

Youth



Relevance of gender in the policy area

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Young people are a priority of the European Union's social vision. Youth policy arises from the recognition that young people are an important resource to society, who can be mobilised to achieve higher social goals. The EU approach acknowledges that youth policy – being cross-sectoral – cannot advance without effective coordination with other sectors, such as education or health. In turn, youth policies can contribute to delivering results in other areas, such as gender equality. The integration of gender concerns in youth policy is increasing, yet most research and policy documents are rarely concerned with gender differences and an explicit and clear gender perspective is still lacking.

Youth is the period between childhood and adulthood when young people undergo multiple transitions, establishing themselves as adults. The situation of young people is shaped by specific life events that occur during the transitional period of youth. For instance, it may be that a young person moves from being financially dependent to being in control of their own budget, from living in the family home to setting up their own household – maybe with a partner – from being in education to having a job, and from being a child to being responsible for their own children.

Across the EU, young people have been increasingly using more time for the transition to adulthood, as the pathways to the next phase of their lives become less standardised and more complex. There is a link between gender and the shift to adulthood – across all youth-to-adulthood transition events, women usually move to adulthood earlier than men.

Youth is typically defined as an age group, although the definition of ‘youth’ varies across EU Member States, with many of them overlapping and vaguely differentiating between children and youth. This diversity and lack of a concrete definition explains why the EU Youth strategy for 2010 – 2018 operates without an official definition for the specific period in life when a person is considered to be ‘young’. For statistical purposes, the EU considers young people to be aged 15 – 29 years of age, while children are categorised as being aged 0 – 14 years.

In 2014 there were 89 million young people between 15 and 29 years of age in the EU, and they accounted for 17.7% of the EU-28’s overall population. Against the background of an ageing society, the population of young people shrunk by 15 million in the decade between 1994 and 2014. In 2014 there were slightly more young men (aged 15 – 29) than there were young women (50.9% against 49.1% respectively).

Many young people in Europe experience challenges which prevent them from fully enjoying their human rights and accessing equal opportunities. In some cases, difficult experiences or situations are gender specific. In some areas, young women are disadvantaged, whereas in other areas young men experience higher risks and adverse effects. Indeed, girls and young women face several challenges. Although different performances in the labour market (employability, transition from education to work, unemployment) are the main issues of concern, many others are also present.

Young women are, for example, more likely to be affected by low pay and precarious employment as young mothers and lack adequate work-life balance measures.

Furthermore, some young women are at a particular disadvantage or at risk of discrimination in the labour market.

The youth sector as an area thus remains influenced by a set of gender inequalities:

- gender differences in education and transition to employment
- gender inequalities in access to the labour market
- young families and care responsibilities.

Issues of gender inequality in the policy area

Gender differences in education and transition to employment

Young women are more likely than young men to graduate from upper secondary programmes. Young women are also graduating from vocational programmes more often than in the past; consequently, their graduation rates from these programmes are catching up with those of young men. Similarly, young women complete education with a tertiary qualification in larger numbers than men. The proportion of women among 20- to 24-year-olds who had at least completed upper secondary education in 2011 was 82.4%, compared to 76.7% for men, and the proportion of women with tertiary education reaches 39.7% for the 25 – 34 age group, relative to 30.4% for the equivalent group of men. Young women are also less likely than young men to drop out from education and training. On average in the EU-27, the early school leaving rate is 15.3% for young men and 11.6% for young women, with wide differences among EU countries.

The high number of women participating in education is a positive change compared to periods when - even only 40 years ago - there were fewer women in education. In 2012 in the EU, 24 % of women hold a tertiary education degree in comparison with 23 % of men. The gender gap has reversed in this domain since in 2005, 18 % of women and 19 % of men hold a tertiary education degree. However, education fields at the tertiary level remain strongly gender-segregated with 45% of women students concentrated in the fields of Education, Health and Welfare, Humanities and Arts (while only 22% of men students are concentrated in these fields) in 2012. Young women often choose fields of studies that may translate into lower employment rates. 'Vertical skills mismatch' or 'overqualification' are widespread, especially among young women with tertiary education, because they tend to choose more general or academic educational paths. Young men are instead more likely to have completed vocational education, which leads to better labour market outcomes than general education. At the same time the decrease in men's participation in and success at higher levels of education is worrying. The reasons for this decrease is insufficiently researched.

