
PATHWAYS TO RIGHTS: EMPOWERING YOUNG EUROPEANS

October 2017



About Volonteurope

Volonteurope is an international network promoting volunteering, active citizenship and social justice in Europe and beyond. Volonteurope works at all levels, from the local to the international, and across the public, private and third sectors. We facilitate exchange, foster collaboration and carry out research and advocacy. Volonteurope currently has over 60 members in more than 20 countries across Europe. Established in the Netherlands in 1981, Volonteurope is registered as an ASBL in Belgium, while its Secretariat is hosted by Volunteering Matters, a leading UK volunteering organisation.

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Volonteurope is supported by the European Commission's 'Europe for Citizens' programme. Sole responsibility for this report and its contents lies with Volonteurope.

Acknowledgements

Volonteurope would like to thank the following for their contributions to this report:

- Cara Battrick and Mandy Wilmot, Volunteering Matters
- Bart Carlier and Charlotte Christiaens, CATAPA
- Maria Chatzipetrou, Emfasis Foundation
- Dănuț Dumitru, REF
- Ingrid Jones, Partnerë Për Fëmijët
- Heikki Luoto, Yeesi
- Tomas Vytautas Raskevičius, LGL
- Terje Tamm, MONDO
- Solange Valdez-Symonds, PRCBC

Volonteurope owes a special thanks to Piotr Sadowski, Laura de Bonfils and Louise King who authored the report. Thanks also to Rosalind Duignan-Pearson for her valuable contributions.

Foreword



Oonagh Aitken
President of Volonteurope

As President of Volonteurope, it gives me great pleasure to introduce this report, published to coincide with our 26th annual conference, 'Pathways to Rights: Empowering Young Europeans'.

You will read a great deal in the report about the important progress that has been made, especially in the European Union, to protect and promote the rights of young people. However, research and real examples demonstrate that despite the set of legislations and institutions designed to protect the human rights of European citizens, the rights of young people are being eroded.

European welfare systems are still not providing young people with the safety nets required to facilitate independent living. Poverty is rising and multiple discrimination is an everyday reality. For example, there has been worrying regression regarding certain rights and in the report we highlight specifically issues around sexual and reproductive rights.

We are experiencing a rise of far-right parties in mainstream European politics which use racist rhetoric to exploit fears over migration and this leads to increased discriminatory behaviour towards minority groups. Young people in these minority groups are particularly vulnerable.

Young people who are not in education, employment or training, young people with disabilities, mental health issues, or those who live below the poverty line are still not getting the support they need to make the transition into adulthood a successful one.

The decision of the UK to leave the European Union and protracted negotiations around the terms of Brexit are in danger of denying several mutual freedoms and rights for both British people and other EU citizens living in the country and this will have a particular effect on young people.

In times of unprecedented societal and labour market challenges, and when the civic space is shrinking, we need to find new ways of encouraging participation and civic action, especially for young people. The work of civil society organisations which engages volunteers is fundamental.

I hope that you will enjoy reading the report and that you will find further inspiration from it for your work.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Oonagh Aitken". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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Executive Summary

Human rights are the inalienable rights that outline how human beings should be treated. The human rights framework which covers both economic and social rights guarantees that we can live a fulfilling and dignified life and facilitates social inclusion.

With its own human rights legislation and institutions, the EU is generally seen as a leader in terms of human rights. Yet, in reality, the rights of young people are being eroded. European welfare systems are still not providing young people with the safety nets required to facilitate independent living, poverty is rising and multiple discrimination is an everyday reality. This report invites readers to think about the current state of youth rights in Europe and how this can be improved with the help of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).

What are the challenges in European societies to achieving social rights?

Europe is doing comparatively well in terms of the fulfilment of rights, ranking highly in terms of wellbeing, human development and quality of life. Yet difficulties still remain, and the levels of these vary significantly between member states. An ageing population, the financial crises, as well as the rise of right wing populism are all factors which are making it more difficult for young people to live a fulfilling life. Civil society actors seek to engage young people through active citizenship and volunteering to help them access their rights despite these difficult circumstances. However, the work that they do and their very existence have come under threat from conservative political leaders.

How are youth rights protected in law?

The UN first introduced the notion of human rights in 1948 with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was given legal force by various treaties and covenants, most notably the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) which came into force in 1978.

On the EU level The Treaty of Rome (1957), The Maastricht Treaty (1992) and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000) have made successive advances in the enshrinement of fundamental rights in law, with a particular focus on social rights with the most recent charter. In terms of youth rights there exists the European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights.

What is the state of youth rights?

Taking the current political, economic and social climate into consideration it is important to zoom in on several key rights of young people, to assess their current state. Different rights reveal different pictures. With regards to education, while enrolment rates in primary and secondary school are consistently high, enrolment rates decrease as young people get older, with many dropping out before finishing high school or progressing to higher education. This varies significantly between countries in Europe. Employment is somewhat more concerning, with young people facing significant difficulties entering the job market. In terms of access to housing, the rising cost of rents is forcing young people into poverty or preventing them from living independently as they are financially obliged to live at home longer. Data on access to healthcare in Europe reveal positive

trends for the majority of young people, yet vulnerable groups such as migrants and trans people still face significant barriers. In terms of mental health, young people are particularly vulnerable to depression, intentional self-harm and suicide. Young people face multiple barriers in accessing sexual health education and medical care due to the multiple dimensions involved, including religious and cultural factors. Young people continue to face discrimination on the grounds of nationality and ethnicity. Furthermore, many young people residing in Europe are denied nationality, rendering them stateless, due to gaps in national legislation. With respect to gender-based violence against women and girls, the EU has a series of conventions, resolutions, conclusions and strategies to combat it. Despite this, the issue continues to present a barrier to the right to bodily integrity of young people in Europe. The right to gender identity and sexual orientation has seen vast gains in terms of legislation throughout the last decade; however in 2013 17% of Europeans reported experiencing this type of discrimination, indicating that much still has to be done. Finally while the EU has some of the world's most stringent environmental protection laws, it faces several environmental challenges many of which are related to climate change, and will have a particularly harmful impact on children and young people as the effects of climate change produce increasingly extreme weather events.

The barriers preventing young people from fully accessing these rights mean that the role of civil society organisations working with young people is more important than ever. Through providing access to services, and engaging young people in activism and volunteer work they empower them to develop skills and competencies for personal, social and civic development. European leaders in all member states must follow the example set by civil society and act urgently to ensure that progress can be made swiftly to ensure that all young people can access their fundamental rights, and become active and engaged citizens.

Recommendations

1. Increase the resources and funds made available to CSOs, to youth organisations and grassroots organisation to realise social rights and organise social action;
2. specifically target vulnerable groups and vulnerable regions for the purpose of improving access to social rights;
3. advocate for rights-based approaches in youth policy;
4. modify and improve the procedures and management of services and benefits which are intended to give effect to social rights;
5. involve youth organisations, volunteer involving organisations and grass roots organisations in the co-design and joint monitoring of policy and initiatives to ensure the inclusivity and accessibility of placements for all young people;
6. create a youth-led advisory body on policy making, and youth consultation on policy making;
7. create more and better quality volunteering opportunities, with a specific focus on people with fewer opportunities;
8. promote the exchange of practices and experiences among partners and stakeholders at both national and European levels;
9. develop and disseminate educational tools and awareness of social rights
10. promote partnership with social enterprises;
11. make citizenship education compulsory in schools to create more awareness, critical thinking and solidarity.

Pathways to rights: Empowering young Europeans

“Rights are won only by those who make their voices heard” — Harvey Milk

1. Introduction

Human rights are the inalienable rights which guarantee respect of the fundamental dignity of the individual. The human rights framework guarantees that social inclusion is an inalienable and universal right of all people. It includes several rights that range from economic, social, civil and cultural rights, including the right to employment, the right to education, the right to social protection, the right to family life, and the right to participation, as well as the right to live a dignified life. Social inclusion means ensuring that all people have the opportunity to fully participate in economic, social and cultural life and to have adequate standards of living and wellbeing.

Although human rights apply to everyone, certain groups of people face particular barriers in accessing and enjoying their rights. To address such barriers, countries have developed international instruments dedicated to protecting certain rights. However, we find that the role of volunteering, social action and civil society are pivotal in removing these barriers and in accessing rights for young people.

The rights of young people today are under threat. European welfare systems are still not providing young people with strong safety nets to be able to live independently. Poverty is rising and multiple-discrimination is still an everyday reality. Young people can be particularly vulnerable to discrimination in various forms. They often encounter difficulties in accessing education, quality employment, social protection as well as other civil and political rights which limit their potential.

Moreover, recent political, social and economic developments have shown that what was considered in the past a natural development towards greater access to fundamental rights can slow to a halt or even regress. This regression indicates that many of the celebrated achievements in human rights were only achieved formally in law, and that lack of implementation has produced little to no improvements to the lives of many people.

This report outlines the various international institutions and important declarations, treaties and legislatures that have been put in place to fulfil the fundamental rights of human beings. It then summarises the reality of access to a series of important rights and showcases the good practice of several civil society organisations (CSOs) working to help young people achieve their rights. Finally it

offers several policy recommendations that would facilitate improved access to the rights of young people.

Volonteurope's report and recommendations build on existing principles enshrined in international instruments presented below. These principles include:

- young people's access to rights is an essential element for building a culture of human rights, democracy and rule of law in Europe today;
- Youth organisations, civil society organisations and volunteering involving organisations have a critical role to play in ensuring young people's access to rights and supporting them to be active citizens participating fully in society;
- access to rights requires that young people are educated and informed about rights they can enjoy;
- participation of young people in society should be supported and encouraged from a young age;
- every person should be able to access their rights freely and without discrimination, so special attention should be given to young people with fewer opportunities.

1.1. Report structure

The report is divided into five chapters. The introductory chapter sets the scene and outlines the structure and tone of the report. The second chapter presents an overview of the human rights international framework focusing specifically on the UN, the Council of Europe and EU frameworks. The third chapter explores the current status of and challenges faced by young people living in the European Union. The fourth chapter takes some specific rights into consideration, providing an overview of the situation related to the fulfilment of these rights in the EU. It also showcases the good practice around removing barriers to rights for young people of some of the civil society and volunteer involving organisations that make up Volonteurope's network. The final chapter draws conclusions and identifies recommendations to support the work of civil society organisations and volunteer involving organisations to support the young people of Europe in accessing their rights.

2. The human rights international frameworks

The modern international human rights system was designed following the Second World War with the establishment of the United Nations and the Council of Europe. Historically, human rights have been split into two main categories, the first containing civil and political rights and the second economic, social and cultural rights. These two categories of rights respect the principle of indivisibility that establishes all rights as equally important. Therefore, States have an obligation to take measures towards the full realisation of economic, social and cultural rights, with consideration of the resources available to them. Legally binding instruments are sometimes referred to as 'hard law' and are complemented by 'soft law' instruments. Soft law instruments are not legally binding but provide recommendations and directions that civil society and other stakeholders can use to further human rights.

Although human rights apply to everyone, certain groups of people face particular barriers in accessing and enjoying their rights. To address such barriers, countries have developed international instruments dedicated to the rights of certain groups including women, children and people with disabilities.

The foundations of human rights exist at the international level where a set of norms and legal instruments, as embodied in the resolutions and recommendations of the United Nations, the Council of Europe and latterly the European Union (EU), serve to establish international standards and procedures for social rights and social cohesion.

2.1. The UN framework

The present understanding of human rights is derived from the Universal Declaration of Human rights. Drafted by representatives of different legal and cultural backgrounds from all over the world, the declaration was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. The Declaration marked the beginning of the transition of human rights from moral and philosophical principles to legally binding rights to which countries were required to adhere (UN, 2017).

The declaration is complemented by two major covenants which give it legal force. These are the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The covenants came into force in 1976, when the appropriate number of countries had ratified them, having been adopted and opened for signature ten years earlier. Some of the rights enshrined in these charters overlap with those in the European

Social Charter. This is especially the case for employment-related rights (New Zealand Human Rights Commission, 2010).



Figure 1. Universal Declaration of Human Rights

In addition to these major covenants, thematic issues are addressed through conventions such as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racism (CERD) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). In addition to these legally binding documents, the UN has produced a large number of non-binding resolutions which establish standards of best practice and carry significant moral weight which can put pressure on countries to change existing practice (New Zealand Human Rights Commission, 2010). The rights enshrined in treaties come into force as soon as the treaty has been ratified by the member state (New Zealand Human Rights Commission, 2010).

The rights in the covenants and conventions mentioned above are monitored through UN Bodies: treaty bodies and charter bodies. Charter bodies such as the Human Rights Council and Special

Procedures monitor the respect of all types of human rights. The Human Rights Council is an intergovernmental body made up of 47 member states, which meet each year with the aim of preventing abuses of human rights through exposing the perpetrators of abuses. The Human Rights Council appoints independent experts, special rapporteurs or working groups known as Special Procedures to report on specific country situations or thematic issues all over the world (OHCHR, 2017).

Treaty bodies unlike charter bodies are created to monitor a particular treaty. Currently there are 9 core UN human rights treaties, with a treaty body to monitor each one. A tenth treaty body, the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture, established under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, monitors places of detention in member states which are party to the Optional Protocol (OHCHR, 2017).

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) offers its expertise and support to the treaty bodies and the charter bodies in their monitoring activities. It provides leadership, objective support and action to empower individuals, organisations and member states to help them uphold human rights (OHCHR, 2017).

Human rights are increasingly recognised as essential to achieving sustainable development. In September 2015 the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by over 170 world leaders. Unlike the Millennium Development Goals, which while promoting certain economic and social rights, ignore other important human rights, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is truly universal applying to all countries and covers a broader set of themes than the narrow vision of the MDGs. The framework of the agenda consists of 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) and 167 targets which serve as steps towards the achievement of these goals throughout the next 15 years (OHCHR, 2017). There will be regular global reviews to monitor progress.



Figure 2. SDGs

2.2. The EU and the SDGs

The European Commission has stated that together with its member states it will implement the SDGs while respecting the principle of subsidiarity. Its strategy for achieving the SDGs consists of two streams. Firstly it will mainstream the SDGs into the European policy framework and the priorities of the Commission and secondly it will develop a strategy for the long term implementation of the SDGs beyond 2020. In terms of mainstreaming sustainability into its existing policy framework, the EU uses impact assessments to ensure that sustainability is adequately considered in existing and proposed policy (European Commission, 2016). The Commission has developed an EU SDG indicator set in order to carry robust and transparent monitoring of the implementation of SDGs by a large number of actors including EU institutions, member states and civil society organisations (Eurostat, 2017).

