation's social and economic rights.

55. Some experts note the European paradox: as European countries invested in better education, improving living conditions and the shared values of European identity, young Europeans became better equipped than their parents to take advantage of "Europe without borders". Unfortunately, in just a few years the economic crisis has undone much of the social progress of recent decades and the young generation has to struggle harder and longer than previous generations to achieve autonomy.²² This is why society and policy makers must adapt youth strategies to generate more opportunities for young people, and the young people, too, have to be prepared to embrace the irreversible changes in society. They need to be adaptable and flexible; they are asked to show the maximum of energy, courage and patience. The evolving terms of the social contract in society amount to asking young people to accept new risks and to be ready for change – and for triggering changes themselves.

21. Proceedings of the Seminar on From Education to the Workplace: a Global Challenge, organised on 30 June 2011 by the European Parliament and several specialised EU agencies.

22. Oliveira, Ivo, "The Benjamin Button effect: Europe's economic crisis postpones young generations", *Fair Observer*, January 2012.

4.4. Proposals from the youth sector

56. European youth organisations are naturally very concerned about the worsening situation of young people. They see a real risk that a vicious circle of weak recovery and weakening socio-economic cohesion might hurt European integration and leave many young Europeans on the roadside, with negative effects on society as a whole. Increased investment in education, training, job creation and job placement are viewed as fundamental to enable young people to participate fully both in overcoming the crisis and in building a more prosperous society.

57. The European Youth Forum²³ and the Council of Europe's Advisory Council on Youth²⁴ point to the shortcomings of the measures taken by many governments in response to the crisis, notably ill-conceived cuts in public spending without instead considering any redeployment of resources towards priority action, including support for young people. They are worried about the worsening conditions for young people in labour markets, notably the spread of precarious work and unpaid or underpaid internships, which lead to eroding access to autonomous life, political participation and social services, as well as a rise in extremism. They therefore advocate a rights-based approach to youth policies to actively promote the autonomy and participation of young people, paying special attention to the needs of more vulnerable young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (migrants, refugees, ethnic minorities, etc.).

58. We therefore welcome and support the constructive consultation between the Committee of Ministers, the Joint Council on Youth and the Social Cohesion and Diversity Department of the Council of Europe, as well as inputs from the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe,²⁵ towards issuing a recommendation and guidelines to member States on the access to social rights for young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Moreover, the rapporteur believes that, once adopted, the recommendation and guidelines could also be brought to the attention of countries in the Council of Europe's southern and eastern Mediterranean neighbourhood, not least in the framework of the North-South Centre's activities on youth co-operation.

59. The forum and the advisory council urge international organisations and States to enhance support for youth organisations and stress the need for European countries to adopt the "youth guarantee" (policy schemes designed to ensure that no young person is out of employment, education or training for more than four months against his or her will). They plead for access by first-time job seekers to unemployment benefits, implementation of adequate minimum income schemes (as called for by the European Parliament),²⁶ support for the European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships²⁷ and job creation via impetus for youth entrepreneurship (based on a stable enabling environment regarding income, social protection, tax facilities and access to financing from European multilateral development banks).

60. In this context, we should heed a most valuable contribution to the committee's discussions by Ms Snežana Samardžić-Marković, the new Director General of Democracy at the Council of Europe, who insisted on the need for national parliaments to be particularly attentive to the dangers of "democracy fatigue" and listen more carefully to the ideas of the young generation and civil society organisations. Political systems should evolve and adapt to the new situation by emphasising social justice as a cornerstone of democracy. It is also essential to closely implicate local authorities, to put youth policies higher on national political agendas and to project a more positive image of youth in the media.

61. We trust that major forthcoming events – such as the 9th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth (St Petersburg, 23-25 September 2012) and the Youth Assembly (Strasbourg, 5-7 October 2012) to be held together with the World Forum for Democracy (5-11 October 2012) – will help build bridges of understanding between youth and policy makers, with a view to triggering concrete action and inducing positive changes on the ground.

23. The European Youth Forum is an independent body established by youth organisations. It groups more than 90 national youth councils and international youth NGOs, which represent other youth organisations and through them bring together tens of millions of young people from all over Europe.

24. The advisory council is made up of 30 representatives from youth NGOs and networks that contribute to youth sector activities. It also involves young people in other activities of the Council of Europe.

25. Notably, [Resolution 319 \(2010\)](#) on the integration of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

26. See the report on the role of minimum income in combating poverty and promoting an inclusive society in Europe (2010/2039(INI)), Ilda Figueiredo, 16 July 2010, and European Parliament Resolution P7_TA(2010)0375, 20 October 2010.

27. See <http://qualityinternships.eu>.

5. Final concluding remarks: time to move from words to deeds

62. The economic and social crisis threatens the effective exercise of rights by the young generation whose autonomy and opportunities are affected by growing economic and social inequalities. Youth policies are particularly sensitive to economic recession and they are too often relegated to a secondary place in governmental priorities and resource allocation. Europe needs the young generation to play its role fully in decision making, strengthening of democracy and the shaping of a more cohesive, prosperous and just society for tomorrow. The best way to achieve this goal is to develop the social integration of young people by better sharing political, social and economic power with them and providing them with full access to jobs, rights and active citizenship.

63. Despite the increased pressure on public finances due to the economic crisis and sovereign debt, austerity measures should not be allowed to diminish public support for youth-related policies. On the contrary, they should compel public authorities to better serve the common interest of fostering social cohesion by better targeting spending, in particular as regards the vulnerable population in need of support, such as the disabled and the most marginalised young people (“NEETs”). National parliaments, for their part, should ensure that youth policies are put high on the political agenda and receive adequate financial resources – in line with an understanding that youth-oriented action is a prerequisite for smooth development, social justice and European competitiveness. Helping and empowering youth today is the best investment Europe can make in its future vitality and prosperity.

64. Moreover, dialogue between social partners on ways to improve youth inclusion in society should be strengthened and macroeconomic stimulus measures should be rethought in order to generate job-rich economic recovery and quality-oriented growth. Authorities need to be particularly attentive to the trends and the demand side of labour markets in order to modernise education and vocational training systems to better equip young people for professional life, to cater for lifelong learning imperatives and changing occupational pathways, and to respond to competitive pressures stemming from globalisation. Developing public-private partnerships between educational institutions, enterprises, local authorities, trade unions and employment services could help smooth young people’s transition from education to work and between jobs.

65. With a view to strengthening grass-roots democracy, governance and inter-generational solidarity, public authorities at all levels throughout Europe should reach out to the young generation via the new tools of communication, regular consultation mechanisms and improved institutional representation. This would be a step in the right direction towards building new, more collaborative social models that give voice and offer truly equal opportunities to all Europeans.

66. In conclusion, as the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman put it in his recent essay,²⁸ it is better not to focus on the world we want to live in, but on the world we should live in. Our problems are global in nature, but we only have local means to face them; and the latter are inadequate for this task. Therefore, the crucial “live or die” question for the 21st century, as Bauman suggests, is: who will deal with these problems? In modern times, there have been many courageous women and men who have changed the course of history in a radical and positive way. We should therefore help young people to take their destiny into their own hands: together we can change things to live better lives.

28. Z. Bauman, “Per costruire una vera comunità non tralasciamo i piccoli gesti”, *Vita e Pensiero*, Milan, November 2011.