Horizontal segregation in education leads to occupational segregation in the labour market and impacts future career options of both women and men. This is all the more relevant when considering that the labour market is also currently strongly gender-segregated. In 2012, 30 % of women were employed in education, human health and social work activities for only 8% of men.

Young women choose fields of study (mostly in the humanities) that are generally considered to provide few opportunities to find a job. In the 2011 Youth on the move Flash Eurobarometer, Eurobarometer asked interviewees about the main concerns they had when seeking a job on completion of their education. A higher proportion of young women than men (24.3% versus 20.4%) declared that there were no job opportunities in their fields of study, while fewer thought they did not have the right knowledge or skills (11.5% of young women relative to 13.7% of young men).

Moreover, young women are less involved in on-the-job training. Men are more likely than women to have participated in training over the last 12 months (by a margin of 24% to 21%); they are also more likely to receive funding from their current employer (60% as opposed to 50% of women) and to have completed a traineeship (37% versus 32%). Conversely, young women take part in non-formal learning activities more often than men.

Gender inequalities in labour conditions

Young people lack work experience and the financial and social resources to find employment. As a result, they are far more likely than other groups to be employed in non-standard and insecure jobs, regardless of their education and skills. The economic crisis in the EU since 2008 has worsened the labour market conditions more for young men (particularly those aged 15 – 24) than for young women, thus reducing the existing gender gaps. This is due to the recession strongly affecting the manufacturing and construction sectors, which traditionally employ mainly men.

Among young people aged 15 – 24, between 2008 and 2014, the employment rate for men declined by around 5.9%, while that for women declined by 3.8% (in 2014, the rate was 30.5% for women and 34.2% for men). Similar trends were also registered for the 25 – 29 age group (–4.4% for men and –5.8% for women, and the employment rate was 66.4% for women and 75.9% for men in 2014). The relatively larger decline in male employment rates has resulted in convergence among young people in this indicator, but in 2014 the gender gap was still present, particularly among those aged 25 – 29 (9.5%, compared to 3.7% among the youngest group, aged 15 – 24).

Youth unemployment rates are more than twice as high as they are for the total EU population. Following the financial crisis of 2008, the unemployment rate of young people (aged 15 – 24) in the EU-28 has sharply risen, by a little over 7% (from 15.6% to 22.2%), and remains high, particularly for men (+7% among men aged 15 – 24, compared to +5.8% for the equivalent group of women). Since 2008, the unemployment rate for young women aged 15 – 24 has been lower than the rate for young men (21.4% and 22.8% respectively in 2014). The rate is practically the same for young women and men aged 25 – 29 (13.7% and 13.65% respectively).

Young women are at high risk of unemployment and inactivity and are one of the especially vulnerable social groups, alongside the low-skilled, early education leavers, people with an immigrant background, and the disabled. The vulnerability of young women results from discrimination based on gender stereotypes, skills mismatch and the lack of family–work reconciliation measures.

Another important issue is related to the fact that NEET rates (15 – 29 years old) have been increasing more for men than for women over the period 2008-2014 (+3.3% and +1.1% respectively). Across the EU-28, the average NEET rate for young women aged 15 to 29 was 17.1% in 2014, while the rate for young men in the same age group was 13.5%.

The NEET rate is a more complete indicator of gender differences than the unemployment rate because it also takes into account those young people who are inactive but do not participate in education or training. In fact, young women are more likely than young men to be NEETs, mainly because they are more likely to be out of the labour force (or inactive).

The inactivity component for women aged 15 – 24, even though it has declined in recent years, still accounts for 57.1% of women NEETs, whereas among men it accounts for only 40.2%. The incidence of inactivity among women NEETs further increases for women aged 25 – 29, reaching 65.5%.

Young families and care responsibilities

Starting a family may be another milestone in the life of a young person. Being married and having children is related to opposite NEET outcomes for young women and men, especially with reference to their (non-)participation in employment. Generally, in most EU Member States, being married and having children implies a much higher NEET rate for women (in terms of inactivity), while for men the opposite is usually the case. Country differences in women's NEET rates mainly concern young married women, and are probably related to the availability of care services and the prevalent social values. Similarly, the presence of children increases the gender gap in employment and part-time employment.

Net childcare costs are a critical factor in parents' employment decisions. The cost of childcare can consume a third or more of family budgets and can become unaffordable, especially for young low-income families and lone parents. It has been observed that improving childcare services increases employment opportunities for (young) mothers, who are more likely to be the main carers in the absence of such family support. Family responsibilities are also used to explain gender differences in the willingness of young people to set up their own business (38.5% for young women relative to 47.1% for young men) or to work in another country (49.4% for young women relative to 56.3% for young men). Education seems to partly counterbalance the 'married parent' effect, since women with advanced degrees – even when married with children – have shorter out-of-work spells than other women.