The European commission carried out a mapping exercise of European policy and found that European policy addresses all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, the Europe 2020 strategy, which sets out Europe's agenda for growth and jobs for the current decade addresses several of the SDGs (European Commission, 2016).

To ensure that states, rights-holders, NHRIs, major groups, business and others take a human rights-based approach to the realisation of SDGs, the Danish Institute for Human Rights has created a database to help people find concrete links between the goals and targets of the 2030 agenda. This serves as a tool to influence implementation strategies and review processes at all levels and helps

states incorporate the SDGs into their human rights reporting (The Danish Institute for Human Rights (2017)).

2.3. The Council of Europe

The Council of Europe promotes social development and works to establish a political, economic and social climate favourable to social cohesion in Europe. Social rights have figured prominently in the Council of Europe's approach. A key achievement of the Council of Europe is the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5), the main instrument guaranteeing the protection of the founding values of our societies. The European Social Charter guarantees social and economic human rights. The case law of the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Social Charter continues to highlight areas in which member States have failed to guarantee access to rights of people. With the opening of the European Social Charter for signature in 1961 and its entry into force in 1965, the Council of Europe established a comprehensive code of economic and social rights. Economic rights as defined in the Charter mainly refer to economic and labour rights while social rights are primarily related to health and welfare. In 1996, the revised European Social Charter opened for signature, and it entered into force in 1999. It is underpinned by the principle of the indivisibility of all human rights and reiterates the importance of non-discrimination as a fundamental principle, specifically that the enjoyment of the rights is to be secured without discrimination on any ground, for example racial origin, colour, gender, language, religion, political or other opinion, national extraction or social origin, state of health, association with a national minority, birth or other status. Employment-related rights again figure prominently. In addition to the rights contained in the 1988 Additional Protocol, they include the following: the right to protection in cases of termination of employment and insolvency of the employer and the right to dignity at work.

In 2016 the Council of Europe published the Recommendation CM/Rec (2016)7 for the access to rights of young people. The recommendation stressed that like all generations, young people are entitled to fully enjoy human rights and all other rights under national and international law and it identified several areas of improvement related to young people's access to rights.

- 1 Addressing discriminatory practices faced on the grounds outlined by Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights, with focus on multifaceted identities and intersectionality;
- 2 removing any legal, administrative and practical obstacles to the right of young people to assemble peacefully and to freely form, join and be active in associations and trade unions;
- 3 establishing or developing youth policies at all levels to promote and facilitate all young people's access to rights more effectively, with special emphasis on the following issues: barriers to access to quality education; secure stable and meaningful employment; or obtain quality internships; lack of support to continue education and support during unemployment; insufficient capacity of social and health-care services to cater for the specific needs of young people; the negative consequences of precarious life situations on the well-being and safety of young people; insufficient opportunities for participation in the life of society, particularly with regard to decisions that concern young people directly, the lack of a systematic policy of encouragement and preparation for participation and the lack of mechanisms or structures allowing effective participation; insufficient or non-existent financial and political support for youth initiatives and self-managed and independent youth organisations.
- 4 taking a co-ordinated approach to improving young people's access to rights with co-operation across all relevant policy areas at international, national, regional and local levels.
- 5 For this purpose, member states should take the following steps:
 - undertake a critical and profound knowledge-based analysis of the problems faced by young people in accessing rights, including consideration of intergenerational solidarity on all policies with a long-term impact. This analysis should involve experts, policy makers, youth workers, representatives of youth organisations, trade unions and other civil society organisations. Where possible, disaggregated data should be analysed in order to identify the experiences of excluded or marginalised young people. Progress should be reviewed at regular intervals;
 - if necessary, carry out a review of existing and planned legislation, and introduce legislative measures that promote and guarantee access to rights and systematically remove any legal obstacles to young people accessing rights;
 - consider additional steps they can take to improve young people's access to rights in consultation with youth policy stakeholders, including youth organisations and national youth councils;
 - if necessary, modify the structure and practice of institutions and services catering for young people, in order to support them more effectively in addressing equitably the needs of all groups of young people, in addition to improving the competencies and skills of staff working with young people in these institutions;
- 6 establishing strategies to improve young people's access to rights that reflect the principles of the universality and indivisibility of human rights, non-discrimination and equal opportunities, gender equality, accountability, democracy, participation and intergenerational solidarity. These strategies should recognise that youth work can make a particularly valuable contribution to facilitating young people's access to their rights;
- 7 taking into consideration the measures proposed in the appendix to this recommendation when formulating and implementing policies and programmes to promote and facilitate young people's access to rights and encouraging local and regional authorities to do the same;
- 8 ensuring that this recommendation, including its appendix, is translated and disseminated among competent authorities and stakeholders, with a view to raising awareness of the need to promote and protect young people's access to their rights.

Figure 3. 2016 Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)7 for the access to rights of young people

2.4. The European Union

2017 marks the 60th anniversary since the creation of the European Community. In the intervening years, what was initially an organisation focused mainly on economic cooperation has evolved into

one in which respect for fundamental rights is a basic pillar of law and policy. The European Union is not just a Union of States, but a Union of people, that grants rights to its citizens and individuals.

The Treaty of Rome, signed in March 1957, primarily focused on economic integration. However, it left space for a successive commitment to fundamental rights, referencing an “accelerated rising of the standard of living”, and the introduction of the principle of equal pay for women and men.

Thirty-five years later, the 1992 Treaty on the European Union (Maastricht Treaty) included the first treaty provision to underline the importance of respect for fundamental rights, stating that the “Union shall respect fundamental rights, as guaranteed by the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms”. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (the Charter) was adopted in 2000.

The use of the words “fundamental rights” implies that rights and principles sit alongside each other in a document that sets out rights and principles which must be respected by the European Union and its member states when applying Community law. Six fundamental values are promoted by the Union: dignity, freedom, equality, solidarity, citizens’ rights and justice. The rights accorded by the Charter of Fundamental Rights are closely related to these principles and, following the opinion of the Council of the European Union (2001a), can be grouped into four basic categories:

- rights and freedoms and procedural guarantees: the rights in question here are civil and political rights such as the principles of equality and respect for private life; and rights stemming from public freedoms such as the freedom of the press, freedom of conscience and freedom of assembly and association;
- rights reserved for citizens of the European Union: these rights, which are encoded in the Treaty establishing the European Community, include electoral rights, common diplomatic protection as well as the right to petition the European Parliament and to refer cases to the European Ombudsman;
- economic and social rights: these include provisions on labour law, such as the right to join a trade union, to strike, and to minimum pay. Other rights are also covered such as those of people with disabilities to occupational integration, the rights of children and the elderly, and provisions of social law such as social protection or the right to health care;
- modern rights: these include rights such as the protection of personal data or rights connected with bio-ethics. The Charter also seeks greater transparency and impartiality in the Community institutions by incorporating the right of access to administrative documents and the right to good administration.

Although the Charter is a key legislation for the EU there are still striking gaps in the realisation of fundamental rights for everyone living in the EU. Although the member states promised to use European integration as an instrument to promote and improve “economic and social progress”, “well-being” and “living and working conditions” for their people it remains very much a work in progress. At the same time, throughout the years the European Union has witnessed fundamental rights challenges in areas such as migration and asylum.

In 2013, the European Commission launched its annual EU Justice Scoreboard, which provides comparable data on the functioning of the justice systems in the EU member states. The scoreboard aims to assist member states in achieving more effective justice systems for citizens and businesses. In 2014, the Commission added a new framework for addressing systemic threats to the rule of law in member states. Both the Council of the EU¹⁷ and the European Parliament followed suit with their own initiatives for combating threats to the values listed in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union.

The Charter provides primary law guidance to the EU and member states, without creating “any new power or task for the Union”: they are explicitly obliged to “respect the rights, observe the principles and promote the application” of the Charter. Fundamental rights are at the centre of the 2008 Framework Decision on combatting certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law, the 2012 Victims’ right directive, the data protection reform package and other directives adopted between 2010 and 2016 under the criminal procedure roadmap.

In addition to making the Charter legally binding, the Lisbon Treaty laid down explicit obligations for the EU to increase social inclusion and equality “in defining and implementing [all of its] policies and activities”. This provided a foundation for including references to fundamental rights obligations across all areas and types of EU action, fostering a culture of fundamental rights.

With human rights as a frame, the European Convention on Human Rights guarantees civil and political human rights; the social rights guaranteed by the European Social Charter.

Social rights, an area of fundamental rights which traditionally receives little attention, are increasingly being turned to, to address the shortcomings of the EU 2020 strategy, which could lead to a more rights based Economic and Monetary Union. In April 2016 the European Union held a public consultation on a Pillar of Social Rights, which intended to place more focus on work related social rights including fair working conditions and adequate social protection (European Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2017). The consultation led the Commission to present in April of 2017 a

recommendation on the Pillar of Social Rights and a proposal for a joint proclamation with the Parliament, the Council and the Commission.

The Pillar of Social Rights consists of 20 key principles and rights which aim to promote welfare and labour systems that function well for everyone, leading to the overall outcome of improved standards of living across Europe. They are structured into 3 categories: equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions and social protection and inclusion.

The European Pillar of Social Rights is supported by several legislative and non-legislative initiatives which address the work-life balance of parents and carers, access to social protection and working time. Furthermore, a social scoreboard has been developed to track trends in countries and assess their progress in improving social rights. The Pillar can be seen as a way to put social rights at the forefront of the Commission's policy priorities. However in order for it to make a substantive change, the Pillar has to be supported by more concrete and binding legislative proposals, and substantial investments. It must ensure that young people are placed at its centre. The announced review on the Working Time Directive and the package on work life balance could mean that young people are given more job security and flexibility, which is crucial at a time when they are entering the labour market and developing their personal and professional skills as they transition to adulthood (European Youth Forum, 2017b). The Pillar's dedication to ensuring that the European citizen's right to receive "an adequate minimum income" and "an adequate minimum wage", also addresses issues that particularly affect young Europeans as 30 % of young people are currently still at risk of poverty and social exclusion in Europe (European Youth Forum, 2017). The Pillar also recognises the right of young people to have continued education, an apprenticeship, a traineeship or a job offer of good standing within 4 months of becoming unemployed or leaving education which gives young people the possibility to reach their full potential and become an active member of society.

On September 11, 2017 the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) organised a public hearing on the European Pillar of Social Rights. This event, combined with The European Social Summit which will take place in Sweden in November 2017, will provide opportunities to steer the work and further promote the vision of a more social Europe.

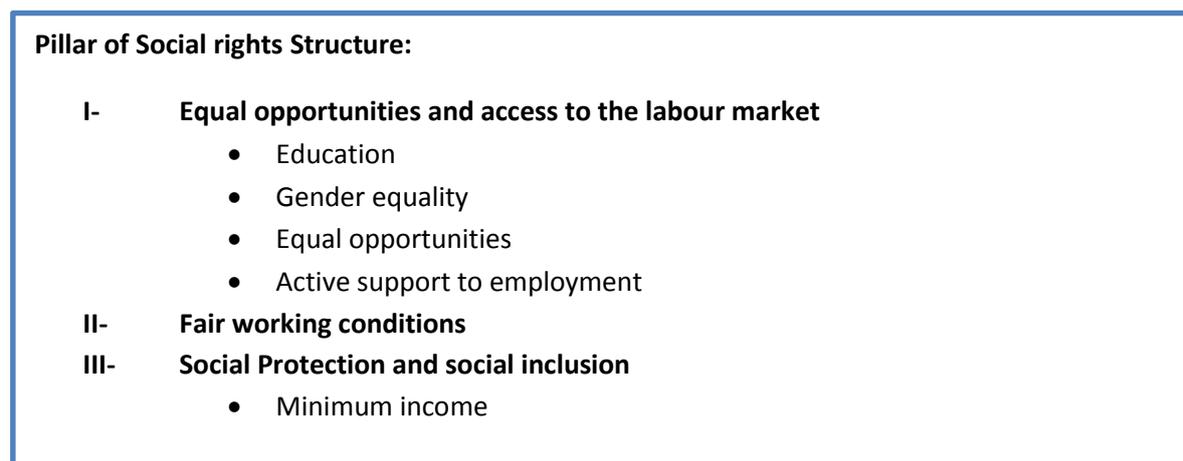


Figure 4. Pillar of Social rights Structure

2.5. Youth rights

Youth rights refer to the full enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms by young people. There is no specific framework or instrument setting out the particular rights of young people at a global level. A convention on youth rights has the potential to address the specific challenges young people face. In the absence of a dedicated instrument on youth rights, the existing human rights instruments that apply to everyone should be used to mainstream youth rights.

However, there are instruments that address the specific challenges faced by young people under 18. The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, for example, makes children the beneficiaries of a whole range of rights including rights which at the time were innovative, such as the right to survival, protection and development as well as the right to participation. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child applies to individuals under the age of 18; however young people moving between two stages of life – childhood and adulthood – can be particularly vulnerable to discrimination in various forms (European Youth Forum, 2017b).

At European level, the Council of Europe signed the European Convention on the Exercise of Children’s Rights (1996), which has recently come into force, and which aims to protect the interests and rights of children. It contains a number of procedural measures designed to ensure that children’s rights are respected and sets up a standing committee to deal with matters arising from the convention. Children may exercise their rights – for example to be informed and to express their views – either themselves or through other people or bodies. Furthermore the European legal instrument helps States to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

For other levels the European Union does not have a specific framework for youth rights but has adopted several measures and specific actions to address young people's access to rights and specific needs. For example in 2009, the European Council adopted Resolution 2009/C 311/01 on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010–18), which sets the stage for the EU Youth Strategy. The Resolution was the outcome of the efforts of the European Commission to promote dialogue between the young European population and policy-makers, with the aim of increasing active citizenship, fostering social integration, and ensuring inclusion of young people in EU policy development.

The EU Youth Strategy for 2010-18 pursues two overall objectives: to provide more and equal opportunities for young people in education and the job market and to encourage young people to actively participate in society.

Despite the lack of a global instrument on youth rights, several regional instruments focused on the rights of young people do exist. These are the African Youth Charter (AYC) and the Ibero-American Convention on the Rights of Youth (ICRY). Spain and Portugal are also signatories to the latter. Inspired by the World Programme of Action for Youth, both the AYC and ICRY clarify the international human rights frameworks with respect to young people. The AYC also introduces new rights, allowing young people to assert their human rights more effectively while also promoting the development and implementation of policies and programmes for young people. It recognises youth organisations as actors and commits States to the development of comprehensive and coherent youth policies. Furthermore, the AYC provides for the participation of young people in national parliaments and the creation of peer-to-peer programmes for marginalised young people. While the AYC contains no reporting or monitoring mechanism, the ICRY includes a biannual reporting structure but there are no mechanisms per se to use if rights are not being respected.

3. Changes and challenges in European societies and social rights

From a global perspective, young Europeans of today live in prosperous societies. They have the highest levels of social protection in the world and rank highly in terms of wellbeing, human development and quality of life. Having said that, challenges and difficulties still remain, and social realities such as education, health, employment patterns, wages, and social protection systems still differ greatly among member states, as do economic indicators of living standards.

3.1. Aging population

The European Union is continuing to age, and the proportion of children and young people in society has been decreasing in recent years. Since 2004 the number of elderly people (aged 65 or more) has been exceeding the number of children (aged under 15). In 2014 the EU population was 507 million people of whom only 169 million (or 33.3 %) were children or young people (aged under 30) (Eurostat, 2015). The aging population and the changing demographic proportions create challenges, for example a reduction in the proportion of working-age people which leads to a reduction in revenue-raising powers from income tax and social security contributions; as well as an increased burden on social welfare models.

3.2. Financial and economic crisis: poverty and social exclusion

As a result of the financial crisis and economic instability which has continued to affect Europe, a range of barriers to the realisation of social rights and a concrete social Europe persist. Poverty and social exclusion are among these barriers. In 2015, 118.7 million people, or 23.7 % of the population in the EU-28, were at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE), of which 26.9 % were children and young people. The largest gaps (difference between the AROPE rates for the specific age groups) between children and the total population were observed in Romania, Hungary, the United Kingdom and Slovakia; in these countries the AROPE rate for children was at least 6.5 % higher than the rate for the total population. The situation was relatively better for children than adults in Slovenia, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Greece, Cyprus, the Netherlands, Germany, Croatia, as well as in Norway.

The percentage of children living in a household at risk of poverty or social exclusion ranged from 14.0 % in Sweden, 14.9 % in Finland and 15.7 % in Denmark to more than 40.0 % in Romania and Bulgaria. The main factors affecting child poverty are the labour market situation of the parents, which is linked to their level of education, the composition of the household in which the children live, and the effectiveness of government intervention through income support and the provision of

enabling services. There are also other vulnerable groups of children, such as those with migrant parents, who are particularly affected by these factors.

3.3. Shift towards more individualised rights

Pillinger (2001) identifies a general shift towards more individualised rights characterised by a move away from universal services to selective services that tackle multi-faceted needs in more co-ordinated ways. However, while globalisation enables greater flexibility, it can also bring new forms of exclusion.

Increasing differences and inequality may make the task of applying and legitimising a social rights approach more difficult. Other political changes have implications for social rights as well. Within and across countries, politics are increasingly being shaped by a politics of difference and/or recognition (Phillips 1999).

In a context of increasing individualism, decision making is influenced by conflicting responsibilities. On one hand governments must recognise differences among groups (on grounds such as gender, ethnicity, racial origin, language and culture), yet at the same time they must also respect the group affiliations of individuals. This context creates an issue for equality.

3.4. The rise of nationalism and right wing populism

Another challenge is the growth of nationalism and right-wing populism that creates an obstacle to the universality of the rights based approach. As well as economic and political transformations, changes in values also affect social rights. The traditional ethos of public service provision is being challenged, especially by deregulation and privatisation that are creating new forms of insecurity and exclusion.

3.5. The rise of the youth unemployment rate

The 2008 financial and economic crisis led to a rise in unemployment, affecting parts of Europe in different ways, but across the Union it is younger generations that have been hit particularly hard. At the end of 2016, the youth unemployment rate stood at 18 % in the EU and 20 % in the euro area. It was around 40 % in Greece, Spain and Italy. For the first time since the Second World War, there is a real risk that today's young adults will have worse living conditions than their parents (European commission, 2017).

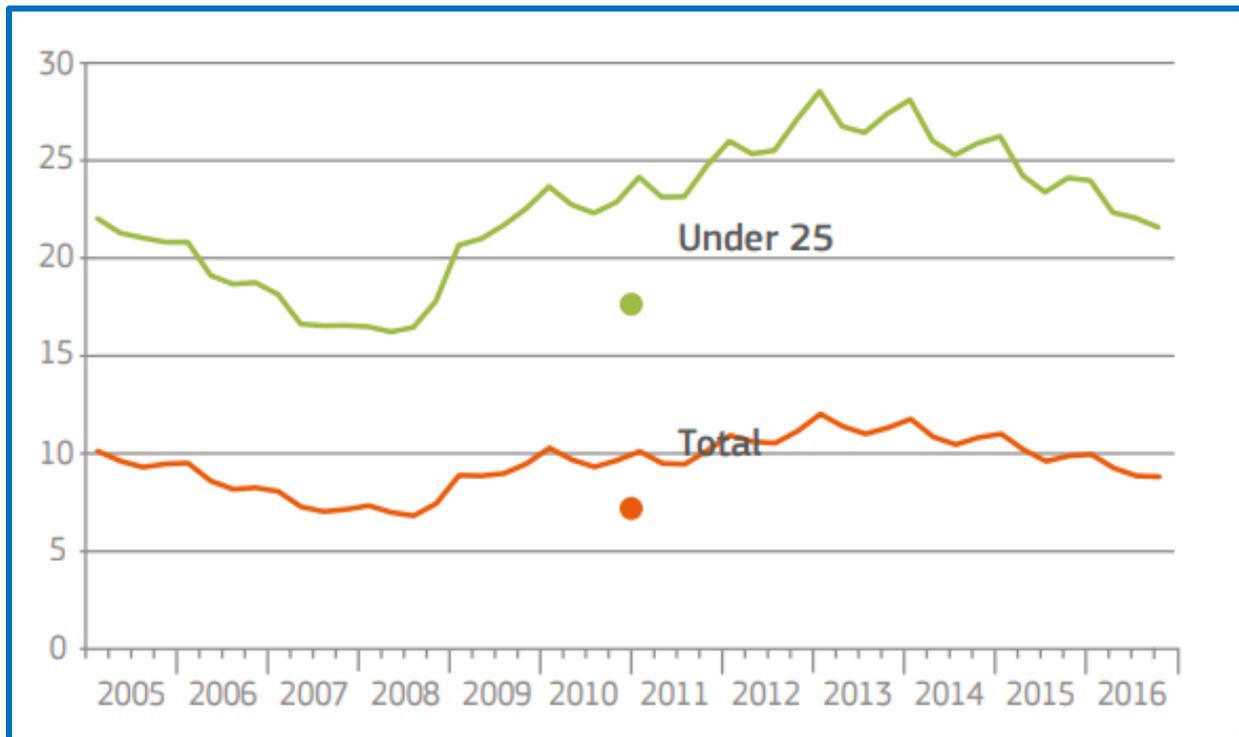


Figure 5. Youth unemployment 2006-2016 Data: European Commission

3.6. The degradation of working conditions and erosion of welfare and social provisions

The economic and financial crisis reinforced in many countries a policy approach to poverty and exclusion focusing on employment, despite evidence in several member states that the impact of the crisis may be leading to an increase in in-work poverty and labour market segmentation. This has created a labour market increasingly divided into categories which allow no crossover possibilities. For example some job sectors give access to well-paid employment under good working conditions whereas other others (mostly low-skilled) give access only to low-paid jobs with poor working conditions. The consequence is often that those who are in work are also at risk of poverty. This is not new but it challenges the notion that access to employment is a sufficient condition for escaping poverty and puts the focus on the importance of ensuring that employment is of good quality and that work pays sufficiently well to provide a decent living.

Another factor which increases the risk of poverty in young people is the erosion of welfare and social security, as well as unstable working conditions in relation to precarious employment in the name of flexibility. The European Union and other international organisations such as the International Monetary Fund have responded to the economic downturn by encouraging 'austerity policies' of budget restriction. As social protection and welfare services account for a large proportion of state spending, these budget cuts have directly impacted welfare safeguarding

mechanisms, which have had a significant impact on young generations entering the job market. These policies have created real uncertainties over the future of the “welfare state” in the EU. CSOs are now sometimes obliged to step in to fill a role formerly played by the state and to provide social services.

3.7. Migrants and young migrants are the most vulnerable

Migrants across Europe are among the most vulnerable groups in society and are often socially excluded. The situation is particularly dire for young migrants. Providers of social and health care services are witnessing an increase in social exclusion and poverty experienced by migrants. Migrant workers and their families often live in precarious conditions and exist in a legal limbo. Migrants trying to enter the EU, including refugees, face difficulties in accessing the territory in order to apply for asylum.

Irregular migration to Europe has seen a sharp increase in recent years and particularly in 2015. The United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) has estimated that in 2015, there were globally no fewer than 100 000 unaccompanied migrant and refugee children. Europol has stated that at least 10 000 unaccompanied child refugees have gone missing after arriving in Europe. There are various reasons as to why a child may be unaccompanied or separated, including persecution of the child or the parents; international conflict and civil war; human trafficking and smuggling, including sale by parents; accidental separation from the parents over the course of their journey; and searching for better economic opportunities. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has identified a number of protection gaps in the treatment of such children, including that unaccompanied and separated children face greater risks of, among other things, sexual exploitation and abuse, military recruitment, child labour (including for foster families) and detention.

In many countries, unaccompanied and separated children are routinely denied entry to the country or detained by border or immigration officials. In other cases, they are admitted but are denied access to asylum procedures, or their asylum claims are not handled in an age and gender-sensitive manner. Some countries impede separated children who are recognised as refugees from applying for family reunification. Many such children are granted only temporary status, which ends when they turn 18, and there are few effective return programmes. The vulnerable and at times dangerous situation of unaccompanied migrants and separated minors worldwide needs to be addressed, particularly due to the significant increase in their number in recent years. The 2016 State of the Union speech called for a strong and immediate protection of unaccompanied and separated minors, in line with the EU's historical values.

Faced with this situation, the EU member states must work together to better manage and integrate migrants. Well managed migration could help address the ageing population in Europe, helping to reduce the shrinking working-age population. However, the reality is currently very different as inclusion policies are too often failing to integrate migrants and, moreover, the increasing number of demands for migration is used as a political tool by some to fuel populism in many parts of Europe.

3.8. Brexit and the consequences for UK and EU young people rights

Last but not least, European young people are currently witnessing the negotiations pertaining to the UK's exit from the European Union. This means that in the next few years, young people from the UK will most likely lose their European citizenship right of freedom of movement in the EU: it seems politically inevitable that some or all restrictions on free movement of people between the UK and other EU member states will be imposed once the UK formally leaves the EU.

3.9. Role of CSOs and active citizenship and participation

Every day in every part of the world, civil society organisations contribute to the promotion, protection and advancement of human rights. Civil society actors work for a better future and share the common goals of social justice, equality and human dignity.

A dynamic, diverse and independent civil society, which is knowledgeable and skilled with regard to human rights, is a key element in the protection of human rights.

However, in recent years European CSOs are facing a growing number of restrictions that limit their ability to perform their tasks. Currently, in several member states the space available to CSOs to perform their role in protecting and promoting fundamental rights, democracy and the rule of law is shrinking. These threats include legal changes ranging from the criminalisation of some civil society work such as providing humanitarian assistance to migrants, to laws prohibiting some forms of assembly including demonstrations.

CSOs have come under sustained rhetorical attack from conservative politicians and affiliated media in several European Union countries including Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Poland and Romania (Butler, 2017). Another issue is the reduced access to information and participation in decision-making processes, affecting transparency and good governance. In countries like Hungary, Poland and Spain, authorities have stopped or reduced to what extent they involve NGOs in law and policy-making on certain issues. The UK and Ireland have also made it more difficult for CSOs to carry out advocacy and persuade decision-makers to implement their fundamental rights obligations, especially during election campaigns.

Public and private funding difficulties also hamper the ability of civil society's ability to function effectively. In countries such as Croatia, Hungary and Poland, cuts to funding have been politically motivated, targeting mostly CSOs that have criticised the ruling party or the Government. Poland is planning to bring the distribution of public and EU funding for NGOs under direct political control, following the example of Hungary. Measures to restrict public or overseas funding for CSOs are under discussion in Bulgaria and Romania and are already in place in Ireland and Hungary (Butler, 2017). In addition, civil society activists face constant threats and attacks.

Despite these challenges, the role of CSOs has increased in recent years, as they have become more and more crucial actors for safeguarding and promoting the fundamental rights of all generations. The societal challenges that can impede the work of CSOs and other civil society actors have led to an increased demand for their services, creating greater room for their work. Today, CSOs are heavily involved in developing key projects dealing with new crises and conflicts, promoting and defending gender equality, addressing the root causes of migration, and mitigating and fighting climate change.

Through supporting a meaningful and structured involvement of civil society, CSOs play a key role in promoting the culture and values of democratic governance. By giving a voice to citizens' concerns, CSOs are active in the public arena, where they work to further democracy. They embody a demand for transparent and accountable governance, and seek to ensure that there are limits on state power. CSO participation in policy processes is key to ensuring inclusive and effective policy.

3.10. The role of volunteering and volunteers

Volunteers as individuals and groups contribute to the process of community development. They support communities and respond to societal challenges. Through social action they contribute to strengthening social cohesion which builds stronger societies. They also support people coming from disadvantaged backgrounds to access rights, by removing barriers and encouraging the exchange of information and knowledge. The contribution of volunteers to social action can also contribute to the identification of new ways of addressing the challenges of society. The benefits of volunteering are not only for the beneficiaries of the social action activities, but also for the volunteers themselves. A key development area in volunteering is the personal development of the volunteer (IVR, 2014). For instance, volunteering has been linked to gaining confidence, autonomy, and self-esteem and learning new transversal skills, such as organisational skills, communication, group work skills self-organisation, self-management, personal management, learning to learn, and digital learning (Arches and Fleming, 2006; Drever, 2010; Taylor, et al., 2003; Youth Agency, 2008;

IVR,2014). Studies also suggest that taking part in volunteering action contributes to the improvement of the volunteers' wellbeing (Plagnol and Hupper, 2010, Istat, 2014).

The types of formal volunteering activities carried out by young people vary from country to country. Examples of organisations and settings include sport clubs, cultural associations, civil society organisations, neighbourhood associations, religious associations and grassroots movements or organisations. Civil society carries out an important role in providing this variety of volunteering opportunities, to help young people contribute to the construction of a stronger society, where access to rights is available for everyone.