Gender equality policy objectives at EU and International level

EU level

Gender equality as a core value of the EU is enshrined in European youth policy documents. However, even if youth policies are a central feature of policymaking both at EU and national level, the gender dimension is lacking in a large number of the recommendations, resolutions and studies that have been enacted and carried out on this issue. Apart from general considerations, most research and policy documents very rarely tackle gender differences, even if attention to this issue has been increasing in recent years.

European Commission

The White Paper A new impetus for European youth was launched in 2001 by the European Commission. It established the objective of improving the participation of young people in European public life and encouraging young people to become active citizens. Gender issues are integrated into the section entitled *Family and gender issues need more attention*, in which it is emphasised that reconciling family and work is one of the main challenges for the future, for example in relation to, the provision of parental leave and improved childcare facilities. Attention has to be given to the specific needs of girls and young women, particularly regarding their health and safety.

In 2005, the European Commission proposed the European Youth Pact, with the aim of improving the education, training, mobility, vocational integration and social inclusion of young Europeans. Gender inequalities among young people were recognised as one of the key factors inhibiting Europe's goals of boosting jobs and growth and creating sustainable development. As mentioned above, the Youth Pact aimed to improve the education, training, mobility, vocational integration and social inclusion of young people, while facilitating the reconciliation of working life and family life, which was presented as key to promoting gender equality for young women and men. This document underlined the necessity to promote 'the reconciliation of working life and family life by sharing the responsibility between partners, particularly by expanding the childcare network and developing innovative forms of work organisation, as well as promoting child-friendly policies'.

While respecting Member States' overall responsibility for youth policy, the EU Youth Strategy 'Investing and Empowering', agreed by EU ministers, renews the framework for an open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities covering the years 2010 – 2018. Promoting gender equality and combating all forms of discrimination are key objectives of the strategy, which calls for Member States and the Commission to launch initiatives within their respective areas of competence to address gender and other stereotypes via formal education and non-formal learning. No other targeted initiatives are described, apart from mentioning the important fact that the promotion of opportunities to reconcile work and family life is considered a priority for both young women and young men. The EU Youth Strategy 2010 – 2018) has 2 main objectives:

- to provide more and equal opportunities for young people in education and the job market
- to encourage young people to actively participate in society

A gender perspective is explicitly applied only once under Field of Action 1 – Education: *Address gender stereotypes via formal and non-formal education systems*. The strategy also recognises that effective youth policies can deliver results to various areas of social and human development, including gender equality.

European Parliament

In June 2015, the European Parliament adopted a Resolution on the EU Strategy for Equality between Women and Men Post-2015, in which it considers that policies and instruments aimed at tackling youth unemployment, such as the Youth Guarantee and the Youth Employment Initiative, should meet the specific needs of young women and men in order to enable them to access the labour market. It notes that the proportion of young women who are NEETs is higher than the proportion among young men; it calls for the collection of gender-disaggregated data in the area of youth unemployment in order that tailored, evidence-based policies may be developed. In this Resolution, the European Parliament calls on the Commission to tailor both the investment package adopted in 2014 and the Youth Guarantee more closely to the specific situation and needs of girls and women.

International level

Council of Europe

In 2008, the Council of Europe adopted a new political framework for the youth sector, in a declaration entitled *The future of the Council of Europe youth policy: Agenda 2020*. This declaration aims to reinforce activities for young people and also to maintain a strong partnership with the European Commission in this area. Agenda 2020 underlines the necessity of implementing youth activities in 3 dimensions: ‘human rights and democracy’, ‘living together in diverse society’ and ‘the social inclusion of young people’. In the background paper, ‘[i]mplementing gender equality and preventing all forms of gender-based violence’ is included as one of the topics that the Council of Europe’s youth sector should especially focus on.

United Nations

The Beijing Platform for Action Area L – ‘The Girl Child’ defines particular policy objectives. For each of these, it also specifies actions to be taken by governments, international organisations and non-governmental organisations in order to eliminate all forms of discrimination against the girl child. All strategic objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action are relevant to the promotion of gender equality among young people. Gender inequality starts at home, where girls may experience gender discrimination which could impact on their performance at school and in their professional life. Therefore, particular attention needs to be paid to enhancing self-esteem and developing the talents and skills of young girls.

In 2013, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted Resolution 68/130 ‘Policies and programmes involving youth’, which reasserts that Member States need ‘to promote equal opportunities for all and to eliminate all forms of discrimination against young people’. The Resolution encourages Member States to tackle the challenges faced by girls and women and to eliminate gender stereotypes, discrimination or gender-based violence and human trafficking.

Within the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 5 is dedicated to achieving gender equality and empowering all women. In particular, references are made to:

- eliminating all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation
- ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere and supporting their empowerment.

Policy cycle in youth

How and when? Youth and the integration of the gender dimension into the policy cycle

The gender dimension can be integrated in all phases of the policy cycle. Below, you can find useful resources and practical examples for mainstreaming gender into youth policies. They are organised according to the most relevant phase of the policy cycle they may serve.

Practical examples of gender mainstreaming in youth

Austria

Financial support of youth organisations and clubs, youth initiatives and projects is an essential youth policy in Austria. In light of outcome-oriented budget planning, the relevant outcome objectives were defined as gender equality objectives, which state that a gender balance shall be strived for within the supported organisations and initiatives. Furthermore, career orientation was defined as a priority for support for the years 2012 to 2014. In this regard, youth work in a non-school environment is an essential way to promote the skills of young people, giving them a broader spectrum of career choices. STEM professions – science, technology, engineering, mathematics – can be mentioned in this context.

Gender perspectives are also mainstreamed in practical work with children and youth. The 5th Youth Report (2007) evaluated the specific measures children's and youth organisations take related to gender mainstreaming. Moreover, a concept was developed to support the organisations in the development, testing and realisation of gender mainstreaming strategies and processes. In the course of ongoing implementation, incentives for the application of gender mainstreaming were created. [Read more.](#)

Ireland

In June 2011, the Irish Government established the Department (Ministry) for Children and Youth Affairs, a new government department with responsibility for a range of issues including child welfare and protection, youth justice, the National Children's Strategy, family support and early childhood care and education. The Department focuses equally on the needs of both young women and men. A new national policy framework for children and young people was launched in mid-2014. [Read more.](#)

Timeline

The key milestones of the EU youth policy are presented below.

1988

Launch of the Youth for Europe programme which supported youth exchanges and mobility actions such as youth workers, cooperation between Member States' youth structures, third-country exchanges, information for young people and youth research.

1988 - 1988

1989 – 1991

Youth for Europe

188/348/EEC: Council Decision of 16 June 1988 adopting an action programme for the promotion of youth exchanges in the Community – 'Youth for Europe' programme, Official Journal L 158, 25/06/1988

1989 - 1991

1992 – 1994

Youth for Europe

II 91/395/EEC: Council Decision of 29 July 1991 adopting the Youth for Europe programme (second phase), Official Journal L 217, 06/08/1991

1992 - 1994

1995 – 1999

Youth for Europe III

Decision No 818/95/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 March 1995 adopting the third phase of the 'Youth for Europe' programme, Official Journal L 087, 20/04/1995

1995 - 1999

1998-1999

European Voluntary Service

Decision No 168/98/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 20 July 1998 establishing the Community Action Programme 'European Voluntary Service for Young People', Official Journal L 214, 31/07/1998

1998 - 1999

2000

Launch of the youth programme which offers young people opportunities for mobility and active participation in the construction of the Europe and contributes to the development of youth policy, based on non-formal education. It aims to promote exchanges and discussion meetings between young people, voluntary work, participation and active citizenship, and the innovation and improvement of international training and cooperation skills in the youth field.

Decision No [1031/2000/CE](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 April 2000 drawing up the 'YOUTH' community action programme, Official Journal L 117 , 18/05/2000

2000 - 2000

2001

European Commission White Paper – a [new impetus for European youth](#).

2001 - 2001

2002

[Resolution](#) of the Council and of the Representative of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, Framework of European cooperation in the youth field.

2002 - 2002

2005

[Resolution](#) of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on addressing the concerns of young people in Europe– implementing the European Pact for Youth and promoting active citizenship.

2005 - 2005

2007

EU's Youth in action programme, with the goals of increasing a sense of European citizenship, solidarity and tolerance among young Europeans, by promoting mobility within and beyond the EU's borders, non-formal learning and intercultural dialogue, and encouraging the employability and inclusion of all young people, regardless of their educational, social and cultural background.