4. Rights to...

Almost 90 million people aged 15-29 live in the European Union (EU). This represents 17 % of its population. The existing human rights frameworks apply to young people just as they apply to everyone else. Additionally, young people who fall into any of the categories for which there are dedicated international instruments (such as young people with disabilities and young women) are also protected by these instruments. There is a clear discrepancy between the rights young people have according to the law and the extent to which they are able to enjoy those rights in practice. This effectively means that young people's rights remain unrealised.

The personal circumstances of young people in the EU are often very different. Patterns of education, employment, and social conditions vary considerably between member states and by age group. In the next chapter we will summarise the present situation related to the access of certain rights and present good practice from civil society across Europe.

While the chapter is not comprehensive in addressing all rights, it offers an overview of some important human rights. Furthermore, it showcases what CSOs, in particular those involving volunteers across Volonteurope's network and beyond, are doing to support young people to access their rights and to become active and united citizens.

4.1. Rights to education

Education is fundamental for the full development of human personality and the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, enabling all people to participate effectively in a free society. The right to education includes:

- free and compulsory primary education for all;
- free secondary education, or progressive introduction of free secondary education;
- free and effective vocational guidance services
- higher education accessible to all on the basis of merit, with a view to progressive introduction of free education;
- parents' right to choose the kind of education for their children, in conformity with their own moral and philosophical convictions;
- access to education and vocational training for people with disabilities, including school integration of children with disabilities;
- access to education and vocational training for people coming from all backgrounds of society including refugees or asylum seekers.

The right to education for children and young people contributes to their overall development and consequently lays the foundations for later success in life in terms of employability, social integration, health and wellbeing. Education and training play a crucial role in counteracting the negative effects of social disadvantage (European Youth Forum, 2017b).

Each EU Member State is responsible for its own education and training systems and the EU's role consists of coordinating and supporting the actions of its member states as well as addressing common challenges. The EU offers a forum for exchange of best practice, gathers and disseminates information and statistics, and provides advice and support for policy reforms. The right to education is enshrined in several legal instruments:

- Article 14 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights guarantees the right to education including compulsory education;
- Article 26 Human rights declaration everyone has the right to education;
- Article 29 of the UN convention on the rights of the Child outlines education as crucial in the “development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.”

Moreover, the right to education has inspired the EU's growth strategy, Europe 2020, and the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET2020). These systems should provide the means for all citizens to realise their potential through making lifelong learning a reality for all. This will increase the employability and prosperity of citizens and create a knowledge based Europe. In order to measure progress achieved on these objectives, the framework defines benchmarks for 2020:

- at least 95 % of children (from 4 to compulsory school age) should participate in early childhood education;
- fewer than 15 % of 15-year-olds should be under-skilled in reading, mathematics and science;
- fewer than 10 % of young people should drop out of education and training;
- at least 40 % of people aged 30–34 should have completed some form of higher education;
- at least 15 % of adults should participate in lifelong learning;
- at least 20 % of higher education graduates and 6 % of 18–34 year-olds with an initial vocational qualification should have spent some time studying or training abroad;

- the share of employed graduates (20–34 year-olds having successfully completed upper secondary or tertiary education) having left education 1–3 years ago should be at least 82 %.

In the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development, the SDG goal 4 is to *‘Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’*.

Access to affordable quality services in education is essential in addressing inequalities and challenges faced by disadvantaged children. In February 2013, the European Commission adopted the recommendation *‘Investing in Children — breaking the cycle of disadvantage’* as part of the Social Investment Package, which proposed a long-term social strategy to support children and to help mitigate the effects of the current economic crisis. The recommendation provides guidance for EU member states on how to tackle child poverty and social exclusion through measures such as family support, quality childcare and early childhood education.

High quality early education and childcare for young children improves their health and promotes their development and learning. While labour market participation of parents and the poverty rates of their children are affected by a number of factors, there is no doubt that high-quality, affordable early years and after-school services are essential both to the reduction of child poverty and to the labour market participation of parents, especially single parents.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) can potentially increase the wellbeing of children, advance their rights and ensure that all children have a fair start in life. Childcare services for children under the age of 3 are also at the heart of EU policies. The *‘Barcelona Target’* defined in 2002 by the European Council to improve the provision of childcare in EU member states, through an agreement to *‘remove disincentives to female labour force participation and strive [...] to provide childcare to at least 33 % of children under three years of age’* is still valid today. In 2013, the EU-28 average was below the Barcelona target for childcare facilities with only 27 % of children up to 3 years attending formal childcare (versus 33 % for the target). Nevertheless, large differences could be observed across countries. Nine EU member states reached the Barcelona objective, with attendance rates higher than one third in Denmark (62 %), Sweden (55 %), Luxembourg (47 %), Belgium and the Netherlands (both 46 %), France and Slovenia (both 39 %), Portugal (38 %) and Spain (35 %). In contrast, the rate of attendance in childcare services for children aged less than 3 years was very low in the Czech Republic (2 %), Slovakia (4 %) and Poland (5 %) (Eurostat, 2015).

On the contrary most EU member states have very high enrolment rates in primary and secondary education. In 2012 the net enrolment rate for primary education was 95 % or above in 20 EU member states, and even above 97.5 % in 14 EU member states (namely Belgium, Denmark,

Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Cyprus, Latvia, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom). The enrolment rates for secondary (lower and upper secondary together) education were a bit lower, but still higher than 95 % in five EU member states, on the basis of available data (namely Ireland, Greece, Spain, France and Lithuania).

Eurostat indicators show significant disparities in the enrolment rate of young people between countries. Across Europe, the enrolment rate of young people decreases as they get older. Of the 91.8 million young people aged 15-29 living in the EU-28 in 2012 approximately 41 million were enrolled in formal education. While at EU level the enrolment rate was 45 %, it varied between about 30 % and 60 % across countries. On average, 85 % of young people aged 15–19 are enrolled in education. This proportion decreases by almost half for young people aged 20–24 (41 %), while only 14 % of young people aged 25–29 are still in education.

For the 25–29 age group disparities between EU member states are even higher. While in Malta and Luxembourg only around 5 % of people aged 25–29 were enrolled in education in 2012, in Greece the enrolment rate of 38 % was almost eight times higher. High enrolment rates for this age group were also observed in Finland, Denmark and Sweden (around 30 %). The disparities between EU member states result from a combination of several factors: country specific organisation of education systems, legal requirements concerning the end of compulsory education, accessibility and affordability of non-compulsory education, and situation of the labour market. The enrolment rate for people aged 20–29 is linked more to socio-economic criteria, especially the employment situation, as in many cases, young people stay longer in education as they cannot find a job.

Secondary education is an important stage in an individual's personal and professional development. Unfortunately, many young people leave the education system without the skills necessary for successful integration in the labour market.

The Europe 2020 benchmark is to bring the proportion of early leavers from education and training in the EU down to below 10 %. On this basis, the EU member states have set national targets that reflect their starting position and national circumstances. In 2013, 11 EU member states had already met or exceeded their national target for this indicator (Figure 16). At EU level, about 12 % of young people aged 18–24 were early school leavers. Early school leaving was rare in Croatia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Poland, with rates below 6 %. The highest rates were observed in Spain (24 %), followed by Malta (21 %) and Portugal (19 %). A reduction can be observed in most EU Member States over the last five years and in 2013 the EU-28 average was three percentage points lower than in 2008 (15 %). The largest drop (16 %) was registered in Portugal.

Student mobility is seen as improving young people's employability by helping them acquire key skills and competences, such as communication in a foreign language, intercultural understanding, social and civic participation, entrepreneurship, problem-solving skills and creativity in general. The EU set a benchmark referring both to mobility of graduates from higher education and mobility in vocational education and training (VET).

In November 2011 the Council adopted a dual benchmark at EU level for 2020 on student mobility:

- at least 20 % of higher education graduates should have had a period of higher education related study or training (including work placements) abroad, representing a minimum of 15 ECTS credits or lasting a minimum of three months;
- at least 6 % of 18–34-year-olds with an initial vocational education and training (VET) qualification should have had an initial VET-related study or training period (including work placements) abroad lasting a minimum of two weeks

The Eurostat report on young people in Europe (2015) states that to monitor this benchmark, only partial data exist: the number of currently enrolled students who have spent some time in another EU Member State, EEA or candidate country. In 2012 the highest student mobility rates were registered in Luxembourg (72 %) and Cyprus (52 %), followed by Slovakia (14 %), Ireland (13 %) and Malta (11 %). This could be explained by the fact that students often leave these countries to study in neighbouring countries with the same language and more diversified tertiary education systems. Students from the United Kingdom (1 %) and Spain (2 %) had the lowest mobility rates. In most countries, the outward mobility rate has slightly increased over the last five years.

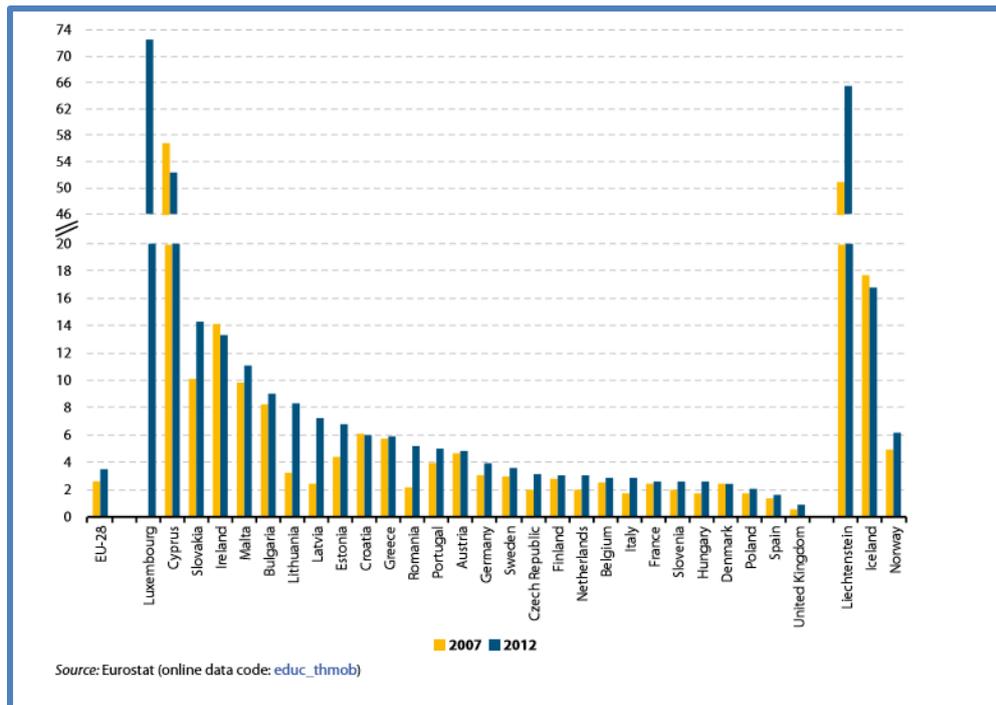


Figure 6. Students (ISCED 5–6) studying in another EU-27, EEA or candidate country as a percentage of all students in the country, 2007 and 2012

Between the ages of 15 and 29, a significant shift from the world of education to the world of employment occurs in the lives of young adults. While a vast majority of those in the 15-19 age group in 2016 were in education, the opposite was true for those aged 25-29. Most of them were in employment. Young people aged 20-24 were relatively evenly distributed between being in education and employment. Moreover, the proportion of young people neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET) increases considerably with age. The NEET rate, which stood at 6.1 % for the age group 15-19 in 2016, tripled to 18.8 % for those aged 25-29.

In 2016, at EU level, the equivalent of the total population of Ireland – almost 5 million young people aged 20-24 (16.7 %) – were neither in employment nor in education or training.

Looking at Eurostat data in 2016 the largest share of NEET aged 20-24 was in Italy where almost 1 in 3 young people were neither in employment nor in education or training (29.1 %), nearly 1 in 4 in Romania (23.6 %), Greece (23.0 %), Bulgaria and Cyprus (both 22.7 %) and about 1 in 5 in Spain (21.2 %) and Croatia (19.6 %). In contrast, the lowest NEET rate among young people aged 20-24 was recorded in the Netherlands (6.9 %), ahead of Malta (8.1 %), Denmark (8.5 %), Luxembourg (9.0 %) and Sweden (9.3 %).

The increase in the number of young people that are NEET has to be addressed as studies have demonstrated that this will have consequences during their whole life, affecting their access to

social rights. This issue can be addressed by directly involving CSOs that provide social services to young NEETs. An integrated approach to tackle the NEET phenomena would involve engaging young NEETs in community development and empowering NGOs and youth workers to advocate for public policies that would increase the sustainability of their work.

4.2. Migrant right to education

The right to education also extends to migrants and is particularly important as it helps them integrate into society. Through education, migrants can improve their understanding of the national language and interact with peers, creating a sense of belonging and building essential skills which can improve their chances of securing employment in the future.

Migrant students' experiences integrating into formal education systems are primarily linked to access, participation and performance. While education is a legal right, accessing quality education is often more problematic. An OECD led Programme for International Student Assessment found that in the majority of countries first generation migrants perform worse than national students but second-generation students while still scoring lower than national students have significantly improved grades. However, the results varied from country to country indicating that national policy can reduce the disadvantages experienced by immigrants.

The EU addresses educational attainment of immigrants through a two-fold approach which includes providing tools and schemes for member states, such as increased access to early learning, and the channelling of funds to support the education of refugees outside the EU (European Parliament, 2016).

4.3. Roma right to education

Roma people make up the largest ethnic minority in Europe. Despite efforts to counter it, Roma people continue to face considerable structural discrimination within the education system which negatively affects their educational attainment and inhibits their integration into society. Roma people face segregation in the education system in a variety of different forms. They are often separated from other students through the organisation of Roma only classes or study groups, and through the concentration of Roma people in certain school catchment areas due to their inferior socioeconomic status. Inappropriate and discriminatory testing methods which transfer Roma children to substandard schools are also to blame. While most EU member states have taken action to address problems related to the education of Roma people, education in Roma languages is rarely

provided due to insufficient language skills of teachers and a lack of resources. Roma people also experience harassment throughout their education which leaves parents unwilling to enrol their children in mixed schools. Few European Roma people complete secondary or tertiary education and the drop-out rate for Roma girls is particularly high (European Commission, 2014).

4.4. Non Formal Learning and Volunteering

Non formal learning means learning that takes place outside the formal education curriculum. It is participative and learner centred in its approach, and people participate on a voluntary basis. Non formal education is an effective way of improving formal educational attainment, especially for NEETs, or those who come from marginalised social groups (European Commission 2017).

Volunteering is an important form of non-formal learning. It is an expression of active citizenship that helps the participant develop skills and competencies for personal, social and civic development through means that are not provided by formal education institutions.

Volunteering rates of young people vary somewhat between countries as shown in the table below. In 2015 or in 2014, rates ranged from 7 % of young people aged 15-29 in Lithuania to 45 % in Slovenia.

Proportion of young people who volunteered time to an organisation in the past month, 2015 or last year available		
Country	% 15-29 year olds	Year
Austria	28	2015
Belgium	28	2015
Bulgaria	8	2014
Croatia	28	2014
Cyprus	23	2015
Czech Republic.	16	2014
Denmark.	27	2015
Estonia	29	2014
Finland	22	2015
France	27	2015
Germany	23	2015

Greece	10	2015
Hungary	11	2015
Ireland	35	2015
Italy	15	2015
Latvia	14	2014
Lithuania	7	2014
Luxembourg	31	2015
Malta	27	2015
Netherlands	29	2015
Poland	14	2015
Portugal	15	2014
Romania	11	2014
Slovakia	9	2014
Slovenia	45	2015
Spain	19	2015
Sweden	18	2015
Switzerland	20	2014
United Kingdom	26	2015

Figure 6. Proportion of young people volunteering in EU countries Source: OECD family database.

The variation in rates of volunteering in each of the EU member states reflects differing volunteering infrastructure and policy in each of the states. Some countries have a clear volunteering framework aimed at promoting the activity and recognising its value, while in other countries volunteer rights are not legally recognised and the volunteer infrastructure is still in development. The European Union recognises the importance of volunteering to non-formal and life-long learning and as such has various programmes to increase participation throughout the EU. Erasmus+ and The European Solidarity Corps enable young Europeans to volunteer at home and abroad, while Europass, a set of five standardised documents and a skills passport, is designed to enable users to present their skills and qualifications, including those gained from non-formal learning across Europe.

Case study: Mondo - Estonia

Mondo is an independent Estonian non-profit organisation devoted to development cooperation, global education and humanitarian aid. In Estonia, Mondo aims to raise awareness of global problems and their possible solutions. We want to educate the public about our work and introduce them to their capabilities for changing the world. Through our work we help young Estonian people access high quality formal and informal education.



Picture 1. Young Mondo volunteer facilitating workshop

Our organisation began its work in 2007 and in 2014 we opened our Global Educational Centre in Tallinn. We work to increase the availability of global education to Estonian students and provide a range of high quality resources. For example, at our Global Education Centre we have a library where people can access materials for research and films related to global education.

Our work focuses on increasing access to both formal and informal education. We have several employed staff and are supported by the work of many volunteers that organise and implement activities in Tallinn and across Estonia. The work that we do is varied and specific to the skill sets and interests of the volunteers. Young volunteers facilitate workshops, host film clubs, intercultural evenings and other informal activities. Young volunteers can also get involved in social entrepreneurship, where they learn about producing and marketing handicrafts. Qualified volunteers in the education sector organise training sessions for other teachers, and those with other specialised skills such as psychologists and translators organise activities accordingly.

Mondo has a documentary movie database where educators can rent out movies, and young volunteers can use them in film clubs and workshops that they organise. We often arrange for experts to attend the locally organised film clubs and workshops to explain more about the issue being addressed in the movie. We also are working on an Erasmus+ funded project with partners in Scotland and Latvia. We are creating a workshop package to teach young people about the influence of media. We select media clips from different mediums such as YouTube videos, advertisements, and short films that cover the most pertinent topics for young people and we are developing a handbook with lesson plans and accompanying worksheets for educators to use. We are also developing guidelines to help educators select media clips of their own.



Picture 2. Young Mondo Volunteers organising a workshop

The work our staff and volunteers do to increase access to global education in Estonia is extremely important. Both volunteers and beneficiaries learn about the diverse nature of global education and get a greater understanding of how they can become more environmentally and socially conscious to make a positive impact within their communities and further afield. They learn skills such as public speaking, events coordination, gain knowledge about fair trade consumerism and get the opportunity to improve their self-esteem through empowering activities. Being able to participate in informal education is particularly enriching for young Estonians, and showcasing this style of teaching to teachers is important way of ensuring that its value is recognised.

4.5. Rights to Employment

Key aspects of the right to employment focus on just and favourable working conditions including:

- fair remuneration to achieve a decent standard of living;
- equal pay for work of equal value;
- reasonable working hours and holiday with pay;
- safe and healthy working conditions;
- prohibition of forced labour (European Youth Forum, 2017b).

Since the beginning of the economic crisis in 2008, young people have experienced difficulties in entering in the labour market. In recent times, while the situation has slightly improved, in some member states youth unemployment rates are still high. As a result of the crisis, young people are now the group at highest risk of social exclusion in Europe. The disengagement of young people can

have serious consequences for an individual, for society and for the economy as a whole (Eurofound, 2015).

The Europe 2020 strategy commits EU member states to lifting at least 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion. This target is now likely to be missed due to the fact that since the crisis the share of people at risk of social exclusion has increased. To tackle the worsening situation, the EU Youth Strategy 2010–2018 was developed, with the objective of providing opportunities in education and the labour market and to support young people to become active citizens. The Youth Guarantee aims to ensure that all young people under 25 get a good-quality offer of employment within 4 months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed. The good-quality offer should be in the form of an apprenticeship, a job, a traineeship or continuing education, and it should be adapted to each individual need or situation. EU countries endorsed the principle of the Youth Guarantee with the Council recommendation of April 2013. The monitoring of the implementation of the Youth Guarantee by CSOs and youth organisations has identified the same challenges of reaching vulnerable young people who face higher risks of unemployment. The emphasis has been on promoting youth employment as the key pathway to achieving social inclusion.

While young people can deal relatively well with short spells of unemployment, long periods of unemployment or disengagement have a strong negative impact on their future employment outcomes and their general well-being. Evidence shows that the more protracted the disengagement is, the more serious its consequences. In particular, long-term disengagement from the labour market results in financial strain and a lower level of psychological and social well-being for young people that can be long-lasting (Eurofound, 2015). Eurofound (2015) also shows that youth unemployment can have a negative impact on individual wages later in working life. Despite the high cost of youth unemployment, the measures adopted so far have been inadequate, having mostly targeted the reduction of youth unemployment with short term solutions. The job creation efforts in the different member states have been insufficient and where entry jobs have been created the contracts have mostly been unstable and precarious (e.g. zero hour contracts in the UK). There is also a significant lack of opportunities for young people in rural or disadvantaged areas (EYF, 2016). Moreover, young people are experiencing a protracted period of transition between education and finding the first job. Poor quality jobs that lead in several cases to in-work poverty, have a particular impact on the economic rights of individuals, as they constitute a challenge to access to adequate income. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has developed extensive standards of employment relevant to young people.

Young people with disabilities find it particularly difficult to secure employment. In the EU the employment rate of people with disabilities remains very low at 48.7 %, and the lack of equal opportunities in the labour market is most frequently cited as the reason for the difficulties faced by people with disabilities. Often young people with disabilities struggle to make the transition from education to employment, something for which the ‘benefit trap’ can be partially blamed. EU member states should focus on this transition in order to counteract the increasing inflow into disability benefits of young people (Chupina, 2017).

4.6. Discrimination a commonly cited barrier to employment

Discrimination is generally perceived in terms of unfair treatment directed to a person due to a certain social characteristic of that particular person, for example disability, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, appearance and age. As such anti-discrimination laws and policies conceive categories of discrimination as distinct. However, in reality young people located at the intersection of different identities face multiple discriminations in the labour market. This can seriously affect the uptake and quality of employment for them, and laws and policies based on one ground only are insufficient to protect them against the discrimination that has led to their situation (European Youth Forum, 2016).

There is a need for social inclusion initiatives which go beyond the labour market that range from community-based measures, with a focus on civic participation and community development; personalised training and life skills programmes; awareness-raising and advocacy measures with the aim of tackling structural barriers to youth inclusion; to training and capacity building for professionals working with socially excluded young people.

All these initiatives are mainly provided by non-profit organisations, which provide mentoring and counselling, promote volunteering and civic engagement, and increase access to education and housing.

Case study: Roma Education Fund, Romania

Roma Education Fund (REF) was created in the framework of the Decade of Roma Inclusion in 2005. Our mission and ultimate goal is to close the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma. In order to achieve this goal, the organisation supports policies and programmes which ensure quality education for Roma, including the desegregation of education systems. Through these efforts our organisation supports the broader goal of increasing the right to ethnicity of Roma people.

The organisation has been implementing the project *Romaversitas Romania* to improve the capacity of Roma students, to increase their employability. Young Roma people often face discrimination from their peers relating to their ethnicity. This discrimination damages their self-esteem, restricting integration with their peers and negatively affecting their academic performance. *Romaversitas Romania* supports these young people through tutoring and mentoring, helping them to regain their confidence and improve their academic performance.

The project began in Budapest and its structure has been implemented in eight different countries from central and Eastern Europe. At present *Romaversitas Romania* is being implemented with 120 Roma students from universities in Bucharest. The organisation runs workshops covering various topics, seminars and language courses. They try to encourage Roma people to pursue academia through providing small grants and running activities which improve their self-esteem and give them a sense of belonging within the university system. They also encourage them to participate in volunteering activities both within and outside Romania. The programme offers volunteering opportunities with public institutions within Romania and also with Roma Education Fund's international partners.

The project is youth focused and as such young people are not only the beneficiaries but the implementers and decision makers within the project. The project involves young Roma people, students between 19-26 years old, Roma mentors, and tutors between 25-35 years old as well as two paid staff, a manager and a financial assistant. Students attend English courses at the British Council as well as Romani classes at the University of Bucharest. Young people also participate in internships and voluntary action. They volunteer in international conferences and through Erasmus+ they are able to participate in youth work abroad. Through their participation in international conferences, young Roma people have been able to raise awareness about their ethnic group through sharing their ideas, perspectives and personal experiences with a wider audience.

The *Romaversitas Romania* has produced significant positive outcomes for young Roma people. Roma students who have engaged in the project have been able to learn English and learn more about their own culture and history through learning Romani. By taking human rights and gender studies classes they have become better equipped to promote human rights and gender parity for Roma people. Their participation in international conferences and other volunteering activities coupled with these specialised academic classes has boosted the academic attainment and self-esteem of young Roma people. 50 % of those who have participated in the project have since enrolled in a master's course, and many have been able to apply for and win project grants financed by The Ministry of Youth and Sport with the Roma Health Campaign in Roma Communities.

A significant number have also received IT and English language certificates, which will increase their employability.



Picture 3. Roma Education Fund language class

4.7. Rights to Housing

The right to housing is often set in the context of the right to an adequate standard of living, and includes:

- access to adequate and affordable housing for all;
- reduction and eventual elimination of homelessness;
- housing policy targeted at all disadvantaged categories;
- limitation of forced evictions;
- equal access for non-nationals to social housing and housing benefits (European Youth Forum, 2017b).

A stable housing situation is necessary for a decent life and is often a precondition for entering into employment. However, access to affordable housing is often denied to young people (Eurostat, 2015). A huge obstacle for young people to access independent living is the rising price of rents as well as the lower social economic conditions which they experience. According to Eurostat data, in 2012, for 50 % of young people aged 18-25 experiencing poverty, the share of their income dedicated to rent was more than 40 %, and this share increased by 15% during the years of the economic crisis (Eurostat, 2015 Housing conditions). In 2014, the at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) rate for young people aged 15–29 was 29.8 % in the EU-28, corresponding to about 25.9 million young people. The proportion of young people at risk of poverty or social exclusion decreased from 2006 to 2009, but increased by 3.9 pp over the period 2009–14 (Eurostat, 2016 social inclusion). Data shows significant variation between countries. In 2014, the EU member states with the highest levels of young people (aged 16–29) at risk of poverty or social exclusion

were Greece (47.9 %), Romania (44.0 %) and Bulgaria (39.0 %), while the lowest rates were found in Slovakia (18.1 %) and the Czech Republic (16.3 %).

As they are unable to afford a stable housing situation, an increasing number of young people are forced to live longer with their parents. In 2014, the share of young people (aged 16–29) living with their parents was 66.2 % of the total young population in the European Union (Eurostat, 2016).

In the context of increased poverty among young people and challenging housing situations, homelessness among young people is becoming a growing European issue and concern. The profile of the homeless population has been changing and now includes more young people and children, migrants, Roma and other disadvantaged minorities. In 2013, 7.7 % of the young population (aged 15-29) faced severe housing deprivation (Eurostat, 2015).

The right to adequate housing is stipulated in Article 31 of the European Social Charter and interpreted by the European Committee of Social Rights: “[s]tates must guarantee to everyone the right to adequate housing. They should promote access to housing in particular to the different groups of vulnerable people, such as low-income people, unemployed people, single parent households, young people, people with disabilities including those with mental health problems”. However, the member states have the primary responsibility and competence to address homelessness.

Case study: Emfasis Foundation - Greece

Emfasis Foundation is a non-profit organisation which addresses the holistic needs of all vulnerable and socially excluded groups who face serious survival problems. We have a particular focus on homeless and destitute people, seeking to increase access to the right to adequate housing in Greece.

Amongst our various projects, we at Emfasis have been working to improve the situation of a young homeless woman struggling to survive in Athens. The young mother of two became homeless after the death of her mother who owned the house that she was staying in. Her fiancé’s mother claimed legal ownership of the house, and unable to afford a lawyer, the young woman was forced to leave her home. Furthermore, her drug addiction has made it impossible for her to secure employment and has caused her to lose visiting rights with her children after social workers deemed her unstable and dangerous.



Picture 4. Emfasis street volunteers

Efforts to improve this young woman's situation have been taking place in the centre of Athens where she has been sleeping rough. Young volunteers working with our organisation have referred her to +Athina, an organisation made up of social workers and psychologists who work with homeless people. They helped to find her a lawyer and supported her in battling her addiction. The case has remained unresolved as the woman has struggled to overcome this addiction. Although she had a right to her property, she has never claimed it. The young volunteers have been trying to empower her, to encourage her to claim her right to the property through ongoing support and communication.

While the case remains unresolved, we continue to support this young woman with the goal of helping her reclaim her property. This will provide her with the stable environment necessary to help her overcome her addiction which will improve her chances of seeing her children again.