Decision No 1719/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006 establishing the 'Youth in Action' programme for the period 2007 to 2013, Official Journal L 327, 24/11/2006.

2007 - 2007

2009

An [EU Strategy for Youth–investing and empowering](#): A renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010 – 2018).

2009 - 2009

2010

Europe 2020 introduces 7 flagship initiatives, one of which is [youth on the move](#), which aims to enhance the performance of education systems and facilitate the entry of young people into the labour market.

2010 - 2010

2012

[Youth employment package](#), the follow-up to the actions for young people laid out in the wider employment package and includes, among other things, a proposal that EU countries establish a youth guarantee to ensure that all young people up to the age of 25 receive a quality job offer, continued education or training, or an apprenticeship or traineeship, within 4 months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed.

2012 - 2012

2013

[Council Recommendation](#) on establishing a youth guarantee.

2013 - 2013

2013

Launch of the [youth employment initiative](#) (YEI), one of the main EU financial resources to support the implementation of youth guarantee schemes. It is complementary to other actions undertaken at national level, including those with the European social fund.

2013 - 2013

2013

Launch of Erasmus+ programme 2014–2020, the new EU programme for education, training, youth and sport. It is an integrated programme replacing several previous EU programmes: the Lifelong Learning Programme (Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, Comenius, Grundtvig), Youth in Action, and 5 international programmes (Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, Alfa, Edulink and the programme for cooperation with industrialised countries).

2013 - 2013

2015

Publication of the [2015 EU youth report](#) that presents a full picture of the situation of young people in Europe and how policymakers have addressed it in the period 2013–2015. The related Communication from the Commission explains the way forward in EU youth cooperation (2016–2018).

2015 - 2015

2015

[European Parliament Resolution](#) of 9 June 2015 on the EU strategy for equality between women and men post 2015.

2015 - 2015

Current policy priorities at EU level

There are 3 main references for current policy priorities at EU level in relation to youth and gender:

- 1 | [An EU strategy for youth – Investing and empowering. A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities](#)

2 | [Europe 2020](#)

3 | [EU strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth](#)

These instruments provide a framework to tackle increased youth unemployment and raise awareness of the many difficulties young people face.

Specific programmes to help young people develop and contribute to building a sustainable society include:

- Youth on the move
- Erasmus+
- Marie Curie

The Commission also encourages Member States and youth organisations to access European funds to create opportunities for young people. The overall aim of these programmes is to further develop formal education and traineeships and build entrepreneurial and apprenticeships skills. Furthermore, the majority of projects funded by the EU through the European social funds, the European regional development funds and PROGRESS focus on labour-market integration for young people by recognising non-formal learning, supporting youth work, stimulating entrepreneurship, improving information services and developing information and communications technology (ICT) skills. Groups of young people at risk of social exclusion and poverty or with special needs, such as immigrants, early school leavers and those with disabilities, are often targeted.

Youth on the move, the package of policy initiatives on education and employment for young people in Europe was launched in 2010 as part of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. It aims to improve young people's education and employability, reduce high youth unemployment and increase the youth employment rate by:

- making education and training more relevant to young people's needs
- encouraging more youth to take advantage of EU grants to study or train in another country
- encouraging EU countries to take measures simplifying the transition from education to work

In 2010, the European Commission published a [new political framework for youth in Europe](#), with the aim of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of European cooperation by establishing a strategy for 2010 – 2018. The objectives of this strategy are to create more and equal opportunities for all young people in education and in the labour market and to promote the active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity of all young people.

To achieve these objectives, the EU proposed a dual approach, focusing on specific activities targeting young people in areas such as non-formal learning, participation, voluntary activities, youth work, mobility and information, as well as on mainstreaming initiatives aimed at enabling a cross-cultural approach found in other policy frameworks relative to youth. The work is primarily carried out by the youth in action/Erasmus+ programme, through the development of a framework for political cooperation and by increasing the visibility of youth and their organisations.

The [EU's strategy for youth 2010 – 2018](#), has 3 goals, each with their own field of action:

1 | Creating more opportunities for youth in education and employment

- education
- employment
- creativity and entrepreneurship

2. Improving access and full participation of all young people in society

- health and sport
- participation
- social inclusion

3. Fostering mutual solidarity between society and young people

- volunteering
- youth and the world

The strategy for youth underlines that youth policy cannot advance without effective coordination with other sectors, and as a consequence, youth policies can contribute to delivering results in other areas.

Want to know more?