Picture 5. Emfasis volunteers providing a homeless person with advice and support

Young volunteers have also been involved in the case of a young man who owns a house with a brother who is very violent towards him. He was violently attacked by his brother, and this caused him to leave home for a period of time. On his return, his brother prevented him from entering the house, forcing him into homelessness. The man claims that his brother is involved in right wing extremism and is happy to testify in court. Young volunteers working within our organisation supported the man to take legal action against his brother through providing practical advice, helping him find a lawyer and assisting him with a CV to help him secure employment. We have also provided ongoing emotional support throughout the period.

4.8. Health rights

The right to health includes: The right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health through accessible and effective health care facilities as well as policies for preventing illness, including the guarantee of a healthy environment. Healthy working conditions, including the protection of children and young people are also necessary for the fulfilment of this right (European Youth Forum, 2017b).

Health is important for citizens in the European Union, who expect to lead longer and healthier lives than previous generations through improved protection against illness and accident. Access to healthcare during the whole life of individuals is essential for their well-being. As such, the availability, affordability, accessibility and quality of information and counselling services are essential to the health related needs of young people. WHO defines the Universal Health Coverage as providing all people with access to necessary health services (including prevention, promotion, treatment and rehabilitation) of sufficient quality to be effective, and to ensure the use of these services does not expose the user to financial hardship.

According to the EU treaty, one of the EU's roles is to ensure that human health is taken into consideration in all of its policies. The EU also supports its member states in their actions aimed at improving public health, preventing human illness and eliminating sources of danger to physical and mental health. The main instrument for implementing the EU's public health strategy is the 'Health programme', which contributes to funding projects on health promotion, health security and health information. In March 2014, the third multi-annual programme of EU action in the field of health for the period 2014–2020 was adopted (Regulation (EU) No 282/2014).

Today's young people are expected to live longer than ever before, the result of a combination of economic development, better education, rising living standards, improved life style and greater access to health services. Infant mortality rates in the EU have decreased by 90 % since 1961 (Eurostat, 2015). Health inequality originates mainly from socio-economic differences. Poorer people and those living in poorer areas tend to be in worse health and die younger than people who are better off. Other factors, which are often linked to overall economic circumstances, also play an important role. These factors include living and working conditions, diet, physical activity, tobacco use, harmful alcohol consumption, provision and quality of health services, and related public policies — including social protection (Eurostat, 2015).

Looking at the self-perceived health in nineteen EU member states, more than 90 % of young Europeans declared themselves in good or very good health in 2013. Generally, young people are in better health and feel healthier than older age groups. Looking at the relation between self-perceived health status and income situation, a clear trend can be observed in almost all EU member states: the higher the income, the higher the probability of young people reporting good or very good health (Eurostat, 2015).

Differences in health status may be partly related to access to healthcare. At EU level, 4 % of young people in 2013 declared themselves as having had unmet needs for medical examination during the

past 12 months. For almost half of these, the reasons were that the medical services were too expensive, too far away or that waiting lists were too long. More than 1 % of young people considered that the medical services were too expensive, and 1 % wanted to wait and see if the problem got better on its own.

However, the situation varied widely between EU member states. While in Slovenia, Malta, Austria, Lithuania, Belgium, the Netherlands and Slovakia almost all young people did not face any unmet needs for medical examination in the last 12 months, more than one in five young people in Sweden declared having experienced unmet needs. Furthermore 3% of young Bulgarians, Latvians and Greeks faced limited access to medical services due to cost and 4% of young Estonians and Finns faced the same problem due to waiting lists (Eurostat, 2015).

The data on youth access to healthcare in Europe reveals positive trends for the majority of young people. However, it is still inadequate for vulnerable groups of young people. As highlighted by the recent study of the Social Platform (2016) the groups that continue to face systematic barriers in access to health services both in law and practice are transgender people, children, and migrants, as systems are not adapted to the needs of these specific groups. Moreover, the situation is particularly difficult for young undocumented migrants.

4.9. Right to mental health

Young people are extremely vulnerable to depression, and other mental health related issues. Depression and suicidal behaviour is caused by a combination of social and psychological factors. Social factors may include discrimination (e.g. bullying at school), social isolation, conflicts with family and friends, unemployment or poverty. Psychological problems play a key role in the emergence of suicidal behaviour, with depression and hopelessness being associated with nine out of ten cases of suicide. Drug abuse and alcohol use are also determinants. Almost one quarter of suicides involve alcohol abuse. Depression can also lead to self-harm and increased social isolation. Suicide rates also increase during periods of economic recession and unemployment (Health statistics, 2009).

Young people are especially vulnerable to the threat of suicide, as intentional self-harm is the second most frequent cause of death among young people aged 15–29. Crude death rates related to intentional self-harm by children and young people have decreased by 40 % and 22 % respectively from 2000 to 2011 in the EU. In absolute numbers, the cases of intentional self-harm dropped from 263 to 159 for children aged 0–14 and from 8 874 to 6 915 for young people aged 15–29.

Some groups are at higher risk of suicide than others. Young women tend to be substantially less affected by suicide and intentional self-harm, with crude death rates being four to five times lower than those of young men in the EU-28. The 25–29 age group seems to be the most confronted with intentional self-harm, with 3 000 cases in 2011. Looking at EU member states, Lithuania, Latvia and Finland were the countries with the largest crude death rates from intentional self-harm in 2011. In contrast, the southern EU member states (Greece, Spain, Italy, Cyprus and Portugal) reported the smallest rates. People in their twenties were also more affected than their youngest peers in all EU member states. Consequently, young men aged 20–29 in the northern EU member states seem to be the most vulnerable to intentional self-harm.

Helping young people to develop life skills and providing them with mental health education and psychological support in schools, universities and other community settings can promote good mental health (WHO Factsheet 345, adolescents: health risks solutions, May 2014). It is also necessary to have comprehensive strategies against bullying, discrimination and segregation.

Case study: Yeesi - Finland

Yeesi is a Youth Mental Health Association that seeks to enhance the mental health of young people aged 13-30 in Finland. We work to encourage young people to improve the mental health of young people and the mental health of their peers. The organisation is based in Helsinki and was set up in 2011 by young people and continues to be run by and engage young volunteers.



Picture 6. Young volunteers of Yeesi

Since 2011 we engaged over 175 young volunteers aged 13-30 from a variety of different backgrounds around Finland to carry out different activities which promote good mental health. Rather than purely intervening in crisis situations, we concentrate on promoting mental health through raising awareness, providing young people with the skills needed to deal with mental health issues and making the language around mental health more accessible for young people. We believe that providing young people with the tools necessary to maintain good mental health is the most effective way of ensuring that crisis situations are never reached. Over the past couple of years, we have carried out the majority of our work in schools and youth centres, where the volunteers have facilitated workshops. In 2016, Yeesi held 46 mental health workshops in schools and youth centres.

Aside from workshops, young volunteers engage in a variety of activities from organising events to writing blogs and speaking at seminars across Europe. In fact in 2016 alone, the volunteers have engaged in over 250 acts of volunteerism. As Finland's first national Mental Health Association for young people, we act as an important platform through which young people can make their voices heard on issues surrounding mental health and we are often consulted by ministries and other organisations seeking the opinions of young people.

To make the organisation truly youth centred, young volunteers are involved in all decision making within the organisation and as such the board members are all young people.

The impact of the work has been recognised in 2016 by the SOSTE Finnish Federation for Social Affairs and Health for the results the young volunteers produced in decreasing stigma around mental health issues and helping young Finns to improve their mental health and the mental health of their peers.

4.10. Right to sexual and reproductive health rights

Access to sexual education and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are vital to the development of young people, however they face multiple barriers to this due to the multiple dimensions involved, such as educational, religious, medical, social and cultural dimensions. Young people need good quality education on relationships and sexual health, as well as access to the appropriate health services so that they can become empowered to control their own bodies and their sexuality.

Various conventions to which the EU and member states are signatories, notably the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) support the provision of good quality sex and relationship education along with advice and support for young people on these matters (Policy Department for Citizen's Rights and Constitutional Affairs 2016).

Research consistently produces findings showing that rather than leading to earlier sexual behaviour, sexual education programmes actually reduce risky behaviours amongst young people. Research also finds that a rights based approach to sexual education empowers children and young people to protect themselves against the risk of abuse, sexual exploitation and domestic violence (Kohler et al, 2008, CoE, 2011). A report on sexual and reproductive health and rights produced by the Policy Department for Citizen's Rights and Constitutional Affairs found evidence in several EU countries to support the view that holistic rights based sexual and relationship education which

emphasises the importance of consent, well-being and respect is an effective way of combatting risky behaviours and abuse (Policy Department for Citizen's Rights and Constitutional Affairs 2016).

At present sexual and healthcare provisions in some form are mandatory in 20 out of 28 member states; excluding Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Spain. It is notable that in several countries, namely Spain, Croatia, and Poland, policy related to sexual and relationship education has seen a regression towards a more socially conservative position. In Poland sexual education programmes are de jure mandatory, but largely due to political pressure from the socially conservative media and the Catholic Church, parents are able to withdraw their children from sexual health classes, which render the provision of sexual education de facto non mandatory. In this way we can see that there is a gap between the mandatory statutory footing of sexual health and relationship education and its implementation in many EU member states (Policy Department for Citizen's Rights and Constitutional Affairs, 2016).

Even more worryingly certain countries have recently taken steps to restrict access to abortions, and these countries, unsurprisingly, have restrictive provisions for sexual and reproductive health education. For example, in Spain (2015), after the failure of the abortion ban law in 2012, the Government restricted abortion for under those aged less than 17 years without parental consent. Poland, a country which has some of the most restrictive laws on abortion in Europe, has been accused of launching a “sexual counter-revolution” after passing legislation reducing women’s access to the morning-after pill. Women and girls 15 and over will now need to make an appointment with a doctor in order to receive this (Boffey, 2017). Moreover, in almost one third of member states, contraceptives are not covered under public health insurance (European Parliament, 2013).

The inconsistency in access to sexual health education and healthcare across Europe, and the trend towards increasingly conservative policy related to sexual and reproductive health means that the role of civil society organisations is more important than ever in delivering high quality services and advocating for better government policy on this issue.

Case study: Volunteering Matters, Sex Matters Too - UK

Founded in 1962 (and known as Community Service Volunteers until 2015), Volunteering Matters has been leading UK volunteering in policy and practice for more than 50 years. We develop and deliver high impact volunteer-led solutions across the UK in response to some of the most difficult challenges facing individuals and their communities today. We engage more than 30,000 volunteers and 90,000 beneficiaries every year through 180 active programmes across the UK.

One of our most successful programmes, Sex Matters Too uses a peer-led approach to help raise young people's awareness of issues surrounding healthy relationships, whilst aiming to increase protective factors against potential exploitation. We train young volunteers, aged 16-25 years, to deliver workshops on sex and healthy relationships to their peers. These workshops go beyond the standard advice on contraception and explore themes such as how to establish healthy boundaries and spot the warning signs of sexual exploitation.

We have a new peer led project which began in August 2017 which works with young women aged 16-35 with learning disabilities. The project will involve 50 volunteers known as SAFE champions, along with 300 beneficiaries over the 3 year project. Evidence gathered by Sex Matters Too shows that young people engage more with other young people and for this reason the peer to peer support is pivotal to the success of this project. Young people work as a group to design and develop the training materials, then facilitate the workshops for their peers. This approach ensures that all the young people taking part, whether volunteers or beneficiaries, are aware of their rights to a sexual life, and they have the correct information to keep themselves safe and healthy which enables them to make good decisions.

The project will collect quantitative information to get an idea of the number of beneficiaries of this project across the country. We will also qualitative information to provide evidence of outcomes such as increased knowledge of healthy and unhealthy relationships, better understanding of how to be safe online, and knowledge around contraception and the prevention of STIs.

The information that we gather will help us develop and improve this project to ensure that we can continue to provide the best possible service for young people seeking to access their rights to a sexual life.



Picture 7. SAFE champions of the Sex Matters Too project.

4.11. Right to nationality and ethnicity

Despite numerous legal instruments designed to combat racism and ethnic prejudice, religious and ethnic minorities continue to experience mistreatment in the form of verbal and physical abuse, discrimination and social exclusion (FRA, 2015). For example 37 % of migrants and minorities surveyed across the EU in 2015 said they had personally experienced discrimination in the twelve months preceding the survey, while 12 % had personally experienced a racist crime. The social and political sphere has become more and more accepting of intolerant agendas that play on societal fears such as terrorism and unemployment, and this has had a detrimental effect on social cohesion, and the respect of the fundamental rights of minority communities (EFRA, 2015).

Roma communities are particularly affected by discrimination. A survey carried out by the EFRA (2015) revealed that the highest levels of discrimination were reported by this community, with one in two respondents saying they had been discriminated against in the last 12 months (EFRA, 2015).

Roma youth are particularly affected by the discrimination endured by this ethnic group. Roma children are the most vulnerable and face multiple disadvantages. 42 % of Roma people living in households under the national poverty threshold are under 18. Furthermore, one in three Roma children go to bed hungry at least once a month (EFRA, 2016).

Young Roma people, aged 16-24 are also the most disadvantaged in terms of employment. NEET figures (not in employment education or training) for young Roma people are particularly startling when compared to non Roma young people. According to the Fundamental Rights Agency survey, 19 % of non-Roma and 58 % of Roma aged 16 to 24 are not in employment, education or training (European Parliament, 2016).

The Commission states that while improvements to the situation of Roma people have been made over the years, it is evident that further and more coordinated efforts between the European, national, and local levels is needed. Member states need to prioritise the fight against the discrimination of Roma people and focus on the integration of Roma youth, through for example creating national Roma platforms that can bring together all the actors, and working together to find the most effective solutions for Roma people (The European Commission, 2017).

4.12. Right to nationality

In addition to the discrimination faced by minority groups on the basis of ethnicity, many people residing in Europe are denied nationality. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “1. [e]veryone has the right to a nationality” and that “2. [n]o one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his

nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.” However, statelessness, which means a person who does not have a nationality, remains a problem today. There are over 10 million stateless people worldwide, of which hundreds of thousands reside in Europe. There is a lack of adequate data on statelessness in Europe with some countries obscuring data through practices that fail to differentiate between stateless and unknown nationality (e.g. Germany). This lack of visibility makes it difficult for the necessary action to be taken (Carrera, 2015).

Statelessness presents a barrier to citizenship, which is essentially the “right to have rights”, and therefore stateless people lack the social economic and political rights of nationals. Nationality of one of the EU member states is a prerequisite to achieving European citizenship and as such stateless people in the EU are not protected by European law either (Carrera, 2015).

Nationality can be acquired by the system of *jus soli*, in which a person’s citizenship is determined by their place of birth or the *jus sanguinis* system which prescribes citizenship through their parents’ or grandparents’ nationality. Member states use different systems, for instance Italy uses *the jus sanguinis* system and France uses the *jus soli* system. Statelessness particularly affects children, who inherit statelessness from their parents who were stateless before them, or become victims of a gap in nationality laws. The 1930 Hague convention sought to resolve such gaps through obliging states to confer nationality to children born on the territory of parents of no or unknown nationality. However this law fails to safeguard children whose parents have nationality but cannot pass it on, as is the case with single mothers from states such as Syria that do not give women the right to confer nationality to their children. For this reason European Law must be amended to ensure that stateless among children in Europe is eradicated (Carrera, 2015).

Case study: The Project for the Registration of Children as British Citizens (PRCBC) - UK

The Project for the Registration of Children as British Citizens (PRCBC) is a registered charitable company which aims to raise awareness of young people, their parents and carers, of the importance of citizenship, and to support and increase the number of children and young adults who register as British citizens. Our organisation was founded in November 2012 by Solange Valdez-Symonds and Carol Bohmer. About a dozen qualified volunteers as well as young volunteers work with children applying for citizenship.



Picture 8. PRCBC volunteers

Being born in the UK does not in itself mean that a child is a British citizen. People are only considered British if at the time of their birth, either of their parents was British, or had indefinite leave to remain under immigration law. Children born here gain the right to register as British citizens if they live in the UK for the first 10 years of their life; or if while they are children, either parent becomes settled or becomes a British citizen.

Other children and young people who were born abroad but brought to the UK when they were very young, who have grown up in the UK, with all their friends and connections in the UK, may feel themselves to be British and are unaware that they are not. These children do not have the right to register as British but can apply for citizenship for a non-refundable fee of £973 at the Home Office, before they are 18. Detailed evidence and legal argument is needed for success.

Since our organisation began its work over 5 years ago, qualified volunteers have represented over 200 children and young people to register as British citizens, or obtain British passports to prove their status. In the last year, we have dealt with over 20 judicial reviews of Home Office refusals to register British citizenship. So far all our reviews have led the Home Office to register the child or young person as British. We have advised numerous other individuals and organisations in person, by phone and by email.

Our work is youth focused and as such we actively engage young volunteers. We have trained and supported three young 'ambassadors' for PRCBC, who go out and talk with their contemporaries about the importance of understanding their citizenship and immigration status. We have organised seminars for young people to discuss their own situation, to hear from others and to help them make applications for citizenship. Members have written articles and blogs about the importance of citizenship and have created publicity materials. Through engaging young volunteers in these ways we are able to hear the views of young people, and in turn the young people can gain valuable experience running the organisation. Our advisory board is also made up of young people that the organisation previously assisted to ensure that the work remains relevant to the needs of young people.



Picture 9. Young beneficiaries of PRCBC

Becoming British means that children and young people's status is secured in the UK and they are empowered to continue with their ambitions in life, without worries about their ability to remain here, work here etc. and gain the right to participate fully in UK society. It is an important step in the lives of many young people, confirming they belong to the country where they have grown up and spent all their lives, and our organisation will continue its efforts to help young people achieve this step.

4.13. Right to bodily integrity: Gender-based violence against women and girls

The Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women frames gender-based violence against women and girls as a violation of human rights (Council of Europe, 2011). The Convention is the first legally binding European instrument on violence against women.

There are several different, interrelated and overlapping forms of violence against women such as: domestic violence, sexual violence including rape, human trafficking, physical violence, psychological violence including stalking, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, and honour crimes.

Furthermore, nowadays women and girls also experience violence online. Most violence against women is inflicted on them by men. Gender-based violence can also be experienced by men, generally those that do not conform to the wider hegemonic group. This violence finds its causes in the same power imbalances and relations that are the root causes of gender-based violence against women (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2015). The causes of violence are often interrelated, with poverty, economic dependency and gender inequality all contributing to violence against women. There are difficulties in gathering reliable data on cases of violence against women as many cases remain unreported and there are currently no international common standards for gathering such data. Since the 1990s, actions have been taken at the international level to combat violence against women. The Council of Europe also played an important role in combatting violence against women. The Istanbul Convention of the Council of Europe became the first international convention on violence against women which, among other things, provides minimum common standards for the prevention, detection and criminalisation of violence against women.

At EU level, there is no general legal instrument addressing violence against women. However, legislation such as the Victims' Rights Directive or the Anti-Trafficking Directive addresses aspects of violence against women and provides assistance to victims of gender-based violence. In addition, the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission have adopted, respectively, resolutions, conclusions and strategies on violence against women and on specific types of violence. The European Parliament has requested from the Commission a European Strategy for Gender Equality with a strong pillar for the elimination of violence against women as well as a Directive that

addresses violence against women more generally. Chapter 4 of the TFEU on judicial cooperation on criminal matters provides possibilities for directives on specific forms of violence against women and also provides a general directive that could create a legally binding instrument addressing violence against women in general terms.

Civil society organisations support the fight to end gender-based violence against women and girls through collecting data, providing support and protecting victims, such as offering shelters, offering legal advice and peer support and sharing this good practice within networks.

Case study: Partnerë për Fëmijët - Albania

Partnerë për Fëmijët (Partners for Children) is a local Albanian not-for-profit organisation with its headquarters in Tirana and three field offices based in Peshkopi, Kukes and Bajram Curri in north eastern Albania. Our organisation implements programmes on early childhood, care and development, education, children with disabilities and child protection.

Within our work on child protection we have a particular focus on raising awareness and community responses on the risks of children trafficked or smuggled from Albania to work in neighbouring countries. Our project addressing child trafficking began in 2016 for a period of 4 years and seeks to address this issue which has been exacerbated by the huge influx of migrants and refugees fleeing war, conflict and poverty into the Western Balkans (Albania; Bosnia Herzegovina; Kosovo; Macedonia and Serbia) in 2015/16 on their way to Europe.

A diverse group of seventeen staff members including social workers, gender specialists and lawyers have been carrying out work in these countries. In addition to the paid staff, we also engage consultants and experts on human trafficking, gender-based violence and migration to develop regional and national policy papers with recommendations for the respective governments of the five target countries.

Young people have played an active role in the project through gathering information in a public opinion survey on the topic of human trafficking and gender-based violence and also through conducting information and awareness raising sessions. The information and personal experience on human trafficking and gender-based violence shared by young people has assisted in the development of regional and national policy paper recommendations on human trafficking submitted to the Albanian government and its relevant ministries.

Our approach has helped young people express their views and opinions on human trafficking and has helped them participate in the decision making process on an issue that can have a significant effect on their lives. Through these activities young people have engaged in active citizenship to increase their right to personal autonomy and the autonomy of their peers.

4.14. Right to gender identity and sexual orientation

The right to equal treatment is one of the founding principles of the European Union and a fundamental right of all people. It is not only referred to in the Lisbon Treaty itself, but also in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which is now established as a formal source of EU law. Whether through obligations established under EU law or through international Conventions under the auspices of the UN and the Council of Europe, member states are also individually committed to achieving equality and combatting discrimination. To close the gaps in protection, in 2008 the European Commission adopted a proposed Directive on equal treatment outside of the area of employment which would cover age, sexual orientation, religion or belief and disability.

Recent decades have witnessed an evolution in the legal framework applying to LGBTI people. All member states of the EU have some legislation protecting individuals from discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation¹ and a growing number have either opened marriage to same-sex couples or have created an alternative form of legal recognition for such partnerships. According to the EU Agency of Fundamental Rights (FRA), 21 member states (Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Romania, Portugal, Sweden, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and the United Kingdom) have extended the prohibition of sexual orientation discrimination to some or all of the areas covered by the Racial Equality Directive (e.g. education, health, social protection), while in 7 member states (Austria, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Italy, Latvia and Poland) legislation is confined to the scope of the Employment Equality Directive. Discrimination related to gender identity is often covered by anti-discrimination legislation, but the extent of protection is often incomplete or ambiguous (FRA, 2015). In 10 member states (Austria, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden) discrimination on grounds of gender identity is treated as a form of sex discrimination, while in 9 member states (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Romania and Slovenia) the law remains unclear (FRA, 2015). There are a growing number of member states where categories such as 'gender identity' or 'sexual identity' are being expressly incorporated within anti-discrimination legislation, while in Malta 'gender identity' and 'sexual orientation' have been added to the anti-discrimination clause in the constitution. There is an ongoing evolution in the conditions found within national law for the recognition of gender identity, in particular where this differs from that ascribed at birth (Dunne, 2015). While the legal protection of intersex people remains limited, in several member states the issue is gaining visibility (Travis,

¹ A table providing an overview of anti-discrimination legislation in the EU member states, EEA states and candidate countries can be found at pp. 124-134, I Chopin and C Germaine, 'A Comparative Analysis of Non-Discrimination Law in Europe 2015' (Publications Office of the European Union 2016): <http://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/3824-a-comparative-analysis-of-non-discrimination-law-in-europe-2015-pdf-1-12-mb> accessed 31 August 2017.

2015). At European level there is very little data available on the situation and the experiences of LGBTI people. The most significant contributions to equality data collection are still the EU LGBT survey conducted in 2013 by the EU FRA, and the periodic Eurobarometer surveys on discrimination carried out by the European Commission (EC, 2017).

Despite the work to date, discrimination continues to be a significant issue. For example, in 2012, 17 % of Europeans (that is 85 million people) reported that they have personally felt discriminated against or harassed in the 12 months prior to the survey and discrimination is perceived as widespread by more than half of the population. Those belonging to sexual (28 % of respondents) or ethnic minorities (27 % of respondents) are more likely to experience discrimination than the rest of the population. Evidence suggests that young people belonging to specific minority groups are particularly vulnerable, facing discrimination on the grounds of both their age and a personal characteristic, such as sexual orientation, gender identity or ethnicity.

Case study: LGL - Lithuania

The national lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender (LGBTI) rights association LGL is a non-governmental organisation in Lithuania representing the interests of the local LGBTI community. We are an advocacy organisation that fights homophobia and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity through education, support, and representation of the LGBTI community. We have been involved in ongoing work empowering young transgender people in their fight for legal gender recognition, a fight that has achieved significant results and has contributed to broader legislative reform in this area.

Lithuania is the last jurisdiction in Europe without any de facto or de jure procedure for legal gender recognition (LGR). Despite the fact that the Civil Code (2001) establishes the right to gender reassignment, the necessary legislation is yet to be adopted. Individuals are forced to take legal action in order to have their gender legally recognised by the courts. However, historically, cases have only been approved for applicants that had undergone gender reassignment surgery abroad before making the complaint.

In 2016, we became involved in an important case involving two young transgender men that sought to address this issue. We supported these men, Tovaldas and Maksas, in their submission of legal complaints before national courts. The objective of the case was to allow the two men to legally change their identity without undergoing gender reassignment surgery.

The applicants claimed that the lack of gender reassignment procedure in Lithuania had violated their constitutional right to respect for private life and was incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). In ground breaking decisions made in April and May, 2017, the national court agreed with the claims of Tovaldas and Maksas and granted them the right to legal gender recognition. This was the first time that such a case had been successful for applicants that had not undergone irreversible gender reassignment surgery.

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The outcome of the case was a success in ensuring that the fundamental rights of these young men could be respected. However, the effects of our work with these young men have extended beyond their individual rights, as it has initiated broader legislative reform in this area. The Government instructed the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Health to prepare necessary legal acts by September 1st, 2017 with the view of introducing gender reassignment procedure in Lithuania. Tovaldas, one of successful applicants of the 2016/2017 case and several civil society organisations were able to meet The Minister of Health in-person to discuss the role of the ministry in introducing the necessary legislation.



Picture 11. Tovaldas on the Cover Page of the daily newspaper Lietuvos Rytas

Civil Society organisations then produced short and long term solutions for the Lithuanian Authorities to address the issues affecting transgender people. The short term solution, a health care protocol permitting transgender people to receive the necessary healthcare has already been adopted. A draft law on the recognition of gender identity without the need to undergo gender reassignment surgery (the long term solution) was submitted for further deliberations to the Government on September 1st, 2017.

These legislative and policy developments have gone hand in hand with increased visibility of young transgender people in Lithuania. Various articles, interviews and roundtables focusing on the challenges of transgender individuals in Lithuania have raised awareness of the issue in Lithuania. For example, the media company "Dokumentikos namai" has developed a series of short movies on individual stories of young transgender people. It goes without saying that the video story of Tovaldas "My Grandmother Always Knew" was the first video to launch the series.



Picture 10. Meeting with the Minister of Health

Today we are working on fifteen new requests by young transgender Lithuanians seeking legal gender recognition before the national courts. These cases will be used to consolidate the legal precedent on changing identity documents without the requirement for gender reassignment surgery. The Parliament is expected to consider the draft legislation in the beginning of 2018 and we are working with young trans people to ensure that as many positive decisions as possible are produced in courts so that a strong advocacy argument can be developed.

The work of young people supported by our organisation has made a considerable difference to the rights of transgender people in Lithuania. Because of them gender recognition in Lithuania no longer a dream, but a concrete advocacy objective, which has a high chance of being achieved in the upcoming months.

4.15. The right to Environmental Health

The EU has some of the world's highest environmental standards, achieved through the development of environmental policies and legislation to protect natural habitats, to ensure that air and water is free from pollution and to help businesses become more sustainable. The EU has also taken a lead role in tackling climate change, and is committed to ensuring that the Paris Agreement is successfully implemented (Eur-Lex, 2017).

Nevertheless, the EU faces many environmental challenges. A report produced by the European Environment Agency (2017) indicated that Europe's Atlantic facing countries will suffer heavier rainfalls, greater risk of flooding, extreme storms and multiple climactic hazards, as a result of global warming. Climate change has also been blamed for the multiple forest fires that have devastated parts of southern Europe, with 1,068 in 2017 affecting an area approximately the size of Luxembourg (Euronews, 2017).

The 7th Environment Action Programme (EAP) produced by the Council of the European Union in November 2013 has been created to guide European environment policy until 2020 in order to

address the cause of environmental deterioration and climate change. It has set out a vision of the European Union in 2050 in order to give more long term direction. The 2015 vision focuses on 3 key areas:

- protecting the natural capital that supports economic prosperity and human well-being;
- stimulating resource-efficient, low-carbon economic and social development;
- safeguarding people from environmental health risks.

Analysis of progress and the likelihood of realising the 2050 vision displayed in the table below reveal that while environmental policy has delivered many improvements, substantial challenges remain in each of these areas. For example while reduced pollution has improved air and water quality, soil degradation and global warming remain major concerns (European Environment Agency, 2015).

	5–10 year trends	20+ years outlook	Progress to policy targets
Protecting, conserving and enhancing natural capital			
Terrestrial and freshwater biodiversity			<input type="checkbox"/>
Land use and soil functions			No target
Ecological status of freshwater bodies			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Water quality and nutrient loading			<input type="checkbox"/>
Air pollution and its ecosystem impacts			<input type="checkbox"/>
Marine and coastal biodiversity			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Climate change impacts on ecosystems			No target
Resource efficiency and the low-carbon economy			
Material resource efficiency and material use			No target
Waste management			<input type="checkbox"/>
Greenhouse gas emissions and climate change mitigation			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> / <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Energy consumption and fossil fuel use			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Transport demand and related environmental impacts			<input type="checkbox"/>
Industrial pollution to air, soil and water			<input type="checkbox"/>
Water use and water quantity stress			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Safeguarding from environmental risks to health			
Water pollution and related environmental health risks			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> / <input type="checkbox"/>
Air pollution and related environmental health risks			<input type="checkbox"/>
Noise pollution (especially in urban areas)		N.A.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Urban systems and grey infrastructure			No target
Climate change and related environmental health risks			No target
Chemicals and related environmental health risks			<input type="checkbox"/> / <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Indicative assessment of trends and outlook		Indicative assessment of progress to policy targets	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Deteriorating trends dominate	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Largely not on track to achieving key policy targets
<input type="checkbox"/>	Trends show mixed picture	<input type="checkbox"/>	Partially on track to achieving key policy targets
<input type="checkbox"/>	Improving trends dominate	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Largely on track to achieving key policy targets

Figure no 7: Source: European Environment Agency (2015)

With this in mind, it is concerning that The European Convention on Human rights lacks an explicit codification of the environment as a human right. There are several rights codified in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union that link to the environment, for example Articles 31 and 32 on safety and health in working conditions and Article 35 on health care (Environmental Law Network International, 2011). While Article 37, pertains specifically to “environmental protection”, it does not give a specific right to people, but is a mere proclamation of a duty of care for the EU:

“A high level of environmental protection and the improvement of the quality of the environment must be integrated into the policies of the Union and ensured in accordance with the principle of sustainable development.” (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2017)

Despite a lack of legislation relating human rights to the environment, The European Court of Human Rights has developed clear case law through which it has defined that certain severe levels of pollution or environmental damage can lead to the breach of other fundamental rights codified in the European Convention on Human Rights (Environmental Law Network International, 2011).

However many argue that the lack of specific European legislation relating to the right of citizens to a healthy environment leaves them defenceless in the face of the effects of environmental deterioration. A supplementation to environmental law could empower victims of environmental deterioration by giving them the ability to hold perpetrators accountable.

Climate change and environmental degradation have a particularly negative impact on young people, who bear the brunt of their indirect effects including an increasing income gap between the rich and poor, and increased rates of unemployment caused by land degradation. The health and safety of young people is increasingly threatened by extreme weather events and pollution, and this in turn can cause major disruptions to their education. Rising sea levels, droughts and floods can also lead to forced migration (Office of the Secretary General's Envoy on Youth, 2015). While the effects of climate change and environmental degradation are most acute in developing countries, the environmental trends in Europe outlined above indicate that that young Europeans could also experience similar problems in the future.

Young people are particularly engaged in the fight to tackle climate change. According to a survey carried out by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP 2008) about 73 % of surveyed youth say they currently feel the effects of climate change and 89 % say young people can make a difference on climate change (UNEP, 2008). Young people are key actors in raising awareness, running educational programmes, and promoting environmental sustainability. Indeed about half a million young people have taken action to combat climate change through small grants programmes

which fund a wide range of projects in their communities(UNDP, 2015). However, despite this, young people express a need for more information on climate change (84 % surveyed young people (Office of Secretary Generals Envoy on Youth, 2016), and only 9 % of young people are very confident that the world is acting quickly enough to address climate change (2008, UNEP). More effort needs to be made to utilise young people as a driving force to combat climate change. This sector of the population is keenly aware of the need to act and must be provided with the tools necessary to do so.

Case study: CATAPA - Belgium

CATAPA is a Belgian volunteering organisation of over 100 volunteers and 1000 subscribers that work around sustainable development and alternative globalisation, with a focus on the mining issues and Latin America. To contribute concretely to a sustainable solution for the ecological and climate crisis, we encourage a fairer mining industry and a more sustainable use of metals. We do this through awareness raising, networking, research, lobbying, exchange programs and supporting farming communities that are threatened by multinational mining companies in our partner countries Bolivia, Colombia and Peru. We also follow some open-pit mining cases in Europe, especially in Romania and Greece.

Among our various projects CATAPA has been supporting civil society organisations and activists in Cajamarca in the Tolima department of Colombia which is being threatened by the La Colosa mining project of AngloGold Ashanti (AGA) the third biggest multinational in the field of gold mining.

Colombia has one of the fastest growing economies in Latin-America. It has a great wealth of natural resources and arable soil. The rapidly growing economy is not only fuelled by these natural resources, but also by the economic policy of the government, which strives to attract foreign investors which develop large scale agricultural, energy and mining projects in the region. In recent years the mining sector has been expanding rapidly which has caused serious environmental degradation and forced indigenous communities from their home lands to make room for various mega-projects. Colombia has the second highest rate of internally displaced people, yet the government continues to grant a substantial number of mining licenses in the poorest and most vulnerable regions due to their mineral rich land.



Picture 12 Miners in Colombia

In Cajamarca, a region of extremely rich biodiversity and arable land, with water sources that supply much of the surrounding area, people have been uniting in protest since the La Colsa mining project was announced by AGA in 2007. Our Colombia working group of CATAPA volunteers has been supporting civil society organisations and activists in their efforts to prevent the mining of their land. They work in collaboration with the youth organisation Cosajuca NGO (El colectivo socio-ambiental juvenil de Cajamarca) which promote local eco-tourism as an alternative development project for the region and supports different agricultural organisations promoting small scale agriculture (i.e. Apacra & UCAT). The CATAPA volunteers raise awareness and fundraise in Belgium, and currently have a volunteer based in Cajamarca, helping the young people mobilise against the mining project.

The work of our CATAPA volunteers in partnership with the young activists of Cosajuca has helped to empower local people and encouraged them to unite against the La Colsa mining project. The people of the Cajamarca district have been mobilised to hold street protests, public debates, and public hearings in town councils. They also recently held a referendum in which they asked the people living in the region their opinion about the project. The outcome of the referendum was overwhelming: 97.9% voted against mining. After the result of the people's referendum, AngloGold Ashanti halted all exploration work at its La Colosa project in Cajamarca.

This is a fantastic result and means that the right to a safe environment of these people has been protected for the time being. Despite the outcome of the people's referendum and the decision of AngloGold Ashanti to stop all project activities, we do not expect the government to respect the referendum outcome so we will continue to collaborate with young volunteers and activists working within local civil society organisations to ensure that their efforts thus far have not been in vain.

4.16. Intersecting discriminations

The information and examples provided so far outline only a few of the numerous example of good practice shown by CSOs that support young people to access specific rights. Moreover, it is important to recognise that discrimination can occur on the basis of more than one characteristic; as a result, people experience barriers to accessing multiple rights due to several intersecting factors combining in a 'synergistic' way, resulting in complex forms of discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989). Attention to the intersectional approach to human rights protection has been growing in recent years. The most important contribution has been the World Conference for Women held in Beijing in 1995, which drew attention to the fact that age, disability, socio-economic position, and membership of a particular ethnic or racial group could create particular barriers for women. A framework for the recognition of multiple and coexisting forms of discrimination became a key part of the resulting Beijing Platform for Action.

Intersectionality was firstly theorised by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) who highlighted the ways in which discrimination law, by focussing on separate grounds of discrimination, tended to homogenise protected groups, rendering invisible those who experience discrimination from more than one direction. Her work has encouraged growing recognition that discrimination is experienced very differently by differently situated individuals despite them sharing a protected characteristic. Intersectionality theory highlights the flaws in a notion of discrimination based only on one characteristic at a time. Firstly, such an understanding ignores the fact that people have multiple identities. We all have an age, a gender, a sexual orientation, a belief system and an ethnicity; many have or acquire a religion or develop a disability as well. Secondly, such an approach assumes that identity groups are internally homogenous. For this reason civil society organisations and volunteers have adopted an intersectional approach when designing projects where volunteers are involved.

5. Conclusions

The content of this report has highlighted the importance of solidarity and volunteering, and the valuable and tireless work of civil society organisations in both promoting social inclusion and supporting access to rights for young people. Their role and work is crucial in these times to build stronger and more equal societies.

The EU must put a greater focus on social inclusion to help all young people become active members of society and to guarantee that they are able to access their basic rights. Volunteering plays a vital role in our societies, fostering active citizenship, a culture of participation, personal and professional development as well as building cohesion to make young people feel part of society. Therefore, it is important to ensure quality volunteering opportunities to all young people. Initiatives such as the European Solidarity Corps are welcome, but they are insufficient in creating more opportunities for young people, unless they focus on accessing young people from hard to reach parts of society to ensure that they receive the same opportunities as everyone else.

Democracy and human rights are fundamental values of the EU. Every citizen has rights and duties which allow them to contribute to their society. This is why it is fundamental that from a young age every person growing up in Europe learns about the functioning of democracy, about their rights and duties through quality citizenship education in school. This citizenship education should also support the development of critical thinking and the competences and skills needed to participate meaningfully in society.

This report shows that good practice promoting the broader social inclusion of young people exists, but young people deserve more support in terms of public investment. These initiatives are in many cases organised and implemented by private non-profit actors and involve diverse partnerships. However, rather than short term solutions from isolated initiatives, young Europeans need long lasting and sustainable solutions that make a real impact. This type of approach requires the combined efforts of CSOs, youth led organisations and from the young people themselves.

As the report has shown, in most instances, young people's social, economic and ethnic background still determines their chances of accessing quality education, jobs and rights. Inequality is the main barrier to accessing rights for young people, but also for the other population groups. The European Union was founded on values of equality and solidarity, so to make it a reality it is necessary to develop measures that target the root causes of inequalities to build a fairer and more inclusive Europe and also empower young people to reach their full potential.

In order to do that the EU needs to increase funding of youth projects such as the Erasmus+ programme, which currently only represents 1.36 % of the EU budget. The EU must also provide more widespread support to civil society organisations and youth organisations that work in member states to promote and protect fundamental rights, democracy and the rule of law. An example would be establishing a fund that engages in capacity building measures for CSOs with a focus on improving their ability to build broader support among the general public for fundamental rights, democracy and rule of law. Supporting CSOs to build a broader constituency will help them increase sustainable financial support among the general public and remove the incentive for populist parties and politicians to attack CSOs as a means of gaining political support.

Moreover, as the report has shown several youth organisations and volunteer involving organisations are involved in supporting the integration of refugees and asylum seekers and ensuring their inclusion in our society. European leaders in all member states must follow the example set by civil society and act urgently to ensure the protection and integration of refugees and asylum seekers.

To conclude, it is necessary to stress that all the initiatives put in place to support the access to rights for young people need to be developed with the Agenda for Sustainable Development in mind, taking into account the consequences for the environment.

Finally, good policies are those made with the input of everyone affected. Institutions and governments need to encourage participation of citizens because the traditional channels of representative democracy are not enough to ensure that every young person's voice is heard. To do so the EU needs to value and incorporate the input of young people, youth leaders, volunteer involving organisations and CSOs. This is the way forward for more democratic and inclusive policies.

Recommendations

Considering the examples and good practices Volonteurope recommends that:

- 1- increased resources and funds are made available to CSOs, youth organisations and grassroots organisation to realise social rights and organise social action;
- 2- vulnerable groups and vulnerable regions for the purpose of improving access to social rights are specifically targeted;
- 3- a rights-based approaches in youth policy is advocated for;
- 4- the procedures and management of services which are intended to give effect to social rights are modified and improved;

- 5- youth organisations, volunteer involving organisations and grass roots organisations are involved in the co-design and joint monitoring of policy and initiatives to ensure the inclusivity and accessibility of placements for all young people;
- 6- a youth-led advisory body on policy making, and youth consultation on policy making is created;
- 7- more and better quality volunteering opportunities are created with a specific focus on people with fewer opportunities;
- 8- the exchange of practices and experiences among partners and stakeholders is promoted at both national and European levels;
- 9- educational tools are developed and disseminated to increase and awareness of social rights
- 10- partnership with social enterprises is promoted;
- 11- citizenship education is made compulsory in schools to create more awareness, critical thinking and solidarity.

Glossary

At risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE)

At risk of poverty or social exclusion, abbreviated as AROPE, refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty, or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. The AROPE rate, the share of the total population which is at risk of poverty or social exclusion, is the headline indicator to monitor the EU 2020 Strategy poverty target.

COE

Council of Europe

CSO

civil society organisation

EU

European Union

Empowerment

A process and result of becoming aware of one's own agency and of one's ability to challenge and change the systems regulating one's life through collective action (Chandhoke 2002).

Engagement

The process by which citizens meaningfully participate in the social, communal realm of citizenship, exerting their agency in collective action.

Lifelong learning

Lifelong learning is the lifelong, voluntary and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge for personal or professional reasons. The overall aim of learning is to improve knowledge, skills and competences. The intention to learn distinguishes learning activities from non-learning activities such as cultural activities or sports activities.

Social exclusion

"...a process whereby certain individuals are pushed to the edge of society and prevented from participating fully by virtue of their poverty, or lack of basic competencies and lifelong learning opportunities, or as a result of discrimination. This distances them from job, income and education opportunities as well as social and community networks and activities. They have little access to power and decision-making bodies and thus often [feel] powerless and unable to take control over the decisions that affect their day[-]to[-]day lives" (Eurostat 2010).

Young people / Youth

An umbrella term to describe a diverse segment of people between 15 and 30 years of age of varied sexes, genders, sexualities, abilities, races, ethnicities, origins, religions, economic backgrounds and other overlapping and discrete statuses.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a sociological theory describing multiple threats of discrimination when an individual's identities overlap with a number of minority classes — such as race, gender, age, ethnicity, health and other characteristics. The whole discrimination experienced by the individual is different from the sum of the single discrimination experienced in the individual grounds of discrimination.

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